

Larry Johnson & Col. Wilkerson: Iran Just Changed the Game... Why It Matters

This interview argues the conflict is effectively a U.S.–Iran war, not simply Iran–Israel, and questions official claims of progress. It says the real issue is the Strait of Hormuz, where any escalation could trigger severe global economic fallout through oil, gas, fertilizer, shipping, and chip supply disruptions. The speakers also argue that talk of quick military success is unrealistic, warning that Iran’s defenses, mines, drones, missiles, and geography could make any attempt to reopen or control the strait extremely costly and dangerous.

#Nima

The current situation with the war between the United States and Iran—well, it seems that the war isn’t really between Iran and Israel anymore, because Israel is so busy with Hezbollah. They’re not, you know, fighting Iran directly now. Let’s start with what General King said on Fox News and his assessment of the current situation. You know, Donald Trump first issued an ultimatum of 48 hours, then he said it was going to be five days.

#Guest

Right now, more than ten days in, here’s what General King said: a little less than three more weeks, in the minds of our commanders, to complete this operation. It’s taken a little over three weeks to get where we are, so you can see we still have a lot of work ahead of us. And what does that really mean? Well, for a fact, we’re going to accomplish all the assigned objectives that President Trump has given the CENTCOM commander. And in talking to the IDF, they fully intend to accomplish all the objectives that Prime Minister Netanyahu has given them. The general time frame is, as described, around three weeks.

If it happens soon, fine. If they have to take a little longer, we’ve said from the beginning that this is conditions-based. The enemy has a vote. And what is the enemy trying to do right now? Number one, they’re trying to personally survive and keep the regime somewhat intact. And believe me, that’s an enormous problem for them—you can see it. You’re reporting on it every single day, what’s happening to the leadership. The paranoia inside that leadership is real, and the chaotic decision-making process in there is real. So we’re fragmenting that leadership for sure, and we’ve got weeks to go to do more of that.

The second thing they’re doing, in addition to trying to survive individually and as a regime, is trying to protect their assets. They know we know where everything is, and we’re systematically taking them down. They want to save something, for sure, so they have the ability to retaliate against us

when we begin to open up the Strait of Hormuz. If we're going to take Kharg Island, they're going to want to carry out some kind of military retaliation—likely against allies and partners in the region—and U.S. bases would be the easiest targets. Israel would be a more challenging target, to be sure.

And they're trying to hide that, deceive us as much as possible, protect some of those resources, while at the same time still trying to fire missiles and drones at our bases and at Israel. So that makes target identification and destruction more challenging. Are we going to be able to do that? You betcha. But it takes more time, more identification, more tracking to get it done. I try to describe it with a football analogy—you know, we're in the red zone here. We're on the 20-yard line, trying to get to the goal line, and the opposition is putting up as many impediments as they can because they can see how close we are to achieving our objectives, and they're doing everything they can to prevent that from happening. Right.

#Lawrence

Yeah. Nima, I just—go ahead, Comrade, go ahead. I love that analogy. I love that analogy. We've been in the red zone a number of times over the last 30 years, and we've never scored a touchdown. I wonder how this is any different. And then the second thing I'd say is, you never, never ask a person in a war—or even in a simulation—if they're accomplishing their objectives, because they'll tell you yes, of course, and they'll detail all the objectives they've accomplished. You ask them, are you accomplishing your mission?

And the mission has never been expressed—not by the president, not by the Secretary of Defense, not by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Is the mission accomplished? Bombing? Relentlessly? It appears to be. But there's no question the mission is not being accomplished if the mission is, as I think they're saying quietly, to bring the regime down. They haven't done it, and I don't think they're going to do it. So that was an idiotic presentation that I wouldn't have accepted from a Navy lieutenant commander or an Army major on a game floor without tearing his butt off.

#Nima

Larry, what's your take on what's going on, and how do you understand the situation?

#Larry

Keane is delusional. I mean, he lives in a fantasy world. Number one, the issue should be the Strait of Hormuz. You know, I didn't appreciate this at the outset of this war either—it's been accumulating knowledge as it goes on. The world is in a recession now. Normally, they define a recession as two consecutive quarters of negative economic growth. So they say, "Well, you can't call it a recession because we haven't had six months and we don't have the—" Nonsense. The world is in a recession

right now. The question is, will it become a depression? A depression means economic growth drops below 10%, ten percent negative. The disruption of oil is one thing, and ironically, in that disruption of oil, Iran has benefited.

