

US-Israel War on Iran | Ben Norton vs Norman Finkelstein on Israel Lobby

We spoke to Ben Norton on the ongoing US-Israeli war against Iran — and the geopolitical stakes could not be higher. Support Independent media to remain bold: <https://patreon.com/IndiaGlobalLeft> Link for donation: <https://paypal.me/sankymudiar> In this in-depth interview, we explore: What caused the war? From long-standing tensions since the 1979 Iranian Revolution to regime change strategies and regional power struggles, Norton explains the deeper geopolitical drivers. Israel Lobby vs US Empire Debate Responding to Norman Finkelstein, Norton challenges the idea that the war is driven primarily by the Israel lobby, arguing instead for a broader imperial strategy. Is the US failing in Iran? Despite massive strikes, Iran has adapted with asymmetric tactics and continues to disrupt global markets — raising questions about whether Washington's objectives are achievable. Iraq's PMF enters the war? Why has mainstream media downplayed the role of regional militias and expanding resistance networks? What about Venezuela and Cuba? After developments involving Nicolás Maduro, we ask: Is this conflict part of a wider strategy ahead of US elections? Key Themes Covered US hegemony in West Asia Regime change strategies in Iran Axis of Resistance and regional escalation Oil, sanctions, and global economic impact Expanding war beyond Iran Chapters 00:00 Causes of the War Norton vs Finkelstein Debate Is the US Losing? Iraq PMF & Media Silence Venezuela, Cuba & What's Next Follow us on Substack: <https://substack.com/@indiagloballeft> Twitter: <https://twitter.com/indiagloballeft> Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/indiagloballeft/> Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61559411353392> Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/show/69Y9iCWUv8ha3ATsPWtWk0?si=ee1f0de3de094f17> Telegram: <https://t.me/+WNlqoiv1RhG5NjEx> Keywords US Israel Iran war, Ben Norton interview, Iran war analysis 2026, Israel lobby debate, Norman Finkelstein, PMF Iraq Iran war, Venezuela Maduro US policy, geopolitics Middle East, US empire analysis

#Mudiar

Hello and welcome to another episode of *India and Global Left*. If you're new to the show, please hit that subscribe button. Also, consider becoming a YouTube member, a patron, or donating a small amount using the link in the description box. Without further ado, let me welcome our guest tonight, Ben Norton. Ben is a journalist and the founder and editor of *Geopolitical Economy Report*. Ben, welcome back to *India and Global Left*.

#Ben

Thanks for having me. It's always a pleasure.

#Mudiar

I wanted to focus on the war, and if we could start with your analysis of the causes of this war. What led to the American-Israeli attack on Iran?

#Ben

Well, it's really important to emphasize that the U.S. has been discussing a war against Iran for many decades. I clearly remember the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which was a violation of international law. That was a very formative experience for me. I was a teenager, and it really got me involved in anti-war activism—it made me the person I am today. I remember vividly that at the time, the Bush administration, at least a few years after the war started, was extremely unpopular, and there was widespread discussion of U.S. plans to attack other countries. Famously, the U.S. general and former NATO commander Wesley Clark revealed that the U.S. had plans to attack seven countries in West Asia and North Africa.

The plan was to try to change those governments within five years. Of course, it took much longer than that—we're talking about a process that's lasted two decades. But the U.S. did succeed in changing the governments in six of those seven countries. Those include Syria, where in late 2014 the government was targeted; Libya, where in 2011 NATO destroyed the government; Sudan, which has been facing a brutal civil war; Lebanon, which is basically a failed state, with the U.S. constantly meddling and imposing sanctions; Somalia, also essentially a failed state; and Iraq, which the U.S. invaded. And then finally, Iran—always the cherry on top, if you will. And this really goes back to the 1979 revolution.

Ever since the people of Iran rose up and overthrew what was essentially a U.S. puppet dictator—the Shah—ever since that revolution, the U.S. has sought to overthrow the revolutionary government. Now, it's important to go back to the Richard Nixon administration's foreign policy, especially under Henry Kissinger, who was the architect of a lot of U.S. imperial designs for the region. Iran was referred to at the time as one of the twin pillars. The Western pillar of this twin-pillar strategy was actually Saudi Arabia—interestingly, not even Israel. Of course, by the 1970s Israel was leaning toward the U.S., but it's important to remember that until the late 1960s, really until the 1967 war, Israel was not a very close U.S. ally.

There's this very facile narrative we hear today, largely from American analysts, who say everything's about Israel. That's very superficial, and in many cases I think it's also self-interested. They're excusing the crimes of the U.S. empire and erasing the very recent history of U.S. wars of aggression and imperialism in the region. I mean, obviously, Israel has been part and parcel in recent years, and I'm certainly not disputing that. But you have to look at what the U.S. has been doing in this region for decades, even without working with Israel. Going back, for example, to the Suez Crisis in 1956, when Nasser, the Arab nationalist leader of Egypt, nationalized the Suez Canal, which was extremely important for the Egyptian economy.

Previously, it had been largely run by the British Empire. At that time, the U.S. did not support Israel. It was actually Israel, the British Empire, and the French Empire that were allied. The U.S. was trying to get some Arab nationalist forces on its side. This was at the beginning of the first Cold War, and it wasn't obvious yet that Arab nationalist governments would largely lean toward the Soviet Union. Nasser did end up leaning toward the Soviet Union, but Egypt under Nasser was one of the co-founders of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961. So there was this kind of realignment that happened a bit later.

But the U.S. previously saw Saudi Arabia and Iran as the main pillars of its "twin pillar" strategy. Of course, after 1953, the U.S., the CIA, and British intelligence, MI6, carried out a coup that overthrew Iran's elected Prime Minister, Mohammad Mosaddegh, because he nationalized the oil and hurt the interests of U.S. and British oil companies in the region. So, you know, this war against Iran is something that's been talked about for a long time. This brings us to the question of why it's happening now. I'll get to that in a moment, but I am frustrated by what I consider very superficial analysis from many people who otherwise, I think, have very sophisticated analysis of the war.

And certainly, many of these U.S. military veterans—former top officials of the U.S. government—know much more about U.S. military strategy and the nitty-gritty details. But I think they're often distracted by the inside-baseball politics in Washington today. They miss the forest for the trees and lose sight of the larger perspective—the broader trajectory of U.S. foreign policy over decades in this region. Also, I think, again, it's quite self-interested, because a lot of people who worked for the U.S. government or served in the U.S. military don't want to accept that the U.S. empire has always been this way.

It has always been an imperialist, aggressive power that has, in the Global South, violated the sovereignty of Global South countries and overthrown dozens of independent, sovereign governments. I mean, the U.S. empire has been the principal source of instability for the Global South for decades. And if you just simply blame Israel, it's much easier—even though that doesn't help us understand. Was Israel responsible for the U.S. war in Korea, for the U.S. war in Vietnam, for the invasion of Panama, the invasion of Grenada, the war in Yugoslavia? I mean, people love to point to the wars in West Asia and say all those wars are for Israel. It's a very superficial analysis. But what about all the wars in other parts of Asia?

What about the nonstop wars in Latin America? Did Trump bomb and try to kidnap Venezuela's president because of Israel? I mean, again, this is such a superficial analysis. And I have to say, John Mearsheimer is obviously a brilliant scholar who's made a lot of contributions. But a lot of people think that Mearsheimer, who's one of the principal promoters of the Israel lobby argument... We should point out that many people mistakenly think he's a dove because he's been critical of the NATO proxy war against Russia. Mearsheimer is actually one of the key proponents of the new Cold War against China. He strongly advocates for an aggressive, belligerent policy toward China because he wants the U.S. empire to be as strong and powerful as possible.

This is, you know, the whole idea of offensive realism—that all states are as aggressive as the U.S. empire, which is absurd. It's a projection of this U.S. hegemonic foreign policy. He sees that all states seek to maximize their power and seek hegemony, and he projects that onto all other countries. And this is why he says it's a waste of time in West Asia, it's a waste of time in Ukraine—we should be focusing on basically a war on China. So I think some of these figures who have made great scholarly contributions, I fundamentally disagree with them at the level that this argument—that the Israel lobby is responsible for all of this—is basically an argument that the U.S. otherwise is not necessarily a malevolent power.

Maybe. Certainly, I don't think Mearsheimer would ever argue that the U.S. is a benevolent power—certainly not. That would be a very infantile argument, the kind maybe the neocons would make. And Mearsheimer is not a neocon, but he does have a very cynical view that, yes, the U.S. is certainly not benevolent, but Israel forces the U.S. to engage in what are otherwise sideshow conflicts, and the main focus should be on containing China. And that's obviously a bad thing. Ironically, from Beijing's perspective, they certainly do not want the Iranian government to fall.

And we can talk about the way China has been supporting Iran behind the scenes in a lot of ways. China is never going to directly intervene—it doesn't do that and certainly doesn't want to fight a war with the U.S. But at the same time, even though China definitely doesn't want the Iranian government to fall, I think a lot of people in Beijing aren't necessarily upset about the U.S. getting bogged down in another war in West Asia. So that element can be true, but I don't think a consistent anti-war, anti-imperialist position should be that the U.S. is waging wars because of Israel, and instead should focus on waging a war on China. That's absurd.

