

# Col. Jacques Baud: Why the U.S. Can't Invade Iran: Diplomacy vs. Force

The interview analyzes rising tensions in the Middle East, arguing that limited U.S. operations—like seizing strategic islands—may be possible but unsustainable due to Iran's missile capabilities. A full invasion is described as unrealistic, requiring massive forces, difficult logistics, and facing harsh terrain and resistance. The discussion suggests current actions are more symbolic than strategic, while prolonged conflict strengthens Iran politically and militarily. It highlights that U.S. and allies may be trapped in escalation without clear success, while Iran gains leverage. The conversation also questions the role of foreign military bases, sanctions, and nuclear policy, concluding that diplomacy—not force—is the only viable long-term solution.

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One of these articles in the New York Times mentions that the number of American military personnel in the Middle East has exceeded 50,000. And when it comes to these numbers—you know, 4,000, 50,000, 12,000—

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If the United States decides to invade Iran, to go to one of these islands in the Persian Gulf, close to the Strait of Hormuz, is that possible with these numbers? Because, if I remember correctly, during the war in Ukraine, when it comes to a ground invasion, you need some sort of dominance—three to one—when you attack. But when it comes to an island, that could be different. You could capture an island, but sustaining and keeping that island is important too, not just capturing it in a short period of time and taking a lot of casualties. What's your understanding of the way Donald Trump is talking about invading? It seems they're serious and going in that direction.

## #Jacques

Well, it depends very much on what the US has in mind—and what Trump has in mind. As you rightly said, if it's about taking over a couple of islands, and you have a few in the Strait of Hormuz—like Lesser Tunb, Greater Tunb, Abu Musa, those kinds of small islands—they could probably be taken very quickly by a small force, and maybe even held for a while with those forces. The same applies to Kharg Island. It might be possible for some trained units to gain a foothold on Kharg Island and stay there for a while. The problem is, when you talk about invading Iran, that's a completely different story.

Those islands—first of all, if you have them, you have to figure out what you want to do with them. If the purpose of holding those islands is to maintain free traffic through the Strait of Hormuz—I'm talking about the three: Lesser Tunb, Greater Tunb, and Abu Musa, for example—you can probably stay for a while. But again, the problem is that the Iranians, because of their superiority in missiles and all that, make it uncertain that a U.S. force could maintain its presence for very long. They could probably be decimated very quickly by missiles, and apparently Iran is not ready to let such a force stay on those islands for long.

So this is certain. On Kharg, the problem is slightly different because, of course, it's an oil terminal of huge importance for Iran, with major economic significance. Now, my feeling is—and I've read this somewhere, though I'm not sure if it's official policy—but I would expect, if I were American, that the Iranians would prefer to destroy the whole potential of Kharg Island rather than let the U.S. stay there. And in fact, if you think about it, if you have a force that can install itself on the island and keep control over the oil terminals, essentially you've lost that terminal. So, therefore, it's the same price for you to destroy everything.

So, in that case, I don't see exactly what the U.S. is aiming at by keeping those forces, because it's probably more of a PR exercise than anything else. We had similar issues, remember, at the very beginning of the Ukraine war with the so-called Snake Island, which was just a rock close to the Romanian shore. The Ukrainians took this rock, had a presence there, then surrendered, and the Russians left it empty. But then the Ukrainians came back and claimed a victory over the Russians by taking the rock back—and the Russians just bombed it and, in fact, annihilated everything on it.

So we may have something very similar at play on those islands in the Persian Gulf. But when it comes to an invasion of Iran, that's a totally different story. I'm not sure what a force of 50,000, even 100,000 people, could actually achieve there. Because, first of all, occupation isn't just a matter of force ratio—it's about how you sustain your presence in such a country. Especially in Iran, which is huge, when you have a force that requires a lot of logistics, how can you afford to do that? Especially if the Iranians have, as I said, superiority in missiles, drones, and all that. So I'm not sure exactly what the Americans could achieve.

They can probably manage to establish a bridgehead and get some presence, but I'm not sure they could achieve any significant operational or even strategic success in Iran. I think everything we've heard—and again, I don't know what's in Donald Trump's mind—but my feeling is that what we see at this stage is more of a PR exercise than a real and imminent danger for Iran. It's probably an imminent danger for the U.S., if I can put it that way, rather than for Iran. Invading Iran would require a huge amount of forces, and remember, the Americans already tried something in 1980 with Operation Eagle Claw, when they had this special operation to rescue the hostages from the U. S. Embassy in Tehran. They used several C-130 aircraft and helicopters specially designed for special operations.