You know, they went from—Trita Parsi, I forget whose show he was on—but he was explaining that prior to the war, Iran was pumping 1.1 million barrels of oil, selling it at 47. Now they're doing 1.5 million and selling it at 97, so more than double the price. The disruption of liquid natural gas is significant; it's really affecting Asia. Several countries have declared states of emergency, and they've stopped frying food because the fuel for frying comes from liquid natural gas. Then you've got the fertilizer issue. With more than a third of the world's fertilizer sourced through the urea that comes out of the petrochemicals there in the Persian Gulf, that's gone. So we're not going to see the full effect of that for about six to eight months, because right now is the planting season.

And if the crops aren't getting properly planted with fertilizer, they're not going to grow. That means when it comes time for harvest, you're not harvesting much. So we're looking at a global food shortage. And with that comes the potential for famine or starvation in certain countries. So, I mean, that's not something to just shrug off—it doesn't only affect us here. We don't yet know the full ramifications of that. Then there's the helium. It turns out—who knew?—that the Persian Gulf is also a major source of helium, which is essential for producing computer chips. So now those chips aren't getting produced because they don't have the helium. And if those aren't produced, then the computers, the cell phones, the Tomahawk missiles, and everything else that depends on those chips aren't available.

And then the sulfuric acid— I mean, it just keeps going on, and it's not opening up. Even if somehow, magically, things turned around in a day or two, getting the oil and liquid natural gas flowing again, getting the urea flowing again, it's going to take time. So this is having an economic impact on the world that, particularly here in the United States, we're not really paying attention to yet. We're starting to, but not fully comprehending it. So, you know, in talking about all this, it's reminiscent of McNamara during the Vietnam War, when they'd come out and say, "We killed X number of Viet Cong today," and all that turned out to be a lie too. So, you know, things haven't changed.

#Lawrence

And in addition, Nima, to what Larry's talking about—which is all the practical side of it, and it's not looking too good at all, as he's just demonstrated—I saw yesterday that we're up to 3,500 stranded ships sitting off the Strait of Hormuz right now with no place to go. This is the other side of it. And guess who summed this up? I'm going to read this because it's priceless—from Arashi. He's at the emergency meeting of the U.N., called because of our attack on that school. And he says—and I'm paraphrasing, but these are the bullet points—two bullying nuclear-weapons regimes have attacked

a non-weapon regime. Second time. Second time they've torpedoed diplomacy. They are normalizing crimes against humanity, which started with a vengeance—guess where? In Palestine, at the hands of Bibi Netanyahu.

And as John Mearsheimer keeps pointing out, probably on the pretext that most of the people killed on October 7th were killed by Israelis, not by Hamas. Twenty-seven days of illegal war, Arashi continues—no regard for humanitarian law whatsoever. Six hundred schools, hospitals, nursing homes, ambulances—stationary and on the move—water sources, food sources, all war crimes. All a product of the world ignoring Palestine, bringing it back to the genocide that's almost been buried now. But we have resolved—he ends by saying—we have resolved, and I believe he does, and I believe his country does. We are becoming not only stalled at sea, as Larry pointed out, with grievous economic ramifications not just for us but for the world—we are also becoming the most hated nation on the face of the earth, next only to Israel.

#Nima

Larry, it seems the situation with the invasion of Iran—the invasion of Iranian islands in the Persian Gulf—is getting serious. What would the escalation look like on the part of the United States and Israel? I think the next step could be an invasion of these islands. Many people are arguing about which one—are they going to invade several islands in the Persian Gulf, or just one? And here's one of them that's especially interesting in terms of strategy. This island is called Lorac Island.

Lorac—it comes here. You see, the route of the tankers comes from here and goes close to the island, between Qeshm Island and Lorac. It passes right through here. If they take this island, it could cause some problems. And then, if you go up here, what they're talking about is this island—Kharg—which is farther away from the Strait of Hormuz. So, what's your understanding, Larry, of the strategy they're pursuing right now?

#Larry

What was that word you used? Strategy? God, boy, you're an optimist. Look, let's start with what we know. Last week it was published on a site called Open Source Intelligence Defender on X, and that source was reporting on another one called the Intel Frog. The Intel Frog detailed that since March 12th, there have been C-17 flights—about 35 of them, with 11 more to go. So when I started looking at the bases, I realized this is a special operations mission they're launching out of Joint Base Lewis-McChord. That's the 75th Rangers, 2nd Battalion, I believe—Hunter Army Airfield.

Task Force 160—it's got an element of that regiment deployed there, plus the 75th Rangers, 1st Battalion. Now, understand that the 75th Rangers, within the world of special operations, are what they call a Tier 2 unit. They provide support to Delta Force and SEAL Team 6. In the 23 years I was doing exercises, we always joked that every exercise had to include an airfield the Rangers could seize. That's one of the things they do—they go seize an airfield. The other flights—we're talking not

just one or two C-17s, but multiple flights for each of these bases. Oceana Naval Station, Virginia—huh, who's there?