Now, getting back to why this is happening now, I've always been very critical of the Israel lobby argument. I'm not saying that Israel is not a factor—obviously, Israel is a factor—but Israel is an extension of the U.S. empire. Netanyahu himself referred to Israel proudly as a mighty U.S. aircraft carrier. The Secretary of State under Ronald Reagan, back in the '80s, also famously said that Israel is an unsinkable aircraft carrier. As for why this conflict is happening now, I think there are a few reasons. Again, this has been discussed for a long time. But one major difference now is that, of course, the Bush administration would have loved to wage war on Iran, but at that time there were so many more obstacles. In late 2014, the Syrian government was overthrown.

That was a major step toward waging war on Iran—not only politically, but also logistically—because Israel often uses Syrian airspace to launch these sorties into Iran. And the Syrian government now, to the extent there is a government, is largely a failed state. But to the extent there is one, it's led by the former leader of al-Qaeda, who rebranded himself. He was previously Abu Muhammad al-Julani; his birth name is Ahmad al-Sharah. This guy was the former head of the largest al-Qaeda affiliate in the world, and he sees Iran as his main adversary. The Wahhabi-Salafi forces behind Julani, or Sharah, in Syria have been carrying out horrific atrocities against minority groups there—Alawites, other Shia sects, Christians, Druze.

Of course, Israel is cynically exploiting that to justify its colonization policies in Syria, saying they have to defend ethnic minorities. But in reality, this regime in Syria is the most pro-Israel regime they've ever had in modern history. Previously, Syria had an Arab nationalist government that refused to normalize relations with Israel, whereas now al-Sharah has said publicly, "We don't want any conflict with Israel." He wants to normalize with Israel. Al-Sharah was just in the White House several weeks ago, meeting with Donald Trump. So the fact is, the Syrian government now not only doesn't oppose Israel—it's actually actively antagonistic toward Iran.

That was a major step toward this war on Iran. Furthermore, there's the decapitation of Hezbollah's leadership in Lebanon. Now, Israel falsely believed it had destroyed Hezbollah. Obviously, it did not, because Hezbollah's roots run deep in Lebanese society. As long as the U.S. and Israel try to basically colonize Lebanon—which Israel is doing right now, colonizing the southern one-fifth of the country—they've already displaced about 20% of the Lebanese population and are colonizing the south. As long as Israel does that, there will be indigenous resistance against it. Hezbollah itself has its origins in the 1978 and 1982 Israeli invasions of Lebanon. And after the '82 invasion,

#Ben

Israel occupied southern Lebanon in violation of international law for nearly 20 years, until it was expelled by Hezbollah. Hezbollah led the resistance, along with other groups, in 2000. So Israel thought that the U.S. and Israel could simply decapitate all of Hezbollah's leadership and then just take over Lebanon. It's the same thing the U.S. thought in Iran—that it could simply decapitate the leadership, the Iranian government would fall, and it could install a puppet, like it thought it would do in Venezuela. I know you want to talk about Venezuela later. By the way, the U.S. has not succeeded in overthrowing the Venezuelan government. It remains the constitutional order. The current acting president was the vice president under Nicolás Maduro, Delcy Rodríguez.

Constitutionally, she is the acting president, so there hasn't been a break in the Venezuelan government. Now, there have certainly been some concessions that Venezuela has made to the U.S. because of this sword of Damocles hanging over the heads of all the leadership. The U.S. is using these terror tactics and threatening to assassinate all the leaders of Venezuela. And yes, Venezuela has made some concessions, but it also desperately needed sanctions relief. Quietly, the U.S. has given some sanctions relief to Venezuela. So even in Venezuela, it's not as simple as Trump supporters would like to make it seem. But the reality is that Trump thought he could repeat that in Iran. He failed. Now, there are, of course, other reasons.

Of course, the big issue I mentioned is that a lot of this analysis is very superficial. It's all "Israel, Netanyahu just convinced Trump," and otherwise Trump is, you know, such an innocent man. I mean, he would never bomb another country if it weren't for Israel, right? But he didn't just bomb Venezuela a month and a half before attacking Iran. Again, this is such a superficial analysis. Trump, by the way, now holds the world record for bombing more countries than any other U.S. president—and he certainly faces a lot of competition. Obama bombed seven countries; Trump has now

bombed ten. And he's threatening Cuba—that would be the eleventh. And also, by the way, he's kind of bombing Ecuador.

That's already the eleventh. And the Trump administration—what they're doing in Latin America is absolutely scandalous. Again, you can't just blame Israel for this. U.S. policies in Latin America have always been imperialist and aggressive, but Trump is taking it to a whole new level. And Marco Rubio—they've now launched what they call "Operation Total Extermination." That's the name. They plan on launching more military operations across Latin America. They started in Ecuador. So, I mean, this administration is just imperialism on steroids. It's absolutely brutal what they're doing all around the world, not just in West Asia, where U.S. analysts can scapegoat Israel as if the U.S. were otherwise a peaceful, peace-loving hegemon.

Now, again, getting back to why this is happening now—the larger picture that people often miss the forest for the trees—is, of course, this broader U.S. strategy of trying to contain China. Now, in Beijing, there are some people who don't like this argument. I argue with them a lot, but they don't necessarily see the war on Iran as targeting China. I think that's... well, I think they're sometimes a little naive. "Naive" isn't really the right word, because they're very smart analysts, but I think they underestimate the aggressiveness and the insidiousness of the U.S. And really, if you— I mean, if you watch Fox News, they say this every hour: it's all about China, China, China.

And the U.S. would love to control all the oil reserves in West Asia to use that as leverage against China. I think this was also something Trump was planning in the lead-up to his now-postponed trip to meet with President Xi Jinping, where the U.S. wanted to overthrow the Iranian government, install some kind of puppet, control the oil, and then, when Trump met with President Xi, he could use that as leverage and say, "Look, you have these export restrictions, you have this leverage in terms of the U.S. being very dependent on a lot of industrial inputs from China. Well, we have leverage over you. We could cut off your oil."

China is the world's largest importer of oil, and it gets a lot of that oil from the Persian Gulf—not only from Iran, but also from the Gulf monarchies. China is playing a complicated role: it's supporting Iran, but it's also trying to balance its relations with the Gulf monarchies because China is their largest trading partner and depends heavily on their energy. So there's a complicated geopolitical game being played here. The U.S. would like to remove all the countries that—well, you know, China doesn't have a formal alliance system—but those that are very friendly to China, especially the ones that provide it with the energy and commodities needed to power its massive industrial economy.

And the U.S. would love to control the oil in this region—not because it needs more oil; the U.S. is the world's largest oil producer—but because it wants to use oil as a geopolitical tool and to control the global oil market. That's very important, because there's also a big de-dollarization element to this. Iran recognizes that. Iranian military commanders have shown how shrewd and strategic they

are, and they've very cleverly used asymmetric leverage over the U.S.—demanding, for instance, that oil passing through the Strait of Hormuz be traded in Chinese yuan instead of U.S. dollars, and targeting U.S. corporations in the region, especially big tech companies.

In addition to targeting U.S. military bases, there's also the element of the dollar system. Right now, we've seen, for instance, a lot of foreign central banks selling off U.S. Treasury securities because their currencies are falling dramatically—largely because of this crisis. Many Global South countries are major oil importers, and they're facing chronic current account deficits that are getting worse as oil prices skyrocket. So they're going to sell off U.S. Treasury securities, which will put upward pressure on yields in the U.S. bond market. And if Iran can succeed in de-dollarizing at least part of the global oil market—which China has been pushing for as well—this could put significant pressure on the U.S. bond market.

And this is something that Trump is very concerned about—along with the stock market, obviously—which is why he constantly waits until Friday night or Saturday morning, when the stock market is closed for the weekend. Then he makes these big announcements, like saying he's going to blow up Iran's electrical grid. So, I know I've given a very long answer here. There's a lot you probably want to say. I could say more—I've been bloviating—but this is why I think it's very important to look at the larger historical context. Look at the U.S. strategy today, where about 90 percent of U.S. foreign policy is aimed at China. That doesn't mean it doesn't have other secondary goals.

But I think this analysis I hear from so many people—that it's all Israel, that Netanyahu convinced Trump, and otherwise Trump wouldn't be doing this—you can't understand U.S. foreign policy with that kind of facile argument. You can't understand the war in Vietnam, Korea, the constant attacks in Latin America, the constant imposition of sanctions on one-third of the planet, including 60% of low-income countries, if you just say it's because of Israel. That's an excuse that distracts from the fact that the United States—the U.S. economy, the political-economic system of the United States—is predicated on the deindustrialization of any powers that could challenge it. It's predicated on the forceful subjugation of any independent countries that could challenge the dollar system.

And Iran has been a major one of these countries. It's all predicated on control—monopolistic control over key strategic markets, especially the energy market, along with semiconductors and big tech—which is why China is seen as a big threat. If you don't have a political-economy understanding of U. S. foreign policy and what drives the interests of the monopolistic corporations that control it, you're not going to understand what's happening. That's why it's much easier to say, "Oh, it's all the lobby in Washington," as if there aren't dozens of other lobbies. By the way, the last thing I'll say—I often point out—if you look at the sheer number of dollars spent by foreign lobbies in Washington...

One of the biggest is China, which obviously has very little success, because the interests of the Chinese lobby don't align with those of the monopolistic U.S. corporations and the military-industrial complex. The interests of Israel, on the other hand, largely do align with those same forces. Similarly, the Gulf regimes also lobby a lot. In fact, in terms of dollars, Saudi Arabia spends more on

lobbying in Washington than Israel. So why don't we talk about the Saudi lobby? Well, it's because the lobbies that are successful are ultimately the ones pushing for policies that align with the interests of the U.S. ruling class and capitalist oligarchs. When there's a convergence of interests, they tend to get those policies adopted. When there are contradictory interests—like between China and the U.S.—they tend to have little success.

