

Scott Ritter: Will Iran Force the US Out of the Middle East?

Deep dive into US-Iran tensions: Why ground invasion is militarily unfeasible, Iran's missile/nuclear capabilities, and strategic control of the Strait of Hormuz. Analysis of intelligence failures, Russia's potential mediation role, and shifting regional power dynamics. Explores how Iran's resilience could force US withdrawal from the Middle East, transform Gulf monarchies, and reshape global security architecture. Critical examination of nuclear negotiations, economic warfare, and the broader consequences for international order, energy markets, and the future of US military dominance. Discussion covers Hezbollah's role, Israeli vulnerabilities, and potential political transformations across the Persian Gulf region.

#Nima

What Donald Trump posted moments ago—he's talking about Iran's new regime president—is that he's asking for a ceasefire, asking Donald Trump and his administration for a ceasefire, which so far has been rejected by the Iranian government, at least from what I've seen in the Persian media. And even in the latest interview the Iranian foreign minister gave yesterday on Al Jazeera, here's what the Iranian foreign minister said.

#Guest

It is currently ongoing, but your point is correct—we have no good experience negotiating with the United States. In the past, we negotiated and reached an agreement, only for the United States to withdraw from it for no reason. Twice more, this year and last year, we negotiated, and the result was their assault and attack. There is no trust that negotiations with the United States can lead to results; trust is at zero. Every time they present a proposal for negotiation, the first issue we must examine is how honest they are—and we see none. There is no trust. And to build trust, major steps must be taken. Whether the Islamic Republic decides to do so or not is another matter. But in response to any proposal, the issue is how much trust exists. At present, no trust exists.

#Nima

It seems, Scott, that today Donald Trump is going to speak and address the nation. He's basically focused on the war in the Middle East between Iran and the United States. It's kind of amazing that Israel is now in the background—it's not on the front line anymore. What's your understanding of these new escalations? Because many people think they may attack, that they might try to invade Iran from the southern part this weekend. What's your understanding of that?

#Scott

Have you ever carried out an invasion?

#Guest

No.

#Scott

I have. We're not going to invade anywhere—not with 10,000 troops, all right? We can do a raid. Maybe we can go in, do some things, get out—maybe. Might get away with it. But we're not invading anything. This is just stupidity. People talking about an invasion have never done it. They don't know what it is. They don't know anything about the military, about war, about logistics. Two Marine battalion landing teams—you know, you could scare them. Red Beach 1 and Red Beach 2: "Hey, we went in, we advanced 500 meters. Now we have to stop. Now where's the follow-on echelon?"

Oh, there isn't a follow-on echelon, so you're kind of stuck where you are right now. Yeah. It's not much of a beachhead, is it? No. Five hundred Marines isn't a lot of Marines. Most of them are logistics and air wingers—actual boots on the ground, rifle companies? No. So this is just stupid. Anybody talking about a ground invasion literally doesn't know what they're talking about. There could be a raid, but you're not going to hold any territory with 10,000 people. And like I said, there are only about 4,000 Marines deployed in the area, and half of them aren't combat troops. Half of them, you know, are wingers staying on the airplane.

#Nima

It seems they have more than 10,000. They're talking about 50,000 soldiers being there.

#Scott

How are you going to get 50,000 soldiers? Where are they coming from?

#Nima

I don't know.

#Scott

They don't come from anywhere yet. They're not there. And again, they're not soldiers. We have a lot of airmen. Did you look at the guys who died in that first drone attack? Those weren't frontline combat troops. Those were fat reservists. I mean, I'm not picking on them—I'm sorry they're dead—

but, you know, these weren't the tip of the spear. These aren't guys who've been out there doing their push-ups, pull-ups, running and hiking with 45-pound packs, 90-pound packs, 110-pound packs, humping mortar rounds, base plates. No, they don't know how to do that. They were sitting in a bunker, and they got killed. The vast majority of the people in theater are just that—support troops, logistics troops. There are no combat troops.

And the combat troops, you know, they require sustainability. That means we've got to have—let's just make this very, very clear—we're making this up as we go along. We don't have a plan. If we had a plan, the Marines would have been deployed forward, up front. This is all reactive. If we had a plan, the paratroopers would be in theater, ready to rock and roll. If we had a plan, the Rangers and Delta would already be on the ground doing their stuff. This is all reaction because we thought we were going to win this war that quick. We thought we were going to drop bombs, kill the Ayatollah, down goes the regime. Look at the stupidity of this president. The new president of Iran—same president. Same guy, the guy I talked to back in September before the war. It's not a new president.