SEAL Team 6, as well as the East Coast SEALs. Pope Army Airfield—that's Delta Force, 82nd Battalion, the 82nd Airborne—excuse me. Fort Campbell, Kentucky, headquarters of Task Force 160, the Night Stalkers. So it was clear there was this movement. Now, there are only two possibilities: when you see that kind of movement, it can only mean one of two things—it's an exercise, or they're going into battle. And based on things I've heard—I've got another friend who's buddies with somebody at Delta—and Delta is saying, "They're sending us on a suicide mission." So they're really going to send them now.

Trump initially announced that five—when I heard him say the five-day thing last Monday—I thought, okay, that means Friday, today or tomorrow, we're going to start the shoot. And originally, that's what it looked like. Let me make one other point. Remember, that air movement started on March 12th. On March 13th, they launched the first MEU, the 31st MEU, out of Okinawa. I said, okay, you head there. So this tells me this is planned. You don't start something on March 12th or 13th as just an immediate, "Oh my God, we've got a problem we've got to solve." No, this is planned out.

The deployment of the 11th MEU—they're about a week behind, maybe a week to ten days—which now explains why, I think, yesterday Trump announced, "Okay, we're going to give them until April 6th or 7th." That's next week, and that's when that other MEU will be in the area. So the intent of Trump is that they're going to launch a ground operation. Now, on Qeshm Island, my understanding is that there's one of those underground missile cities there, so they would specifically task either Delta Force or SEAL Team 6 with attacking and capturing that site. They're assuming Iran doesn't have any defenses in place. I think that's a very foolish assumption—and actually, I don't think Delta or SEAL Team 6 would assume that.

So you're looking at a battle where, if they capture that missile city, okay, they've got that. But that still doesn't open the Strait of Hormuz. And if you put military forces on any of those islands, that doesn't open the Strait of Hormuz either, because Iran can still start deploying more mines into the waters—and they've said they would. They've said they'd flood the Gulf with mines, not just in the Strait. They've got underwater drones, submarines with torpedoes, and then missiles and drones above ground. So if you're going to open the Strait, the mission has to be: we've got to shut down all of Iran's offensive capabilities. And just putting guys on those islands isn't going to do that.

#Lawrence

And further, Nima, I've heard so many "experts"—I'll put that in quotation marks—say, in the last 48 hours down at William & Mary, I heard a number of them talking about the Strait and the geography of the Strait. Man, I've been there, done that. I was doing some of the planning around Earnest Will and Praying Mantis at Pacific Command. They get it wrong. One person said, "Well, the average

depth of the Strait is so deep that you couldn't do much to it." The average depth of the Strait is 50 meters. Now, that's pretty deep. That allows you to sink a supertanker, for example, and probably not have impediments. But it's not all that deep.

And one of the things we were worried about was several ships being sunk and blocking that. And, oh, by the way, the North Channel—I think the north goes on the right side if you're looking north, and the south goes on the left side. They're different channels, and they're slightly different in terms of salinity, current, and other things that impact passage through the Strait. But this is not an easy Strait to open if somebody is intent on keeping it closed, as we learned in 1988. And they're talking about it as if it were, you know, as Larry was saying: you just do this, you do that, you get this, and you get that, and you can keep them from blocking the Strait.

Au contraire. It's awfully easy to block that Strait, and I'm sure Iran has given it detailed study since their efforts in 1988. In fact, I'd say they're probably leagues ahead, as Larry was pointing out, with weaponry, methodologies, and such. It just doesn't take much. And as Larry said before, to scare the world to death—and insurers and shippers alike—all you've got to do is get one. That's all you've got to do. And then it takes a long time before any navy can convince people that, hey, you can sail again.

#Larry

Yeah, and let's recall that what happened in 1988 was all in the context of the Iraq-Iran War, which the United States helped provoke and sustain. Remember, the United States was not just providing the chemical precursors to Iraq to manufacture chemical weapons, but also providing intelligence. I know then-Colonel Patrick Lang—Pat Lang—who set up the Arabic program at West Point and later was the senior defense intelligence officer for the Middle East. He was the one hand-carrying the intelligence to Iraq to help Iraq defeat Iran.

And so, when Iran started mining the Strait then—this shows you how things have changed in almost forty years—we had a barge off the coast of Bahrain. It was called the Hercules Barge. It was an oil platform, but it was taken over by Navy SEALs. The SEAL who commanded that is a friend of mine; he was a commander at the time. They had Little Birds, their own gunboats, and several clashes with Iran. But at the time, Iran wasn't attacking with drones or missiles, so Iran was really in the early days of its military capability. Whole different ballgame today—completely different.

#Lawrence

They set up on a couple of derricks, as I recall, and we wiped them out there because they were just exposed on those platforms. It won't be like that this time around, I guarantee you.