#Mudiar

I interviewed Norman Finkelstein, and he said he wasn't convinced by the Israel lobby argument back in 2003, but he thinks that this time there might be more weight to it. From what I recall, his analysis was based on the idea that Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, even George Bush were smart people. Yeah, I watched that. They're very smart. Okay, yeah. I think he overestimated their smartness. But basically, he thinks the current administration is full of people who don't have an IQ, and so this time they might have been tricked.

#Ben

With all due respect to Norman Finkelstein—he's done amazing work—yeah, respectful disagreement here. One, I think that, again, that's just a very simplistic analysis: U.S. leaders were smarter then and they're stupid now. Ironically, this is the opposite of what Trump says. Trump promised he was going to, you know, end wars, that he wasn't going to start new ones. And then, when he started waging these new wars, he said—well, the difference is... Actually, I think that was Pete Hegseth who said it. No, sorry, it was J.D. Vance who said it. He said, back then the difference is those leaders were stupid, and now we're smart. This is a ridiculous, simplistic analysis that misses the forest for the trees and obscures the historical trajectory of U.S. imperialism in this region.

And by the way, it's not like everything is just being done by Emperor Trump. Certainly, Trump does have a lot of power, but this also obscures the role of the military itself. People like General Dan "Raisin" Cane, whom Trump loves to praise—this maniac who earned the moniker "Raisin Cane" because he loves to raze cities to the ground. And there are a lot of military brass who have been advocating for war with Iran for a long time because they wanted to decapitate the Iranian leadership and destroy Iran's nuclear facilities. They say they want to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, but I actually think this war, ironically, makes it more likely that Iran will develop one.

But there's such a long history of empires showing this kind of hubris and arrogance—underestimating their adversaries, believing their own propaganda, which is always very dangerous, and overextending themselves. Every empire has done this throughout history, and certainly, in the case of the U.S., we can see it. Iran is obviously much more sophisticated and was much better prepared than Washington assumed. And just saying it's all because Trump decided on a whim to attack Iran is, again, a very simplistic analysis. It also obscures the role of Marco Rubio, a very sophisticated and nefarious operative who has totally rebranded himself.

But, you know, if you have an attention span of more than a few months—which, unfortunately, in U.S. politics and the corporate media, most people don't; they only have the attention span of a few months, if not even shorter, a few weeks, right?—the reality is that Rubio has, his entire career, been a neoconservative warmonger. Every war that the U.S. has waged, Rubio staunchly advocated for, and he pushed for even more war. Rubio has always been pushing for war in Iran, of course, and in Cuba and Venezuela. A lot of people rightly, correctly, focus on his attention to Latin America. But Rubio has always been a hawk in West Asia—very, very supportive of the wars in Syria and Libya, all of these modern wars ever since he was a senator. And Rubio kind of rebranded in the past few years, portraying himself as a populist. He started talking about industrial policy.

His office published these reports, which are honestly quite interesting, about how the U.S. needs to move away from market fundamentalism—adopting some even left-leaning economic talking points—while at the same time, when it comes to foreign policy, he's as right-wing as it gets: extremely aggressive, extremely belligerent. But he rebranded himself as this kind of populist-sympathetic, MAGA-sympathetic realist. In reality, though, Rubio has never stopped being a mouth-foaming warmonger. And even though he's been pretty quiet in the Trump administration—which is a clever move on his part, because he understands that Trump doesn't like strong personalities that aren't deferential to him; he gets rid of anyone who's not completely deferential—Rubio has been very quiet.

He only speaks when Trump asks him to. And behind the scenes, I think Rubio is also the architect of a lot of these policies—certainly the attack on Venezuela, and probably war in Iran as well. You know, if you were to look at, to bring it back to Noam Finkelstein, like the Dick Cheney to Bush, if you will—Dick Cheney was obviously a very evil but also cunning imperialist, and Bush was the public-facing figure, but he wasn't really the architect of a lot of those policies. I think you can make a similar parallel today with Trump and Rubio. I think Rubio is certainly pushing for a lot of these policies and convincing Trump. But again, it's not even just Trump; there's an entire apparatus that has been pushing for war in Iran for decades, going back to that famous Wesley Clark speech and even before.

Let's not forget that in the 1980s, during the horrific Iran-Iraq war, the U.S. ironically supported Saddam Hussein, and the CIA gave assistance to the Iraqi military as he was using chemical weapons on Iranians, including civilians. This was reported by **Foreign Policy** magazine. The U.S. was supporting Iraq in this proxy war against Iran to overthrow the Iranian revolutionary government. So this is certainly not the first time the U.S. has been in a kind of indirect war with Iran. The U.S. has been waging an indirect war against Iran for many decades. So again, I think what we're seeing today is a convergence of different factors—the overthrow of the Syrian government, the weakening of Lebanon, the operation in Venezuela—and the U.S. thought they could easily repeat that in Iran.

The sanctions that the U.S. implemented, including the maximum pressure strategy, have been devastating to the Iranian economy. Just a few weeks before the U.S. attacked Iran, on the 28th of February, Scott Bessent, the billionaire hedge fund manager from Wall Street—ironically a Soros protégé—went on Fox News and boasted that he took credit for collapsing, as he said, the Iranian economy. He claimed that the massive, suffocating maximum pressure campaign and sanctions had starved Iran of hard currency, which led to very high inflation. And as Bessent boasted, it became difficult for Iran to get the hard currency it needed to pay for its imports. He even took credit for the big protests.

So I don't think it's a coincidence that these massive protests, which were extremely violent, were destabilizing the Iranian government just a few weeks before this war. There were many actions carried out in the lead-up to this war by several administrations. The Obama administration started the dirty war against Syria in 2011, which continued under Trump in his first term and ultimately succeeded under the Biden administration, because the Syrian economy had suffered and eroded so much that the foundation of the government was really brittle at that point—and the Syrian government fell. I mean, that was a 13-year project, from 2011 until 2024. So this path toward war on Iran was not...

#Ben

It wasn't just laid by Trump in the past year. This is a decades-long project, and yeah, Trump is the one who ultimately pulled the trigger. But the point I've been making in my videos is that this reminds me of people who argue that World War I happened because of the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand by a Yugoslav nationalist, and therefore the Austro-Hungarian Empire declared war on Serbia, which set off this cascading domino series of events that led to World War I. I mean, that's not wrong, but it's such a superficial understanding of the war. World War I was an inter-imperialist war. The European colonial powers had colonized the entire world.

They had nowhere left to colonize except their own territories. So you have Alsace-Lorraine and all these regions inside Europe. They started colonizing their own territories and fighting over resources and markets within the European colonial regimes themselves. That was the real reason for World War I. If you look back at World War I, it makes sense. But I have no doubt there were a lot of analysts, journalists, and even scholars at the time—in 1914, 1915—who said, "Oh, this is all because of Yugoslav nationalists in Serbia, and it's because of the Austro-Hungarian Empire." I mean, come on. That's such a superficial analysis.

And I have no doubt that 30 to 40 years from now, historians will look back at this war as part of a larger Eurasian project by the U.S. empire to control the "world island," if you will. This is geopolitics 101—to encircle China, to remove any independent countries as the U.S. wages this new Cold War, as the U.S. seeks control of the global oil market, as the U.S. desperately tries to hold together the dollar system at a time when that system is in significant decline, which is the most powerful

weapon the U.S. has. Historians, I think, will see those factors as more important. And certainly, they'll say Israel was a factor, but the idea that this is all because of Israel is just superficial.

#Mudiar

There's been a lot of talk about who's winning the war, or about the significance and impact of the war. I don't want to ask that very broad question, because it really depends on how you define the goals of the war for each side. One could say that the decapitation of the leader means the U.S. has won. Another argument is that setting fire to a U.S. warship means Iran has won the war. I think a better way would be to drill down on something you said—that if your analysis is that China is the primary factor, or let's say a significant factor, behind the U.S...

#Ben

It's a major factor. There are multiple factors, but it's a major one.

#Mudiar

It's a major factor as an incentive—U.S. incentive—to attack Iran. Then the analysis would tell us that they are failing badly. First of all, the U.S. can't control Iranian oil because they couldn't break up Iran. All these talks about a quick special operation on Kharg Island to control Iranian oil are just ludicrous. Even if you could control Kharg Island, you couldn't control Iranian oil, because for that you'd have to control the entire production process. We've seen that in Venezuela—you can't do that without controlling the whole process. On top of that, the petrodollar system—if the goal was to strengthen it—has been weakening, if anything, because the oil market has been disrupted. Furthermore, the Gulf states, who have been the linchpin for oil and the foundation of the petrodollar system, have been reinvesting their surplus in U.S. assets.

They've been having to rethink their PAC. So if they stop buying these massive military contracts from U.S. contractors, the investment patterns could change, and that would destabilize the dollar even more. I'd add one last point. Militarily, the diversion of the THAAD system and other systems has shown that, within East Asia, it's become quite clear to those paying attention that the U.S. can't guarantee your protection. I'm talking about the vassal states in East Asia. Even the Philippines has become increasingly dependent on Russia through Russian oil exports. The discussion within Taiwan about the vulnerabilities of the Gulf states and their reliance on U.S. military protection has been very revealing. So, based on your analysis, it seems fair to conclude that the U.S. is failing in its war objectives.