It's not new leadership. It's the same freaking leadership. You know, Arachi's still the same foreign minister. Yeah, they killed some people, but they get replaced. That's what happens when you have a system. And, you know, what all the Iranians said is that they're not looking for a ceasefire—they're looking for the war to end and to make sure there's not another war. And if those conditions could be met, they'd be willing to stop the war. But until then, no, they're going to keep going, keep plugging away. And I loved all the people tracking the missile launches—"They fired this many on day one. Look, it's getting smaller, smaller, smaller. They've got nothing left." Last night—boom—the Iranians went, "Yeah, eat that and die." And they'll just keep doing that.

The Iranians have been planning this for 20 years. There's nothing reactive about the Iranians. They're operating with a plan—we're the ones reacting to it. There's not going to be a ground invasion. It simply won't happen. Like I said, there might be a raid. But again, a raid to accomplish what? Having planned a major raid during the Iraq War and the Gulf War, and having defended it before the Commandant of the Marine Corps and a panel of four- and three-star generals, I had to answer a lot of questions about what the risk-versus-gain was. I mean, are we just trying to prove that the LAV-25—which at the time was relatively new—can be inserted by helicopter, run around, shoot things up, and then come out? Because if that's what it's about, wow, we're not too thrilled about this, because there are Marines on that.

They can die. You know, there has to be a reason for the raid. If you could secure the 60% enriched uranium with a raid— in, op, out—something like that would be a reason. Karg Island. We're not going to hold Karg Island. We're not even going to take Karg Island. But even if we did—has anybody looked at a map? See where Iran is? You understand that Karg Island is low and flat, and it's going to be leveled, and the Iranians know everything about it. We know nothing about it. No, it would be a death match. It would be stupid. This president is dumber than hell. I mean, I think the Iranians said it best: he's negotiating with himself. Negotiating with himself. He's making things up. There's a lot of wishful thinking.

Anytime the Iranians—first of all, the Iranians have made it clear they're not going to negotiate with the United States. That just isn't going to happen. So he's got Egypt, Pakistan, Turkey, and maybe some others trying to reach out to the Iranians. And if the Iranians take the call, the president says, "See, they're negotiating with us." No, they're not. They just took a call from the Pakistanis. What they told the Pakistanis was, "Tell the Americans to pound sand." You know, Trump doesn't want to hear that. This man lives in a fantasy world. He's going to try—he needs to create the conditions where he gets to say, "I won the war." The Iranians aren't going to play that game. They don't care about domestic American politics.

What they care about is ending this war so there's never another one. That means Israel doesn't get to keep doing what it's been doing, and the United States doesn't get to keep doing what it's been doing. And that requires the Gulf Arab states to be broken—totally broken—broken to the extent that they no longer look to the United States as their savior, that they realize they have to live in this region in peace and harmony with the Iranians, because they have to start treating the Iranians with respect. This might require some regime change in the Gulf Arab states—in the United Arab Emirates in particular. Maybe it's time for that family to go. Goodbye. Goodbye. Maybe in Kuwait. Goodbye. It's all possible. These aren't popularly elected regimes.

These are monarchies installed by the British. So it's not like these people earned their right to be there—they were given it. And then they just sit there on their oil, build giant palaces, and live this pompous, lavish lifestyle where, because of the amount of money they can throw at a problem, they've been able to solve most problems. Well, you're not solving the Iranian problem too well. And I think they're going to be broken. The United States is already broken. We don't have a solution. We don't have a solution to the Strait of Hormuz, and it's only going to get worse. The Iranians hold all the cards. So, you know, Donald Trump—he's in a fantasy world because he can't admit that he made a mistake.

He can't admit that Pete Hegseth, the worst secretary of defense in the history of secretaries of defense, lied to him—misled him. And he needs to create this narrative that says, "I am the conquering hero, and because of my decisive action, great things happened." The Iranians aren't going to—well, I mean, the sad thing is we had a deal, and now we don't. Now, there's some talk—and this I'm pretty hopeful about, if it turns out—where the Iranians said they may be willing to let the Russians serve as mediators. This is what I've been pushing for. This is what I pushed for when I went to Russia. I went to Russia and made as big a noise as I could about getting the Russians to be mediators here, because that is the solution.

A Russian mediation can solve a lot of problems, because now Trump can do some posturing, you know, and such. But, you know, it's early on. And again, the end result has to be the United States out of the Middle East and Israel accepting a Palestinian state. And there need to be international security guarantees. I always love it—how the Ukrainians are like, "We need security guarantees." Well, you know, I think the Arab world needs security guarantees against Israel. Israel can't be

allowed to have the same military it's been having. It has no right. It can't be allowed to go out and bomb everybody. They bombed five countries in the last week. I mean, come on, man.