#Ben

I think there's no doubt that the U.S. is failing miserably in pretty much all of its objectives. And I would go further—at this point, I think it's fair to say we can conclude that Iran is winning in

significant ways. It might sound like a pretty radical argument, but even *Foreign Affairs*, the publication of the Council on Foreign Relations—which is as ruling-class as it gets—even they published an article acknowledging that, by its own metrics, Iran is winning this war. I'll get to that in a second. There are so many great points you made that I want to respond to. The first is that I mentioned every empire ultimately reaches a point where it overextends itself, and out of its own hubris, it commits these self-destructive policies.

You see this in so many cases throughout history—the Roman Empire, every major one. The British Empire, certainly, that ultimately was destroyed in World War I and World War II. The German Empire—well, that's the most horrific example. But let's not forget that it was the Nazi regime that destroyed the German Empire. The crimes the German Empire committed in southern Africa, for instance, were often forgotten because of the horrific atrocities of the Third Reich. But, you know, those atrocities, as was famously argued by Aimé Césaire, showed that fascism was the application of colonialism internally—against nations, oppressed peoples, or minority groups inside the imperial core.

You know, the Nazis said they were going to have—the German Reich would live on for a thousand years. They destroyed the German Empire for at least a century. We'll see what happens in the coming decades. But certainly, there are far-right forces that want to remilitarize. You see this throughout history, where empires think they're going to ensure their dominance and continued strength, but they actually end up destroying significant parts of their own empire. And I think it's fair to say the U.S. may be doing that as we speak. Now, why do I say this? Why is Iran winning? Why is the U.S. losing? From Iran's perspective, it has several goals it wants to accomplish.

Obviously, the biggest goal would be the liberation of Palestine. That, unfortunately, does not look like it's going to happen in the short to medium term. Although I'll point out, this gets back to the point I just made a moment ago. The Israeli regime—like I mentioned with the German Empire destroying itself—looks now like it is so strong. It has succeeded, at least for now, in basically destroying Gaza. And who knows what's going to happen in Gaza? It's gradually annexing the West Bank in violation of international law. It's trying to colonize southern Lebanon. We'll see if it succeeds there. It did not succeed in the '80s or the '90s.

Let's not forget that Israel did succeed in occupying southern Lebanon for 18 years, but they were still expelled in 2000. So even if Israel does succeed in the short term in colonizing southern Lebanon, there's no guarantee it will stay there permanently. Now, Israel does look like it's in a stronger position—you know, the Syrian government was overthrown—but if you actually look at it, it could be weaker than ever. The economy is in free fall. According to even conservative statistics from places like *The Economist*, their GDP contracted by 7% last year, which is probably an underestimate. You're seeing a massive brain drain in Israel. Many of the skilled workers—doctors, engineers, scientists, researchers—have dual passports. They're quite wealthy.

And they've been going to their other countries of citizenship—Europe, the U.S., Canada, Australia. So you're seeing a massive brain drain and a significant economic crisis. No one can trust Israel. Even the Gulf monarchies that normalized relations with Israel, like the UAE, are facing severe consequences, as you mentioned, because of this war. And Saudi Arabia, which was considering normalization, you can bet they're second- or even triple-guessing that now. So again, Israel looks like it's stronger than ever, but in many ways it could be weaker than ever. And then there are all these internal contradictions in Israel—the growing rise of extremist theocratic movements against the old-school secular forces who used to lead the military. There are so many contradictions waiting to explode in Israel.

And then, when we're getting back to the U.S.—okay, so what were the U.S. goals? First of all, regime change. It's not going to happen. The joke people are saying is that the U.S. succeeded in replacing Khamenei with Khamenei. And I would add that Ali Khamenei was 86, in bad health. He wanted to be a martyr. He didn't flee. He knew the U.S. and Israel were going to kill him. He was in his office in the center of Tehran—he wanted to become a martyr. And now his son has been elected by the religious authorities in Iran to be the new supreme leader. It's been widely reported that his son is more militant. It's often forgotten, because the Western media is full of this Orientalist propaganda, but Ali Khamenei, in the context of the Iranian government, was actually a relatively moderate voice.

He was not very militant. He was the principal advocate of Iran's policy of strategic patience, which is why some people, especially in the military establishment in Iran, were very angry when the U.S. and Israel kept attacking Iran—assassinating Iranian leaders, killing Iranian nuclear scientists. They even bombed Iran's consulate in Syria. Last year, in June, they waged a 12-day war against Iran. And Ali Khamenei was always pushing for a policy of strategic patience. He wanted the responses to be reciprocal, and he didn't want to escalate because he feared the U.S. and Israel were trying to drag Iran into a larger war.

Well, reportedly, we don't know a lot of details, of course, but from sources I trust—people who are real Iran experts and not like these Western think tankers—I've read from some of these analysts that the son, Mojtaba Khamenei, is not as moderate as his father, and he may not be opposed on religious grounds to nuclear weapons. Ali Khamenei issued a religious ruling, a fatwa, against nuclear weapons. It was a deeply held belief. And it seems that Mojtaba Khamenei is more willing to pursue nuclear weapons. This comes after, last year, Iranian military commanders actually made a quite extraordinary intervention. This was reported by The Telegraph, but it was also reported elsewhere, and I think in this case it's pretty reputable. I know it is.

I mean, there were reports about it even in, like, you know, West Asian media outlets. It wasn't just that. But I saw a report in The Telegraph that Iranian military commanders were trying to convince Ali Khamenei to change his fatwa—to cancel it—and allow the creation of nuclear weapons. So it's likely now that this war will lead Iran to develop nuclear weapons. I think that's almost certain.

Moreover, from the analysts I've read, Mojtaba Khamenei is very close to the IRGC. And he's relatively younger and less experienced, which means the new Iranian government will likely be even more heavily influenced by the military and less by the religious leadership. I'm not saying the religious leadership will have no influence—obviously it will.

But I think it's quite clear from now on that the military will be by far the most powerful force in Iran. Every state on earth has a balance of forces within it. You know, you have states like Pakistan that are run by the military. I think in the case of Iran, the military has always been very influential, but you also had the political leadership and the religious leadership. And you have a small handful of capitalists. You have this balance of forces. I think now there's no question that the military is in command and will be very powerful going forward. So, ironically, this war will probably strengthen the fortitude of the Iranian state. It could make the Iranian state even stronger and more resilient, because these military-led states tend to be a little more resilient. And in terms of U.S. goals of regime change, it failed.

In terms of the U.S. now—you know, you talk about the petrodollar—obviously a miserable, abject failure. In terms of control over the Strait of Hormuz, complete failure. Iran has now asserted control over the Strait of Hormuz for the foreseeable future. So, on every metric, the U.S. is losing pretty badly. The U.S. has been able to destroy a lot of Iranian infrastructure and, you know, bomb children—which it's very good at doing, bombing schools and hospitals—but it obviously has not broken the will of the Iranian people. And this, ironically, has only led to Iranians rallying behind the flag. And then finally, why do I say Iran's winning? Okay, so I mentioned that Iran obviously would love to have—you can think of each state as having many different long-term, medium-term, and short-term goals.

Less realistic goals, more realistic goals. Iran has some goals that I think are noble, like the liberation of Palestine. In the short to medium term, I don't see that as very realistic—maybe in the long term, certainly. But it also has other goals that are much more tangible and realistic. One of Iran's goals for a long time now, for decades, has been the expulsion of U.S. military bases from the region. In that sense, it has accomplished that right now. Whether or not the U.S.—I mean, I think the U.S. will not leave these bases permanently. The U.S. will probably rebuild them whenever this war ends. So I don't think Iran will have succeeded in totally expelling the U.S. permanently.

However, it has succeeded in, one, destroying all of these bases, and two—this is why the New York Times reported that the U.S. military is now mostly operating from European bases—because they don't really have forces in the region anymore. Iran has also established deterrence with Europe, showing that it can use long-range missiles capable of hitting targets more than 4,000 kilometers away. It struck the Diego Garcia air base, operated jointly by the U.S. and the U.K. So now there are reports that European countries are even pushing back against the U.S., because they're afraid that as the U.S. uses European bases, those could become legitimate targets for Iran's long-range missiles, which reach within 4,000 kilometers.

We see even Spain, for instance—which has been kind of the model for Europe—as the only country really openly challenging the U.S. Spain is forcing the U.S. military to withdraw its forces from Spanish bases. So in that sense, this is a major victory for Iran, at least in the short term, maybe the medium term. Then this brings us to another goal. Iran has established deterrence to an extent, although it doesn't want the war to end immediately because it still wants to inflict more damage on Israel and the Gulf regimes in order to strengthen that deterrence. From Iran's perspective, they don't want this kind of war to happen every year or every two years. So Iran's strategy from the beginning was to use its cheap drones—the Shahed drones, which cost around \$20,000 on average—to deplete the air defense interceptors in Israel and the Gulf states.

And it has depleted them for the most part. Now Iran is using some of its more sophisticated missiles to destroy infrastructure, especially military targets, in these countries. So the U.S. and Israel—I have no doubt that at this point they would love for the war to end. Trump keeps saying, keeps hinting, that supposedly there are talks going on, even though Iran rejects that. But Iran doesn't want to end up in a situation where they agree to a ceasefire, and then the next year, after the U.S., Israel, and the Gulf regimes have their munitions refilled by the U.S., they launch the war again. Iran needs to establish deterrence and make it clear that there won't be another war for decades.

They need to cause enough damage to Israel and the Gulf regimes to make them triple, quadruple, even quintuple-guess any action they might take in the future against Iran. That's the definition of deterrence—to prevent them from carrying out these kinds of actions again. In that sense, I think Iran is in the process of establishing deterrence, which is a major victory, a major goal they've been trying to accomplish. Another point, regarding the Gulf regimes, is that many of them have been very insidious, playing both sides. Now, you and I have talked about this—we're in a new Cold War—and if I were the leader of any country in the Global South, of course I'd want a non-aligned foreign policy.

I mean, it's very noble. I have a lot of respect for countries that are directly challenging the U.S. empire. But as we see in Cuba, it's very painful to do so. You will be punished, you will be blockaded, you will face sanctions. So it makes sense, from their own national interest, why so many Global South countries are non-aligned. And the Gulf regimes have tried to balance between the U.S.-led West and the kind of Eurasian countries—China, Russia, the BRICS countries. The UAE even joined BRICS, which is quite incredible, because the UAE and Iran are basically at war with each other now. The U.S. is using, or was using, military bases in the UAE to attack Iran.

And the Washington Post reported that the Wall Street Journal said not only was the U.S. using those military bases, it was also using territory outside the bases in the Gulf states to launch attacks. So these countries are parties to the war. They've given the U.S. approval to use their territory to attack Iran. Iran wants to exact a cost on them as well and send the message that they should

actually be non-aligned—not this fake non-alignment where they help the U.S. and Israel wage war on Iran while claiming to be neutral. They're not neutral. I think this will further incentivize the Gulf regimes to diversify their foreign policy even more and lean a bit further east.

China is already the largest trading partner, and the U.S. so-called security guarantees obviously haven't been successful in guaranteeing security. They've actually been a liability. So I don't think there's going to be a big change of heart where these benevolent monarchs suddenly see the light and ally with China and BRICS. That's absurd. No, they're not going to do that. They're still going to try to balance, and they're certainly not going to challenge the U.S. But there's another element here, which is that these regimes in the Gulf are also very brittle. They're basically, you know, tiered, hierarchical, even kind of apartheid regimes, where you have a very small percentage of the population.

In places like the UAE and Qatar, around 10% of the population are citizens. They have a very generous welfare state because these are all petro-states. They get all this money from oil and natural gas, and then a small handful of the population receives very generous benefits, while the majority are treated like slaves, basically. They're largely migrant workers from South Asia—especially Muslim migrant workers from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India—and even from Southeast Asia, like the Philippines. There are a lot of migrant workers who are brutally exploited. In many cases, dozens of people live in cramped rooms with bunk beds. They don't have adequate access to hygiene, and sometimes their passports are taken from them. It's a horrible system. There's very little legitimate popular support for these regimes. The only reason they really have some support is because the leadership bribes the people who have citizenship.

And, you know, if you're a Saudi citizen, you get paid a lot—these massive dividends, right? You live very comfortably. You don't have to work a day in your life. But there's not really a political base of support for these regimes. The majority of the population doesn't benefit from these systems. And there are significant Shia minorities in Saudi Arabia, which also happens to be where much of the oil is located. There have been big protests in the past, especially when Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr was executed. That was a major affront to Shia Muslims. So Saudi Arabia is very unstable. They like to project confidence and stability, but if the Shia community in Saudi Arabia were to rise up, I have no doubt the Saudi regime, with U.S. support, would be extremely brutal in trying to quell it.

But there's no guarantee that the regime would survive. Bahrain is even more fragile. It's a majority Shia country with a Sunni sectarian leadership that's very pro-U.S., that normalized relations with the Israeli regime. And again, I don't want to make everything about sectarianism—it's much more complicated than just Sunni versus Shia. But, you know, it's important to remember that Iran is not just a political entity; it's a major religious state with thousands of years of history. Not only is the government religious, but it's also the global center of Shia Islam—the largest Shia-majority country—and it has many Shia religious sites that are very important theologically. There are many Shia scholars. I mean, this is another card that Iran could play if this war continues to escalate.

And we've already seen this with Yemen, by the way. Yemen is now getting directly involved in this war, which means they can shut down the Red Sea, where roughly another 10% of global seaborne oil passes through on a daily basis, in addition to the 20% that used to pass through the Strait of Hormuz. We're talking about potentially 30% of globally traded oil being taken offline—or maybe not all of that 30%. Maybe it's more like 20% of globally traded oil being taken offline. That would be a massive shock to the global system.

So finally, another major victory for Iran is that they've demonstrated—this is another form of deterrence—that if they're ever attacked in the future, they can cause a global economic crisis. They can use control over the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea as strategic leverage to trigger economic crises in many parts of Asia and Europe and cause damage in the U.S. You know, people keep saying the U.S. is energy self-sufficient. It's not true. The U.S. is a net oil exporter, but it still imports a lot of heavy crude, largely from Canada and Mexico. It's not totally self-sufficient. And the price of oil is global.

They're not determined locally in the U.S., and we're seeing massive gasoline price increases—price hikes—just a few months before the midterm elections in the U.S. So again, my answer is very long here, but honestly, from every angle I look at it, I really think this is a major victory for Iran. Yes, there's been a lot of damage caused in Iran, but that's how every war is. Compared to what Iran is gaining in terms of its victories, I think if I were an Iranian military commander right now, I'd be very confident. That's why I think Iran has been so reticent to get involved in these so-called negotiations, which they can't even trust anyway, because every time the U.S. engages in "negotiations," it uses them as cover to launch another attack on Iran.

#Mudiar

One of the important pieces of news this morning is that Kataib Hezbollah, one of the major resistance forces in Iraq, along with the PMF and others—and they have decades of experience in resistance, going back at least to the U.S. occupation of Iraq—has said they're ready to cross over to Bahrain if the war continues. The Western media has completely ignored this, but I think it's a significant development after Yemen attacked Israel and expanded the war of resistance. I wanted to end—

#Ben

Let's not forget that Bahrain had massive protests. The Bahraini regime is very unpopular, which is why you've seen so many videos on social media. Whenever there are these strikes in Bahrain—the Iranian strikes—you see people cheering. And in 2011, there were those big protests. Saudi Arabia invaded Bahrain with the full support of the U.S. government in order to violently repress them. At the same time, the U.S. government was saying, "We have to support the peaceful protests for democracy in Libya and Syria." So it just shows how duplicitous and hypocritical this always was. When there were protests in countries where the U.S. supports the regime, like Bahrain, they

violently repressed them. But when it came to Syria and Libya, oh, they were glorious, peaceful revolutions. And we saw how disastrous the outcomes were in Libya and Syria.

#Mudiar

That was called the Arab Spring. Of course, Egypt and Tunisia were the justification, given the unpopularity there. But Bahrain was completely suppressed. And Syria and Libya became what real scholars called the Arab Winter. I want to end by asking you about Venezuela and Cuba, and I'll combine my questions in the interest of time. As you said, it's hard to understand the driving causes of obvious imperialism if one doesn't take into account the whole picture—otherwise, you might lapse into explanations like "the Israel lobby." I think one of the important regions, apart from East Asia and Eurasia, is Latin America. I have two specific questions, and I'm combining them. What has happened in Venezuela since the attempted kidnapping of Nicolás Maduro?

Because there have been debates within the left about whether there's been a real regime change. I think people on the left who support that argument are reading too much into mainstream propaganda. One piece of evidence they point to is that oil exports from Venezuela to the United States have increased, along with the concessions made. Of course, it's often ignored that Maduro himself said he made a lot of concessions, while the mainstream used to claim that Maduro wasn't making any. So, what has been the impact of the kidnapping on the government structure of Venezuela? That's my first question. And the second question is—Is Cuba next? Because, given your important argument about what Cheney was to Bush, if Rubio is to Trump, then his lifetime mission seems to be to overthrow the government and the revolution in Cuba.

So if we follow that logic, we're basically waiting for another massive strangulation and a direct war—let's say, on Cuba—because the war on the Cuban Revolution has been going on, and the harshest sanctions have been imposed on them. We've also heard that Russian oil tankers have recently reached Cuba. The mainstream media says the U.S. Coast Guard has allowed or lifted the blockade. Of course, it hasn't lifted the blockade. We don't know many details about how they got there—whether it was by force or because of the U.S. Coast Guard's incapability. I don't know the details, but how do you read the whole situation in these regions, in the context of the war, the midterms, and the general unpopularity of the U.S. government?

#Ben

Yeah, great comments. And you asked so many good questions there. I'll try to respond to all of them. First, I want to make a brief comment about U.S. policy in Latin America and why I've been frustrated by some of the superficial analysis of the war in Iran and how it's supposedly all about Israel. Unfortunately, a lot of people who focus on geopolitics—analysts, reporters, that kind of crowd—don't really care about Latin America, which I find sometimes very arrogant, sometimes very

condescending. They think it's an insignificant region, or, in the worst case, some people straight up believe that Latin America is rightfully the U.S. empire's so-called sphere of influence, which is outrageous.

This is an independent, sovereign region. Sovereignty is extremely important—it's enshrined in the UN Charter. And beyond that, you can't have international relations in the world without ending up in a state of permanent war if you don't have the basic concept of sovereignty. This is the Westphalian system. Even the European empires—well, actually, I shouldn't say until World War I, because there were still wars between them—but they at least pretended to respect the state sovereignty of the other European empires, because they knew that if they didn't, it could lead to more war. Of course, the Westphalian system was always hypocritical, because the European empires did not respect the sovereignty of the Global South.