#Nima

Even they're bombing Syria, and Ben-Gurion is talking about assassinating—Israel, HTS in Syria. You know, it's amazing, Scott. When it comes to the war, you mentioned it's going to be—if they attack, it's going to be a raid of some sort. What would be the outcome of that? What do they need? I'm not a hundred percent sure, but I really believe they can't achieve anything if they go for it. Those 400 kilograms of enriched uranium—they're not going to find it. They're not going to do anything like grabbing it. I just can't imagine the Iranians...

#Scott

Say, all right, we've got 406 kilograms of 6% uranium hexafluoride. Okay, guys, let's put it in a lightly guarded facility near the coast of the Persian Gulf, all right? And we'll just sort of leave it there so the Americans can come in, launch a raid, and take it. I think it's actually deeper inside Iran, in a mountain, which means the raid would have to penetrate deep into Iranian airspace. They'd get shot down on the way in. Then we'd have a Black Hawk Down situation all over again—you know, a helicopter goes down, we've got people on the ground, survivors, Iranians closing in around them, close air support brought in, more helicopters go, more aircraft go down.

And now the whole thing's bogged down before it even began, because this isn't World War II. In World War II, you send in the, you know, the C-47s, and three of them get shot down—so sad, too bad, wouldn't want to be them—but you just keep going. No, this is the modern day. A helicopter goes down, and we've got to come out and do combat search and rescue. We've got to put guys on the ground, do the whole Black Hawk Down thing. We don't leave a man behind—and then everybody dies. If we do a raid into Iran, my prediction is the entire raiding force will be destroyed, because we're going in without careful planning. Everything being done here is for political reasons, not legitimate military ones.

There's no reason to go after the 450 or 460 kilograms of uranium hexafluoride—none whatsoever. We had a deal where they were going to give it to us. My advice to the president would be: do whatever you can to get that deal back on the table. Whatever it takes, including getting the hell out of the Middle East. Tell the Iranians, "We're going to get the hell out of the Middle East, but you've got to turn over that 450 kilograms of uranium hexafluoride enriched to 60%." And this is where the Russians can come in. The Russians can handle this stuff—lifting of sanctions and things of that nature. I think the Iranians would give it up.

It's caused them nothing but trouble—nothing but problems. And, you know, what I would tell the Iranians is, we'll leave the bases, and we'll work with the Israelis to, you know, change behavior. But we need you to take that deal that was on the table—we need you to do that deal. You're closing

the door forever on your potential to develop nuclear weapons. That's just the way it is. You're going to sign a deal that says you will never be able to build nuclear weapons. You'll be permanently limited to 3.75% enriched uranium, carefully safeguarded, etc. That's it. And I think Iran would do it, but not with the Americans dictating.

#Nima

I really don't think they're going to do it. In my opinion, those days are gone. I just don't think so. You have to understand what's going on in Iran right now.

#Scott

I know full well what's going on in Iran, and I know the Iranian people have said they'll tear the president apart if he negotiates with the United States. But now the Russians come in. And if the Russians sit down with you and say, "Okay, stupid people—because you are stupid right now—you're being destroyed. Yeah, you're tough, really tough. We're so impressed. God, I'm so impressed with how tough you are. But you say you care about your people? They're about to suffer permanent damage to your infrastructure—damage you'll never recover from, ever. All right?" So now you can sit there and say, "Oh God, we're the Shia, oh yeah, we're so good. Karbala, Karbala, Karbala, Karbala." Wow. That's stupid. How about lifting sanctions? How about getting the sanctions lifted, getting you fully engaged?

#Nima

They don't want it anymore, Scott. Of course they do, Nima. Of course they want it. Yeah, I know, I know. The priority isn't the sanctions right now. The priority has changed—because they're talking about Israel. Because they're talking about Israel. What's their priority about Israel?

#Scott

Their priority about Israel?

#Nima

Yeah, Israel should be denuclearized.

#Scott

Destroyed? Iran doesn't get to make that decision.

#Nima

Yeah, but Israel—right now, the problem is Israel, Scott. As long as Israel has nukes, those nuclear weapons.

#Scott

Nima, this is fantasy. This is cocaine-sniffing fantasy. If you think Iran has the leverage to get Israel to give up its nuclear weapons like that, you're high on the cut. You know how Israel will give up its nuclear weapons? On Iran. That's not my point.

#Nima

That's not my point about forcing Israel. What I'm saying is, as long as Israel keeps those nukes on its soil and keeps talking about the Samson Option, there's no way to have any kind of balance.

#Scott

Israel never talked about the Samson Option. Israel has never talked about the Samson Option. They've only talked about it indirectly.

#Nima

Their minister said that about Gaza—they said to use nukes against the Gazans. The Gazans have nothing.