But anyway, getting back to Latin America, I find it really frustrating that some geopolitical analysts just ignore the region. Because, yeah, if you ignore what the U.S. has done in Latin America and only focus on West Asia, then maybe you could say everything is Israel's fault. But that doesn't help explain why the U.S. has also been so belligerent toward China and in East Asia, or with the proxy war in Ukraine against Russia. I understand why people see it that way if they only focus on West Asia. But if you look at U.S. policy in Latin America—especially today, but not just today, over decades—the U.S. has militarily intervened in almost every country in the region, according to a report by the Congressional Research Service.

The U.S. has backed coups d'état in pretty much all the countries in Latin America. I mean, what the U.S. has done in Latin America—not just in our lifetimes, but for two centuries—is absolutely outrageous. And Trump is now putting the pedal to the metal, and more specifically, Marco Rubio. They're reviving the colonial Monroe Doctrine from 1823. They now call it the "Donrow Doctrine," and they're launching what they call "Operation Total Extermination" in Latin America. So, getting to Venezuela—well, first of all, before I get to Venezuela, let me point out: what is the strategy here? Of course, the strategy for Latin America has always been control over the natural resources in the region and overthrowing any independent governments, especially left-wing governments.

That offer a model for a new path of development that other countries in the Global South could follow. You have to destroy any positive example, make their lives hell, and impose sanctions and a blockade on them as punishment—so that any country that tries to pursue a socialist, or at least an anti-neoliberal, path will be seen as a threat. It's basically saying, "Don't do what Venezuela did, don't do what Cuba did, or you'll face the same consequences. We'll put a blockade on you." So, destroying the threat of a good example. Also, control of the natural resources, control of the markets, the massive deindustrialization of Latin America.

So U.S. corporations could friend-shore or near-shore, like the U.S. did in Mexico when NAFTA was passed in 1994. Before that, Mexico still had, in terms of Latin America, one of the highest industrial shares of GDP. If you look throughout the region—if you look at the industrial share of GDP in South

America until the 1980s, even up through the 1970s—South America had the highest industrial share of GDP in the entire world, out of all the regions. This was the peak of the ISI policies—import substitution industrialization—which were largely pushed by Argentina and Brazil. And the most famous economist pushing for ISI was Raúl Prebisch, famously of the UN and UNCTAD, the UN Conference on Trade and Development.

And he also co-founded the UN Commission on Latin America. They were big advocates of industrial policy. Then, in the 1980s, you had the rise of neoliberalism and the debt crisis, which was largely due to the 1973 and 1979 oil crises, the recycling of petrodollars, and the big bank loans to Latin America that many countries defaulted on. Because of the massive oil prices—these were major oil importers—they ran current account deficits and couldn't get the hard currency they needed to pay their dollar debts. Then the IMF came in and imposed neoliberal structural adjustment. They had to end all of their industrial policy, and they saw massive deindustrialization in the 1980s and 1990s.

So South America specifically went from being one of the more industrialized regions of the Global South—probably the most industrialized—to now being the second least industrialized region after sub-Saharan Africa. So, I mean, this is the goal of U.S. corporations: to control Latin America's resources and exploit its cheap labor, moving factories there as part of offshoring, and then repatriating the profits back to the U.S., right? This is what the U.S. did in Asia, except the difference is that in East Asia you had governments able to implement coherent industrial policy and planning to move up the value chain—because China, for instance, has a socialist system.

China only ever borrowed from the IMF twice in history, in the 1980s, and immediately paid it back—never did it again. Whereas in Latin America, I mean, we all know the history there. So again, if you know anything about U.S. policy in Latin America, it's just nonstop imperialism. You can't just blame Israel. Anyway, getting back to your question about Venezuela—people who... well, I'll say briefly. My answers are never brief, I'm sorry, but relatively briefly—in Venezuela, the U.S. did not succeed in carrying out regime change. The government is pretty much entirely intact.

Now, the government has been forced to make several concessions for a variety of reasons. One—there's this sword of Damocles hanging over it, where the U.S. at any time could just kill or kidnap the leadership of Venezuela. But it's not just that; it's also because of the extreme destruction caused by the blockade and the sanctions. I've been to Venezuela many times. I speak fluent Spanish. I know a lot of people there. And, like, look, when I was in Venezuela in 2019, during the last coup attempt with Juan Guaidó, it was the craziest inflation I've ever seen in my life. I doubt I'll ever see inflation at that level again—where literally you have thousands and thousands, I mean many thousands, of percent inflation every year, like tens of thousands of percent inflation.

Absolutely crazy—hyperinflation like Weimar Germany inflation. And that was because Venezuela has been a petro-state for a hundred years. Before Hugo Chávez was born, like Saudi Arabia—imagine if the U.S. put a blockade on Saudi Arabia. If Saudi Arabia were not able to import any of the technology it needs for its oil infrastructure, which is made by U.S. companies, if it couldn't export

much of its oil, if it couldn't use dollars or access the U.S.-dominated international financial system—Saudi Arabia would collapse in a few weeks. The fact that the Venezuelan government survived this for so long is a testament to the popular support that still existed among poor and working-class Venezuelans. Now, Venezuela is a very divided country. It's seen enormous brain drain.

Unfortunately, I have to be honest—pretty much all the skilled workers left. Anyone who had advanced technical training, engineers, they all left, because they can get paid way more elsewhere. Unless they were diehard Chavistas—but diehard Chavistas tend to be poor and working-class people who aren't very skilled workers and don't have advanced degrees. There's a big class divide. So yes, Venezuela is very divided, but the fact that the government held on is a testament to the base of support that still existed. The government has been desperately trying to get sanctions relief. And basically, you mentioned that Maduro was also willing to make concessions—he allowed partial privatization of the oil industry, although that's been misrepresented by some ultra-leftist critics.

#Mudiar

For that, he's been criticized within the Venezuelan left. Some on the Venezuelan left argue that he made too many concessions.

#Ben

Yeah, from the PCV, the so-called Communist Party, which is tiny and irrelevant outside the internet. And honestly, they've been extremely opportunistic—they even allied with some right-wing forces in the last elections. So, I mean, again, it's just ultra-leftism. They literally would rather have the right wing win. In the last election, they were supporting the right over Maduro. Completely outrageous. That's ridiculous. The reality is that you can't just magically develop socialism when you're a petrostate and you have no industry, because anyone who knows the basics of—this is basic political economy—the famous resource curse, or Dutch disease, knows this has happened again and again throughout history.

Any country that has significant natural resources and relies on revenue from exports tends to have not only its industry but other economic sectors atrophy, because what happens is you just become a rentier state—a petrostate—where the government depends on that export revenue. Everything revolves around it. You get these patronage networks, and then the currency tends to be overvalued because you have current account surpluses from exporting a lot, especially when commodity prices are high. That makes your other exports very uncompetitive. How are you going to build any kind of manufacturing when your currency is so expensive?

So this is why you tend to have, you know, this famous resource curse that leads to deindustrialization, and your economy becomes entirely dependent on exports of that resource. Saudi Arabia, one of the richest countries on Earth per capita, has been desperately trying to

diversify its economy with very little success because of the resource curse. Now imagine you're Venezuela—you're under a blockade. I mean, again, these problems I'm talking about have existed in Venezuela for a hundred years, ever since oil was discovered. The difference is, when the Bolivarian Revolution started under Hugo Chávez, he said, "We're going to use the oil rent to benefit the majority of the population."

Previously, much of that oil revenue benefited U.S. corporations and a small handful of oligarchs in Venezuela, many of whom are of European descent. And if you look at the main leaders of the Venezuelan opposition, they're all closely linked—through their families—to these oligarchs. Famously, María Corina Machado, who is the main far-right opposition leader, is the cousin of one of the richest families in Venezuela, the Neumann family, who are descendants of these European oligarchs. They control a bunch of industries in Venezuela. And Vanessa Neumann, she's a dual U.S. citizen. She was made the fake Venezuelan ambassador to the U.K. during Juan Guaidó's coup attempt and all that stuff.

I mean, if you know the Venezuelan elites, they're all so inbred. They're all cousins of the other oligarchs. It's outrageous. Leopoldo López Mendoza is the other main far-right opposition leader, now based in Spain. He's from one of the richest oligarch families. He's the cousin of the Halverson family, who are Norwegian oligarchs. I mean, it's just like... Venezuela is the classic textbook example of the comprador bourgeois oligarchs who used to rule the country on behalf of Washington. They're a small handful of elites. They benefit. The vast majority of the population sees no benefit. This is how Haiti is governed. This is how so many countries in the Global South are governed, right?

#Mudiar

Especially in Latin America—the link to Europe, to Spain, to Portugal...

#Ben

Of course, previously you had the hacienda system—you had the big landlords. People love to say, "Oh, you know, in the early 20th century, Argentina was one of the richest countries on Earth per capita." I mean, Argentina was a plantation economy, like the Confederacy in the U.S. South. Okay, you can say they were wealthy, but it was because they had a lot of agricultural exports with a small population—because, by the way, most of the Indigenous population was exterminated. And this was before the massive waves of European immigration. So you had a small population because of that extermination, and you had these big landlords who controlled huge agricultural exports, no industry, and they survived by—well, they lived off basically slavery conditions, where Indigenous people worked on their plantations for very little pay and in horrible conditions.

I mean, again, these arguments made by neoliberal economists are so superficial. They say it's all because of Perón and the Peronists, and that import substitution industrialization doomed Argentina.