#Scott

It's a cocaine-sniffing minister who's high as a kite, sitting there saying stupid stuff. Find me the official policy statement of the Israeli government that says they'll drop nuclear weapons on Gaza. Because we have Americans who've said the same thing—and they're just stupid, mouth-breathing morons. Okay, let's get to the official policies of the Israeli government. There is an official protocol that exists between Israel and the United States on the use of nuclear weapons, and Israel will not violate that protocol.

#Nima

I really don't think Iran would accept that. The worst thing has happened, Scott. No, the worst thing has not happened. Yeah—no, nothing. What else can they do? They want to use nuclear bombs? Go ahead and use them. And then what? How tough are you then, when you're dying of radiation sickness? They're going to see what they have. They're going to see, Scott. I think they have to understand that.

#Scott

You're going to unveil their three 15-kiloton nuclear weapons that they managed to scrape together?

#Nima

Yeah, I'm saying—I think they know how to respond to that. And it's not just my personal opinion, because I talked with many of them when I was in Iran. I know they're right. They said what—decision makers or the people? I'm talking about the decision makers.

#Scott

I'm not talking about— And you're telling me right now that the decision makers in Iran won't go for it? Because, first of all, what you're saying doesn't line up with what the Iranian government is saying. The Iranian government is saying that if the United States leaves the Middle East, and if Israel—if there are behavioral checks and balances on Iran—they never once mentioned Israel's nuclear weapons as a precondition. That's your thing. They never mentioned it.

#Nima

What I think the official policy is, Iran is keeping this level of enrichment. They're not going to give up that level because they want to be prepared for Israel. If Israel decides to attack Iran using nuclear weapons, they want to be ready to respond. That's the whole concept. What I've learned—it's not just my opinion. I'm not speaking from my own point of view; it's because I talked with many of these decision makers in Iran. They said they're prepared to the end. They said the end means the use of nuclear weapons. They're prepared for that.

#Scott

I mean, there's nothing you can do. It's like looking across the ocean—only the Russians can save your ass. That's the only chance you have.

#Nima

Because otherwise, you're just going to get— You know, Scott, even Medvedev said that two days ago. He said the outcome of this war would be Iran withdrawing from the NPT and becoming a nuclear power, having nuclear bombs. And he said that. When someone like Medvedev says that, it means something. It doesn't mean his assessment of what's going on in Iran— that's the only assessment that matters.

#Scott

Did Putin say it? No. Don't talk to me about Medvedev. Don't talk to me about Karaganov.

#Nima

Don't talk to me about— Yeah, when it comes to Russia, Scott, when it comes to Russia, we have to understand what's going on against Russia and Iran, because I think they're fighting the same war. What Russia is fighting, what Iran is fighting—it's the same. It's the same. The same people, by the way. The same people.

#Scott

The people who are in Ukraine are the same people who are in Israel. They're not fighting the same war, Nima. Because Russia is not ready to commit suicide. Iran is, apparently—according to you—that's not the same war. One is a rational approach toward achieving objectives that are well laid out—the Russian approach—ending the war. I'd hope that Iran would be on that course too. But if Iran is saying, "We're willing to die and commit suicide," then Iranian suicide means the destruction of the global economy. And Russia's not about that. I can guarantee you, Russia's not about that. Russia's not looking to die with Iran. They're not willing to hold hands and die with Iran.

#Nima

They're not there to wreck the entire economy.

#Scott

The Russians are there to find a path to peace. That's the guarantee.

#Nima

Yeah, but they're not trying to destroy the Russian economy or the Chinese economy, because they're considered—so far, in the Strait of Hormuz, all those Chinese and even Indian, even Pakistani tankers were passing through the Strait of Hormuz. This is not the problem with the world.

#Scott

Because you're paying money.

#Nima

Yeah, they're paying, exactly. They don't target those countries because they see them as friendly. The problem is how to put pressure on the United States, not on China or Russia. And these countries understand what's going on—especially with the case of the Strait of Hormuz. Because right now, the main problem, you know, before this war started, Donald Trump was all about nuclear weapons and the nuclear program. Right now, his main concern, his priority, is the Strait of Hormuz.

#Scott

Yeah, of course it is, because for the Iranians, that's their trump card. But again, do you consider Donald Trump a rational actor or an irrational actor?

#Nima

I don't see Donald Trump as a rational actor. I don't see Donald Trump as irrational anymore. Right, right.

#Scott

Irrational.

#Nima

Irrational. He's irrational—completely, 100% irrational.

#Scott

Emotionally driven, not fact-driven.

#Nima

Yeah.

#Scott

All right, so what do you think will happen if the Iranians—look, don't get me wrong—I think the Iranians are doing a fantastic job. I mean, they have a plan, they've been sticking to their plan, and we've been reacting to them from day one. They've got the whole OODA loop sequence going in their favor; they're driving the decision-making cycle and all that. But the difference is, on Iran's best day—best day—they could put five nuclear weapons on missiles and take Israel out. And then Iran would cease to exist. I hope Iran understands that. Everybody says, "We're ready for it." You don't know what you're ready for, because life would end for everybody. The United States would come in—it wouldn't be Israeli nukes, it would be American nukes. And ours are a lot bigger. You want to see what happens to twenty million people in Tehran? You know what a one-megaton bomb would do to Tehran?

#Nima

Why would the United States do that? If Iran can—

#Scott

If Iran used nuclear weapons against Israel?

#Nima

Yeah. No, no. I'm talking about why the United States would use nuclear weapons against Iran. Is it because of Israel, or because of the United States?

#Scott

Donald Trump is an irrational actor who's doing more than anyone else.

#Nima

Let's assume his main objective is not to be beaten by Iran. So you think he's going to go nuclear just because he doesn't want to be beaten by Iran? I think Donald Trump understands—after all, Scott—so far, Donald Trump tried to do regime change. The main goal, I think, was regime change. It wasn't about a military operation. If it were a military operation, they would have been prepared for the war. They were not prepared for this war. They were deceived by Mossad, I think, basically, and some people in the CIA, who told them they could do regime change. You remember, you and I discussed this before—you said if they go there, it's going to be a regime change operation. But that was a fantasy, I think, sold by Mossad.

#Scott

Well, you remember what I said about regime change. I said it would be a regime change operation. It's the only way they could do it because of their limited military capabilities. I said the only way we could do this is through a regime change that collapses Iran before their missiles could become fully engaged. But I also said you can't initiate regime change unless you have certainty of outcome. And I said, you know, that means the Israelis need to have the place totally penetrated, the United States needs to have it totally penetrated, and we've got to go in there and get it done. I mean, across the board, a fundamental regime change isn't killing the Supreme Leader—regime change is suppressing the totality of the establishment.

And if you could do that, then you could initiate this action. I think it's clear they couldn't do that—that they were operating under the impression that killing Ali Khamenei would achieve the goal. That's Donald Trump's simplicity. And I blame the Iranian missions. They don't have the Iranian Mission Center anymore, but the Near East Division of the CIA—they've got to know. I mean, they've got to know the truth about Iran. I say they've got to because the CIA doesn't even know the truth about

Russia today. So, you know, clearly the CIA can start believing its own propaganda. And I think that's what happened. I think one of the things that happened in Iran is that we started—if you go back in history—there's a guy, Steve Richter. Good old Steve Richter.

My good old friend hates me. You know, he was doing the regime change in Iraq, but he also did Iran. And there was a time—I forget, maybe in the '80s or early '90s—when we needed intelligence. We had a network of people dating back to the Shah's time, all the stay-behinds. They were in there, and we had them all reporting. Then the requirement came down: you need to increase your Iran reporting. And Steve Richter—they were running a mail operation where they were basically mailing letters out to Munich. You can do that every now and then. You get 5,000 pieces of mail going out today, three letters going to Munich—that's not raising the profile. That's normal. Normally, the CIA would have pre-thought this thing out.

You test the postal system, see what triggers it, and then you keep that steady flow going—get those letters out there with the secret writing in them and all that. Richter was told, "Double down." So Richter basically told everybody, "Just start mailing letters." And what happened was, suddenly, the mail going to Munich went way up, and the Iranians went, "Hmm." They grabbed the mail, knocked on doors, brought people in, opened it up—found the secret writing, interrogated them, found the materials—and they rolled up the whole network. We lost everybody in Iran that fast. We tried to rebuild it with rapid recruitment. This would've been in the 2000s, when all those people were traveling around the world—the professors, the scientists—going to this meeting, that meeting.

We went in there and did what we do. Sometimes it didn't work; sometimes it did. You know—get them drunk, get them with a whore, take pictures, confront them with the reality that their family life's over and they're going to be killed when they go back to Iran—and then they start rolling over for you. So we got them all in there, but now we were communicating using Gmail, the old CIA Gmail account. And, you know, again, I forget who came up with it. I can't remember if it was the Iranians who rolled it up first and then gave it to the Russians, or gave it to the Chinese, or the Russians gave it—bottom line, somebody figured it out. And so the second wave of recruitment disappeared, which means now we're totally dependent on Israel.

Israel, of course, has been working with the Kurds, with MEK, and with others. So now you've got Israel doing their thing. The Israelis, you know, they assassinate scientists, they put viruses in to make things blow up—they blow things up and say, "We're the Israelis, we're so damn good, we're awesome." They even did a raid on this archive and took all these papers out—although they didn't, you know. And so the CIA said, "Well, rather than us doing a third round of recruitment, we're just going to rely on the Israelis and dovetail on the Israeli op."