It's the exact opposite. That was the best era for Argentina. It was a major industrial power, with a very high standard of living and a strong social safety net. It was the neoliberal era that deindustrialized the country—the neoliberal military regime in the 1970s under Videla—who deindustrialized Argentina and turned it into what it is today, where the economy now relies largely on exporting soybeans and corn. Anyway, getting back to Venezuela—Chávez said, “We're going to use the oil revenue to benefit the majority of the population.”

We're going to build millions of housing units. We're going to invest in education and health care. Looking back, it's amazing what Venezuela accomplished—the poverty reduction. Of course, there are critiques that can be made. For instance, I think a legitimate one is that they should have created a sovereign wealth fund and invested the oil revenue. However, even that argument, which I agree with, isn't a panacea, because people should look at the balance sheets and the assets held by these major sovereign wealth funds. Famously, Norway has a very large sovereign wealth fund—it's another petrostate—and if you look at its holdings, the majority are U.S. assets. Not entirely, but mostly U.S. equities.

So, let's say Venezuela had created a sovereign wealth fund. Well, the U.S. still would have frozen all of that anyway, just like they did with Venezuela's foreign exchange reserves. They even stole Venezuela's gold that was held in the Bank of England. So even if Venezuela had made a sovereign wealth fund, with the U.S. empire it wouldn't have mattered, because this is a crazy rogue regime run by international pirates who have no objection to seizing the assets of foreign countries—not only Venezuela. Venezuela was just the early case. A lot of countries, unfortunately, didn't care because they said, “Oh, it's Venezuela, we're not going to rock the boat.” Then the U.S. seized—first of all, the U.S. seized Iran's foreign exchange reserves.

Then the U.S. seized Venezuela's, then the U.S. seized Afghanistan's, and finally the U.S. seized Russia's. That was the “crossing the Rubicon” moment, when people said, “This is going too far—Russia's a great power.” But when the U.S. and Europe did it to Venezuela, people didn't care. Which again shows that what the U.S. does to the Global South, a lot of these geopolitical analysts don't really care about, unfortunately. I mean, some of them do, but the ones who are hyper-fixated on only West Asia or only Ukraine or whatever, and ignore Latin America—this is what the U.S. has been doing for decades, right?

Anyway, getting back to Venezuela—Chavez recognized that Venezuela had been a petro-state. He said, “We should use this rent to benefit the majority of the population.” However, the people criticizing Maduro forget that. Do you know where the vast, vast, vast majority of oil exports under Hugo Chavez went? The U.S. Yep, it was the U.S. It wasn't China. China was becoming a major oil importer, but we keep thinking of China today as if it's always been that way. In the 2000s, China was a much smaller economy. It was growing very fast, but its oil imports were a tiny fraction of what they are today. China has since become the largest importer of oil from Venezuela.

But throughout the Chávez era—until he won the election and became president in 1999—so from 1999 until his death in 2013, the vast, vast, vast majority of Venezuelan oil exports went to the U.S. throughout that period. Even under George Bush, right? So... at that time, the U.S., by the way, was still a net oil importer, not a net oil exporter. That also changed a lot of the scenario, right? Because starting in the 2010s, with the explosion of shale production and fracking technology, the U.S. became a net oil exporter and the number one oil exporter in the world. So it was no longer dependent on importing heavy Venezuelan crude.

Also, Canada plays a role in this because Canada started tapping the tar sands, which is extremely heavy crude. Venezuela has some of the heaviest crude on Earth. And this isn't new—it goes back to the 1950s. The U.S. started building refineries in the Gulf of Mexico, and those refineries were designed to process very heavy, very sour crude from Venezuela. That was the system. Venezuela was integrated directly into this infrastructure that took decades and many billions of dollars to build. So when Chávez came in, he did nationalize the oil industry. However, even that is not well understood.

Chávez's policy that he passed—well, technically, the oil in Venezuela was actually nationalized in 1976 under Carlos Andrés Pérez, CAP, Carlos Andrés Pérez. However, it was really only nationalization on paper. In fact, many Global South countries, constitutionally, say that all their natural resources belong to the people, to the country, but they make major concessions. So in reality, they're not truly nationalized. Technically, Venezuela's oil was nationalized, but only on paper. Chávez, in 2006–2007, fully nationalized it. However, he allowed joint ventures, but the state-owned oil company, PDVSA, had to hold a majority share in all of them.

And most U.S. companies voluntarily decided to leave because they didn't consider it profitable enough to hold only a minority stake in these joint ventures. Some companies still stayed, by the way—like Chevron. Chevron has always been active, which is why Maduro was even willing to make these concessions to Chevron. The ultra-leftist critics of Venezuela don't understand that under the deals made by the Maduro government, PDVSA still had a majority stake in these joint ventures. So it's not like people have such a simple understanding of the economy. Even people on the left often think socialism is just magic—you just say the state owns everything, and now it's magic.

That's not how building an economy works. The reality is that Venezuela had majority ownership in some of these oil projects, but we're just talking about drilling and maybe exploration—although even a lot of exploration was being done by foreign companies, because that takes a lot of skilled engineers. I mean, Venezuela is still a Global South country. It's still a relatively poor, developing country. They don't have a lot of engineers, especially with the massive sanctions, the blockade, and the brain drain. The kind of skilled workers who know how to explore and find all this oil—especially offshore drilling and all that—it's very complicated. Anyway, the point I'm getting at here is, it's not just that.

Venezuela also doesn't have a domestic oil construction or oil infrastructure industry. All of that infrastructure came from the U.S.—it was built up over decades. Venezuela doesn't have companies that make the actual drilling equipment. By the way, Saudi Arabia doesn't either. Saudi Aramco is one of the biggest companies on Earth, but Saudi Arabia still relies largely on U.S. equipment. Iran does, though, because it's been under sanctions for so long. Iran is a medium-sized country, with more than 90 million people, and it has a major oil sector. Iran has developed some of its own indigenous oil technology, and it was actually sharing some of that with Venezuela gradually. That's why Venezuelan production in the past few years has been increasing—it reached roughly one million barrels per day.

Now, the peak under Chávez was 2.5 million, but those were very different conditions—very high oil prices before the crash of the commodities supercycle. From around 2014 to 2016, there was a massive crash in oil prices, then sanctions in 2017, all of that. But the reality is that Venezuela, even though it did nationalize its oil sector, still relied heavily on imports from the U.S. Venezuela also has extremely heavy, sour crude. They have to import either light, sweet crude or chemicals like naphtha, which they need for refining. And by the way, most of the refining in Venezuela wasn't done domestically. You know where it was done.

#Mudiar

The U.S.

#Ben

The U.S. It was famously the most important Venezuelan foreign asset, which was, again, illegally seized by the Trump administration during the 2019 coup attempt against Venezuela. So, Venezuela is an example of a country that was not only economically but also infrastructurally completely integrated into the U.S. oil industry going back to the 1950s. You can't just magically change that overnight. So, getting back to what's happening in Venezuela today—I could spend another hour talking about this, and I probably shouldn't. I should wrap up. The Venezuelan government recognized that it had to make all of these concessions.

In order to get sanctions lifted—which, by the way, the U.S. quietly did—the U.S. lifted sanctions on Venezuela's oil sector. This was announced quietly at the bottom of a press release from the U.S. Department of Energy. They talked about how the U.S. is going to control Venezuela's oil industry, blah, blah, blah. Basically, Venezuela understood that you have to take one step back in order to take two steps forward—or maybe four steps back to take five steps forward. They've made some major concessions, but they need to rebuild their oil infrastructure. And to do that, they have to import all these parts. I remember being in Venezuela and asking all about this.

And they were like, look, we have all this broken equipment. We'd love to fix it, but we literally can't buy the equipment because of sanctions. And it's not just oil, by the way. Venezuela has something

called a teleférico—which is, you know, a cable car system. So they had to import parts because a lot of those parts were made by German or Swiss companies. It's very specialized cable car equipment, and they couldn't import it because of the sanctions. So, when you think about it, so much of their economy was still dependent on things produced abroad.

And you can't just magically develop a cable car company, even if it's state-owned. It took China—a massive country with 1.4 billion people, not under sanctions, and with pretty good relations with the U.S.—decades of hard industrial work and planning to get where it is today. Venezuela could maybe get there, but this is why, you know, they have to make these concessions. I'm not very pessimistic about Venezuela, but I wouldn't say I'm very optimistic either. I think Venezuela is just trying to survive at this point, and they're doing everything they have to do.

And I totally understand what they're saying. And, you know, by the way, the last thing I'll say on Venezuela is this: famously, Lenin, in **The State and Revolution**, argued—or rather, he defended—why Russia, at the beginning of the Soviet Union, agreed to make the famous Brest-Litovsk pact with the European colonial powers in World War I. It was to extricate Russia, the Soviet Union, from the war, because the Soviets had promised peace, land, and bread. They needed peace to end the war. Millions of people were dying for no reason in this inter-imperialist war, and the cost of that peace was that they had to hand over parts of the Russian Empire.

And they did it. And famously, Lenin said—the analogy he made was something like this: if you're driving on the road and some bandits come and demand your car or your life, you give them your car so you can walk to the city and survive. That's what the Soviet Union did, and it survived until 1991. And this is what Venezuela is doing—you have to make these compromises. Okay, getting to Cuba now. I'm very concerned about the situation in Cuba. Very, very concerned. Cuba has been under this economic blockade for well over 60 years now. It's completely illegal according to international law. It's been bipartisan.