And so the Israelis are telling them, you know, we infiltrated 5,000 Starlinks, we have these cells, we've got people in every city, we're doing this, we've got that. The CIA's going, wow, you guys are really good. So when we kill Ali Khamenei, you're going to be able to get people in the street? Mossad's like, yeah, we got this, we're good, we're Mossad. And the CIA thought it was great, went

and told the president this was all going to happen, and the president called up Netanyahu, and people went, yeah, baby, we can do this. And they went forward. You never—ever, ever—go to war based on another country's intelligence. Never.

Because that intelligence service doesn't work for you. They're not working in your best interest; they're working for their government's best interest. And the Israelis have always wanted the United States to be doing what they're doing right now. This isn't some Israeli fantasy—having America dropping bombs on Iran is what they've wanted for 20 years. And Donald Trump delivered it, but he was led down that path by a CIA that had an op pulled on it. It's the old "the Israelis are so good, they can do nothing wrong" thing. Oh, we know Iran is a tough target, but the Israelis have guys inside. Man, the Mossad's really good, they're really awesome. Well, they're not bad, but they're not perfect.

They make a lot of mistakes. And the thing about the Iranians is, they're not your typical target, I believe. I mean, every society has its weaknesses, every society has its flawed individuals, and those people are susceptible to being recruited and betraying their countries. But this is where I think the West got it wrong. And this is where I think you actually have greater insight than I do, and others. The Iranian people believe in the Islamic Republic. They may not think it's perfect. They'd like a better life. They may even think some of the Ayatollahs are corrupt and should be replaced.

But the concept of an Islamic republic, where religion is an important part of their daily lives—this isn't a fantasy to them. It's not imposed; it's what they want, and they have that. And then there's also the notion of Persian pride. I mean, we're talking about people who know their history, their culture, where they came from. There's a lot of pride in Iran, and they're not going to allow themselves to be sold out. So the idea that we could go in there and buy them off—the "Venezuela solution," you know—that's the other thing, because Trump was told by the CIA, "We can buy the entire Venezuelan leadership."

And I think he was told that we could buy the entire Iranian leadership. That's one of the interesting analytical failures—what we did with the Revolutionary Guard. You remember Rafsanjani at the end of the Iran-Iraq War, looking to rebuild Iran and also figuring out, politically, what to do with the Revolutionary Guard. These radicals were out there saying, "We want to go, we want to do all this stuff." He turned them toward business, got them into the business sector, and they began running companies. And we said, "That's corruption," except they were actually doing good business.

They were actually building things, producing things, creating an energetic economy. But we called it corruption. So we said the Revolutionary Guard Command was inherently corrupt. And you know, when you have corrupt people, they can be bought off. Were there some examples of corruption? Sure—money tempts everybody. But overall, the fact that the IRGC was heavily involved in Iran's economy isn't a sign of societal failure; it's actually a sign of societal success. And it also further—well, "radicalized" is the wrong word—but it further solidified the Islamic aspect. So you don't have secular businessmen out there.

You have people who believe in the Islamic Republic doing business. It made it impossible to buy them off—impossible to buy them off. We got Iran all wrong. I mean, you and I didn't; we got it right, I think. But the CIA—"we" being the United States—we got it all wrong, 110% wrong. We were so far off in our assessments. And we still don't understand what's going on there. Donald Trump's still not getting a qualified briefing, and nobody has the courage to go in front of him and tell him the truth. You know, you saw James Webb, former Secretary of the Navy under Ronald Reagan—his son is out there now saying things that, on the surface, look like he's condemning the attack. But he just keeps saying things like, you know, "the Iranian regime is this, that, and the other thing." I'm like, no. That's not it, man.

You got it wrong. And it seems impossible—you can't say anything about Iran without saying, you know, "the murderous, thuggish Ayatollah regime." But it's not murderous and thuggish. They have a judiciary that's—well, we execute more people in America. I mean, we put more people in jail. Where's our murderous, thuggish justice system? You know, the Iranians have stiff penalties for drug dealers. They have stiff penalties for adulterers, I guess. They have stiff penalties for traitors. Is it the justice system I would want? I don't know. I don't live in Iran. I don't know what the problem would be—what would happen if you didn't have stiff drug penalties? Would Iran suddenly find a thriving narcotics black market, with people getting high in tea shops around the country and sinking society from within?

So maybe you have to deter that because you live in a neighborhood where Afghanistan's producing opium and shipping it through, trying to get into other markets. Maybe you need that kind of deterrence. Adultery? If you're an Islamic republic and your moral and family values are the cornerstone of what holds your society together, adultery is probably frowned upon. It's seen as—if you allow adultery to take place, then your society will be undermined from within and collapse from within. Because what makes the Islamic republic strong is, you know, the Shia faith. And the Shia faith is built around—well, I mean, I just got lectured by the Chechens about this. And, you know, they're not Shia; they're Sunni, they're Sufi. But again, their whole concept of family and the role that Islam plays.

#Nima

Sufism is so close, by the way. Sufism is so close to Shia.

#Scott

I know. It's very mystical. I had a long talk—I got to meet the Grand Mufti of Chechnya. I had a long, fascinating conversation with him about the role Chechnya could play. You know, the Chechens—they had a big parade the other day, and they're like, "You invade Iran, we're coming in. We're coming in to fight on the side of Iran." The Sufi Chechens coming in to fight with the Iranians. But the point is, we don't understand these things. We're so ignorant. We've allowed Islamophobia

to corrupt our minds to the point where the only model we can see is Wahhabism, which is sort of a Western invention to begin with. Salafism is a Western perversion of traditional Islam. You know, we can go back to—what was it?

Uh, I can't remember the name of the guy who defeated the Mongols, you know, back in Syria. It began with a T—Tarmia or something like that. But he defeated the Mongols and then tried to take over and say that he was the guy, but he was quickly pushed to the side, got pushed—pushed out. And then this sort of became the beginning of Wahhabism. But the British allowed Wahhabism to flourish and be exported. The point is, we don't know Iran at all. And so, therefore, I'll say this: I get a little angry. But I don't know Iran. So you may be right—100% right—about your position. You were in Iran, you know the language and all that. I think you're making a mistake if you think that Russia and Iran have the same objectives. They don't.

#Nima

No, they don't. I don't think so.

#Scott

Russia's objectives are about Russia. Exactly. But Russia's objectives also include two major things: Iran being an integral part of BRICS, and the north-south economic corridor for Russia to get from St. Petersburg down to Chabahar, you know, and all that. And for that to happen, Russia needs Iran to survive this war.

#Nima

And Russia needs this war to end permanently. Yes.

#Scott

No, I think the Russians are the best mediators because they understand what the Iranians want—permanence. They don't want this war to start again. They don't want Israel dropping bombs this time next year, or five years from now. They don't want American forces back in the Middle East causing problems. When this war ends, it ends. Done. Finished. And then Iran can focus on the economy—making that the number one priority—how to get into the Eurasian Economic Union and how to make BRICS flourish. Can you imagine how strong BRICS would be if Iran's economic potential were unleashed?

I mean, for all the idiots blowing up Iranian steel mills—you know, they just don't use their brains. Do you know how quickly China's going to come rolling into Iran to help rebuild those steel mills when the war ends? Iran has huge economic potential—huge economic potential. And if the sanctions can be lifted and there's normalization of economic relations, Iran will do to the Gulf Arab

states what Russia did to Europe. I don't see the Iranians saying, "Dubai is the place we want to put our money." I don't see that happening. I see the Iranians saying to the Gulf Arab states, "You're sunk. You'll have nothing. We're going to become the economic..."

#Nima

It depends on them. I think it depends on them because, after all, when you talk about the leadership in the Arab states in the Persian Gulf, it's different from the people in those countries. Iran recognizes that difference. That's why I don't know if they've changed their attitude toward what's going on against Iran. Instead of cooperating with Israel and the United States to attack Iran, they might choose a different path. As we're seeing right now with Oman—with the case of Oman—we see something different. It's not the way the UAE is, or Saudi Arabia.

#Scott

Remember, China came in and negotiated rapprochement. That turned out to be shallow. The Saudis can't be trusted. If I were the Iranians, I'd never trust the Saudis again. And if I were the Iranians, I'd never trust the UAE again. And, you know, if they're not careful—if this war goes on much longer—I think Iran's going to deal fatal blows to the UAE. I mean, you take out desalination plants in the UAE and they're sunk. Now, that opens Iran up, but hell, didn't we just bomb an Iranian desalination plant the other day?

They retaliated by hitting a Kuwaiti desalination plant. Hopefully people woke up and said, "Stop," because, you know, there are issues. But Iran can resolve its water issues. The Gulf Arab states can't. You know, that's reality. I just—you know, we get back to the nuclear thing. I don't think this ends with Iran having 60% enriched uranium. I don't think it can end with Iran having 60% enriched uranium. And I'll tell you why: because Iran's not going to physically defeat the United States. Iran wins by surviving. And they're winning right now. There's no doubt about that.

#Nima

But Iran will not physically defeat the United States.