But you're right. Marco Rubio has made it his life mission to carry out regime change in Cuba, to overthrow the Cuban revolution. He's lied throughout his political career about his parents. He falsely claimed they were refugees from communism who supposedly fled Fidel Castro. It's not true. They left Cuba before the revolution—ironically, when it was run by the horrible military dictator Fulgencio Batista, a U.S. puppet. The economic situation had become so bad, and there was so much violence in the late 1950s, that his parents left for the U.S. Anyway, I think Rubio is going to do everything he can to try to overthrow the Cuban government.

You mentioned this case of a Russian oil tanker that was allowed to—well, “allowed” is the wrong word—that was able to pass through the U.S. naval blockade. There are a lot of conflicting reports about this. I think, in reality, what happened is that it managed to pass by the U.S. naval blockade undetected and arrived in Cuba. And then the U.S. said, “OK, well, they're already there, so we're going to announce that we allowed it,” as if it were some gracious act of benevolence. I'd seen reports that allegedly this Russian tanker had turned off all of its radar systems and signaling and all

that. So, you know, the ocean is pretty big. Cuba's not a big country, but they were just able to pass by and get into Cuba. Reportedly, I think that's probably what happened.

Okay, let's be more charitable and assume that maybe the U.S. made one exception to allow this oil to get in. I should also point out that the U.S. strategy right now is so obviously aimed at destabilizing the government, because the U.S. has made other exceptions. This isn't the first one—but those exceptions are for private companies in Cuba. The U.S. has said that only private companies are allowed to import oil. It's kind of a backdoor privatization effort to weaken the state, because most public institutions are state-owned. The hospitals are state-owned, the schools are state-owned, the energy grid is state-owned. So the U.S. is basically telling Cuba that the energy grid and the hospitals can't have access.

#Mudiar

I just wanted to add, for the viewers, that some of the harshest sanctions are on the medical sector and the oil sector.

#Ben

Absolutely. And they're state-owned, so they're not allowed to get access to oil because of the U.S. blockade. But these private hotels can have oil for generators. You know, people who've spent a lot of time in the Global South know that it's common for companies and even wealthy households to have generators for when the power goes out, which is common in many Global South countries. Cuba is no exception. So these private companies are allowed to have oil for their generators—for hotels and stuff—but not the hospitals. So literally, thousands of people are dying because they can't get medical attention, because the U.S. is starving the state institutions of oil.

It's absolutely barbaric, and they want to collapse the state—or at least cause so much suffering that people rise up and overthrow the government. That's always been the intent. If you go back, I often point to this U.S. State Department cable from 1960, one year after the victory of the Cuban Revolution in 1959. It's declassified; it's on the Office of the Historian website of the State Department. It's from two senior officials in the State Department—a memo they sent to each other. In it, they acknowledge that, first, Fidel Castro and the revolutionary government were very popular, and there was no effective political opposition, which had been discredited for being corrupt U.S. puppets working with the mafia in the casinos.

Moreover, in this memo, the State Department officials say that their goal is—and this is an exact quote—to use sanctions and destroy the economy in order to bring about, quote, "hunger, desperation, and overthrow of government," end quote. They also said they want to, quote, "decrease monetary wages," end quote. So, this is from 1960. For well over 60 years, the stated goal of the U.S., with the blockade and the sanctions, has been to destroy the Cuban economy, destroy the income and purchasing power of average working-class Cubans, and bring about

hunger, desperation, and the overthrow of the government. Now, previously, there have been ebbs and flows—the blockade has been tightened and somewhat softened—but it was never lifted. Obama somewhat softened the blockade.

And then Trump came in during his first term and massively ratcheted up—tightened—the blockade with hundreds more sanctions. Biden came in; he didn't really do much. He didn't lift many sanctions either. And then, by the time Trump came in again, Cuba was already so heavily sanctioned that he took it to a whole new level—a naval blockade. People say it's an oil blockade. It is an oil blockade, but it's worse than that—it's a military blockade. Because how does the U.S. enforce an oil blockade? Through the Navy, through the military preventing countries from sending oil to Cuba. And also, Trump has threatened tariffs on any country that sells oil to Cuba. Marco Rubio falsely claimed in an interview that the reason Cuba is so poor and desperate that it needs charity is because it's asking countries to donate oil.

No, Cuba is willing to pay for the oil, but the U.S. is threatening tariffs on any country that sells oil to Cuba. Now, the U.S. has almost no trade with Russia, which is why Russia was willing to ignore that. Mexico is in a very difficult situation because—well, eighty percent of Mexico's exports go to the U.S. I mean, it's so dependent on the U.S. There's no other country on Earth that dependent, other than Canada. Canada and Mexico are the most dependent on trade with their neighbor. So if the U.S. put tariffs on Mexico, it would be devastating to the Mexican economy.

But the Mexican government right now is a left-wing, very principled government that's very pro-Cuba. So it puts President Claudia Sheinbaum in a really complicated situation. She does want to support Cuba, but if she challenges the U.S. blockade and sells oil to Cuba, and then Trump puts tariffs on Mexico, that would devastate the Mexican economy. This is what people don't understand about the blockade of Cuba. It's not—supporters, or at least apologists, will say Cuba makes all these excuses, but the blockade only prevents Cuba from trading with the U.S. First of all, that's not true. Second, the U.S. is the biggest economy in the Western Hemisphere.

Most countries in the Western Hemisphere, until recently, had the U.S. as their largest trading partner. China has only in the past decade become the largest trading partner of South America. But again, that's a very new development. Until the 2000s, for all of modern history, the U.S. was the largest trading partner of this region. So the fact that Cuba couldn't trade with the U.S. was actually a big problem for the Cuban economy. Previously, it had traded with the Soviet Union, but the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. Then you had the "special period" of extreme hardship in the '90s. And what we're seeing today is the worst hardship since the 1990s, since that special period.

But even aside from that, it's not true. The blockade and the sanctions against Cuba also threaten secondary sanctions. So any foreign company or foreign country that wants to trade with Cuba has to second-guess. They have to say, "Wait a second, if we trade with Cuba, we may be sanctioned by the U.S., or if we trade with Cuba, we can't use U.S. ports." So we have to pick: are we going to trade with this small island of 10 million people, or are we going to trade with one of the largest

economies on Earth—the U.S., with 350 million people? Obviously, 99% of companies on Earth, and most countries, are going to choose trading with the U.S., and they're simply not going to trade with Cuba.

Even if they don't face secondary sanctions directly, they just de-risk. They don't want anything to do with Cuba. Insurance companies don't want anything to do with Cuba. Banks don't want anything to do with Cuba. This country has been suffocated for decades under a blockade. It was already bad enough, and now the Trump administration has made it a naval blockade. It's completely barbaric. The last thing I'll say here is that it's really frustrating, because I believe international law is necessary. I believe the United Nations system is necessary, because otherwise it's the law of the jungle. And this is what China often says, and I agree with that analysis.

And not just China—many Global South countries. There are infinitely many valid critiques of the UN. It's way too dominated by Western powers, especially Europe. You look at, like, not just the Secretary-General, who's Portuguese, but even when they have, you know, a token Asian or a token African—like Kofi Annan, or, you know, from South Korea, Ban Ki-moon. Yeah, yeah, Ban Ki-moon, Ban Ki-moon. But even then, you look at all of the Under-Secretaries-General, and they're almost all Europeans. It's crazy. There are a few Americans, a few Global South representatives, but they're like all Europeans. It's outrageous. And now the president of the General Assembly is the warmongering former president.

Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock from the Green Party. It's crazy. I have so many criticisms of the U.N.—don't get me wrong—but we have to have some international structure that every country is part of. They need at least some kind of representation and some voice. I think the U.N. Security Council needs to be drastically reformed, if not completely abolished, honestly. There are so many problems. But regardless of all that, we need this system, because otherwise it's just straight-up the law of the jungle. This is what the U.S. wants to do. The U.S. has withdrawn from basically all U.N. institutions except the Security Council and the General Assembly.

And the U.S. wants to drag the world back to the law of the jungle, where large imperial powers have their spheres of influence and can just do whatever they want. That's horrible for the world. We do not want to go back to the 19th century. So I think it's necessary to save the system. But with what the U.S. is doing in Cuba, I have to say, the U.N. is just showing how completely impotent it is—like, they can't even issue bare-bones statements. What are they doing? The U.S. is imposing a naval blockade, killing thousands of people, preventing hospitals from getting oil and—

And the so-called international law isn't doing anything. So it makes it very difficult, in a moment like this, even for me—as someone who defends this system despite all its flaws—it makes it hard for me to defend it. And it really shows that the U.S. empire—this will really be the last thing I say, and I think it's a good note to end on, even if it's a sad one—but the U.S. empire, the extreme cowboy

unilateralism of these maniacs in Washington, is literally destroying the international system. And I'm not talking about the so-called international rules-based order, all that BS. That was always fake propaganda, just cover for U.S. hegemony.

But I'm saying the actual structure of international law, despite its infinitely many flaws, despite all the problems with the U.N., I'm not sure this system will actually survive the next several years of what the U.S. is doing. And it's not just Donald Trump. There are so many people in Washington who truly believe they have to destroy this system in order to save their hegemony, because otherwise, in 20 years, China will be too strong, India will be too strong, and the U.S. will be too weak. So they're just going to explode—destroy the entire international system to try to save their hegemony—and that's very, very dangerous.

#Mudiar

We'll leave it there, Ben. Thank you so much for your time—this was a really helpful analysis.

#Ben

Yeah, thanks for having me. It's always a pleasure.