#Scott

We're not going to put 50,000 troops on the ground and give Iran a chance to surround them and make a Dien Bien Phu moment, you know, where they're marching Americans through the streets of Tehran. That's just not going to happen. Trump wants out of this war. I think the big message right now is that he's desperate—so desperate he just makes stuff up. If the Russians can come in and negotiate an end to the conflict that meets Iran's objectives—all of Iran's objectives, not compromising any of them—I think the Russians would tell the Iranian leadership, "If you want America gone, you've got to give up the 60% of its uranium." And then it comes down to the

Iranians. I mean, I know that things have changed. First of all, we're talking about an Iran now that's been bombed.

The horrors we've inflicted on the Iranian people are mind-boggling. Back home, we have no clue what we're doing. We've now run out of targets—of hidden civilian infrastructure—and we're just bombing civilian homes now. We're leveling city blocks. We're committing war crimes beyond imagination. And it's not just in Tehran; we're striking other population centers as well. Shiraz—I'm just scared to death of what we've done to the historical and cultural treasures there. Isfahan, again, what are we doing to these places? We Americans, you know, we're about to celebrate our 250th anniversary, and we're in there destroying things that have been around for thousands of years. It's shocking. So Iran's paid a huge price. I know the calculation has changed, and I respect that fact.

But I guess what I'm trying to say is that while the fact that Iran is willing to go all the way—that's what's going to enable them to win the war—it's this willingness to go all the way. But at some point, "all the way" means suicide. It means everybody dies. At some point, though, the Iranian leadership has always talked about doing what's best for the Iranian people. And if a Russian mediator can come in and negotiate a great deal that ends all the nonsense, and the only price Iran would have to pay is giving up 60% enriched uranium, I think that's something Iran—I would advise them to do it. Because holding onto it, I don't see how that helps. In order for Iran to get out of the NPT and have a nuclear weapons capability, you're going to have to defeat the United States.

So now, does Iran have a plan that—uh—because if we're dealing with a rational president, I think Iran has the cards: economic strangulation. See, a rational president would actually care that there's no diesel fuel in Australia right now, because Australia is an ally. A rational president would care that there's gas rationing in South Korea and Japan, because they're allies. A rational president would be very concerned about what's happening to the European economy, because they're allies. We have an irrational president who is—you know—it's a cult of personality, and it's all about his ego. He's the only thing that matters right now. And the Russians are unique in their ability to understand that. Putin has been playing Trump's ego, you know, masterfully.

#Nima

I mean, anybody who doubts it, just take a look at where Russia is right now.

#Scott

You know, they were literally ready, in 2027, to make drastic changes—economic belt-tightening that was going to bring real pain to the people of Russia. At the end of this year—I'm sorry—and Putin said, "We're not worried about that anymore." Why? Because they just won the lottery. Suddenly, money's flowing in. They're going, "Wait a minute, we don't have to do these belt-tightening

measures. We're solving it." And it's only going to get better for Russia economically. Why? Because Putin had patience. For all the people going, you know, all the Gilbert Doctorows out there saying, "Red lines, you let them—red line, red line, red line, red line, red line."

#Nima

Well, Gil, if we'd done what you wanted, there'd be a permanent state of warfare between Russia and Europe right now.

#Scott

Instead, Russia's winning across the board. There's not a single aspect of this conflict that Russia isn't dominating. So much so that they were able to send, you know, what—700,000 barrels of oil to Cuba—break the American blockade, because there's nothing America can do. And now, because Russia had patience, because they didn't react to any of the escalation, NATO's dead. Donald Trump's pulling out of NATO. It's over. Finished. Goodbye. Remember I told you Mark Rutte would be the last Secretary General of NATO? Mark Rutte's going to be the last Secretary General of NATO. Easiest call to make, because Donald Trump's the easiest person to predict—which is why I'm telling you that if you don't get a negotiated deal, this egomaniac will use nuclear weapons. Because he's the guy that designed it.

Remember, it was under the first Trump administration that the nuclear employment plan involving Iran was changed so we could preemptively use nuclear weapons. And the trigger is an Iranian nuclear weapon. That's the problem. If we had a rational president, we wouldn't be doing this. First of all, we wouldn't be where we're at. But we have an irrational president. And that's why I think the Russians—the Russians are the only ones who can do this. There's no other nation out there right now that can serve as the liaison between Israel, the United States, and Iran. Russia has good relations with all three of them. So I'm hopeful. But again, the idea that the Iranians are going to walk away with 60% enriched uranium when this is all over—I don't see that happening. I understand where you're coming from, and I understand the sentiment, and I understand the justification for keeping it. But, you know, I told Khomeini...

#Nima

I think, Scott, when you talk about it—what do you mean?

#Scott

The Iran-Iraq War ended with the Supreme Leader saying, "I will drink this cup of poison to bring an end to this conflict."