And this operation failed miserably. You can probably still see the remnants of that catastrophe, because some helicopters crashed and one or two C-130 aircraft also went down in the desert, killing a lot of soldiers. Again, I'm not sure, because I haven't been to Iran, but apparently the site still exists and can be visited to some extent—I don't know exactly. In any case, it shows that no matter how much power you have, or how skilled your special operations and airborne forces are, it's very hard to carry out such a mission in that kind of country. The problem in this case was, among others, that there were obviously planning issues.

There were also coordination problems within the U.S. force because they wanted to keep the whole thing secret. Therefore, the right hand didn't know what the left hand was doing, and that led to the catastrophe. Another issue related to the complexity of this operation was the distances, because Iran is huge. They wanted to land their planes in a very quiet place, with not too many people around to see or witness anything. That meant they had to go very far away, and the distances were a challenge in themselves. And, OK, if the U.S. wanted to invade Iran, it would certainly not be the same kind of operation.

But you still have some elements of that that would affect a possible—or let's say a planned—invasion, because of the distances and the kind of terrain. If you look at the map, you'd see that the whole southern part of Iran, the area close to the Persian Gulf, is very mountainous. That means in those places you could have guerrilla warfare; you could make life absolutely impossible for any invading force. This is a situation you barely had in Iraq, which is essentially a very flat country, except up in the north. In Iran, it would be a very different story, because to reach Tehran you have to go through very difficult terrain, where it's easy to ambush and stop vehicles.

I don't see exactly how they would do that. It would require hundreds of thousands of soldiers and a huge logistical capability. And of course, under the constant threat of drones, short-range missiles, and long- or mid-range missiles—those that can reach Israel—fire would continue. So I don't see what the benefit of such an operation would be. We still don't see the benefit of it at this stage, and I'm not sure that escalating this operation or trying to turn this aggression into an invasion would benefit either Israel or the U.S.

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What would be the way out, in your opinion, for Donald Trump? Because it seems to me that, as time goes by, Iran is defending itself. Iran isn't attacking anybody. That's why they're so comfortable, as time goes by, defending Iran—they know what they're doing. But the United States and Israel are attacking, and they're talking about invading Iran. There are two different scenarios: one on the part of the United States, and one on the part of the Iranians. So, what would be the way out for Donald Trump? You can see, in the way he talks about the situation, a lot of desperation. What's your understanding of Donald Trump's current situation? It seems he's created some sort of trap for himself in West Asia.

## #Jacques

Well, same thing for Netanyahu, in fact. Both are trapped by their decisions, and they're trapped by their arrogance and hubris because they expected a very quick success—a very fast victory. And that's not happening. Despite the experience they had during the 12-day war in 2025, they didn't understand or draw the lessons from that war. And today they're still here, thinking they may achieve some kind of success. The problem is, the longer it takes, the harder it becomes to define what success even means.

Because what we see right now in Iran is not just that Iran is defending itself, but that it's also consolidating itself. We see that, with time, the population is becoming more united. They're not just firing missiles; they're also producing more of them. So this is a kind of system—the machinery, the military-industrial complex—moving ahead in Iran. It means they're producing missiles, they're producing other things, and they're getting more support—political support, I mean, from outside, and probably even more technical support.

I'm not sure exactly what kind, but I expect they may get more support from Russia, and in some form from China. That means the Iranians are not isolated—they're becoming less and less isolated. You can see that even in the Gulf. At first, people reacted and said they wanted to fight against Iran, but now they realize that probably isn't the wisest thing to do. They're now calling for dialogue and for appeasement in the region. You see the same thing in the U.S., basically. The U.S. understands that it overestimated the probability of success, and now it's not achieving that.

So the thing is, we're now in the same situation as in Ukraine. The obvious solution would be to have talks with the Iranians. But Trump and his administration are not used to having talks—they impose a solution. And that's exactly what they just did with this 15-point plan. They come in, put the 15 points on the table, and say, "Well, take it or leave it," more or less. That's what they've done for Gaza. It's also what they tried to do with Russia last year with that 20-point plan. And it didn't work, because now they have adversaries who are able to respond and are confident that they can respond. Therefore, a negotiation today cannot be just a simple proposal you can't refuse.

This has to be a dialogue, and the solution must come from both parties in a real, diplomatic kind of dialogue—one where both sides say what they want to achieve. The problem is, the longer you wait for that, the more Iran will gain influence and the more the U.S. will lose influence. We already see that, because as of today, it's the U.S. that comes up with a plan. They feel they can achieve something, but they want to stop the whole thing—they want to save face—and therefore they try to impose something. But they're the ones trying to stop the machinery. And that's exactly the problem, because Iran has basically refused this dialogue, saying, "If you want to have a dialogue, you need to come with responsible proposals."

And what we want is—and not a bene, it's almost exactly the same thing you have with Russia. They don't want a ceasefire. They don't just want to oppose; they want to have a solution. Iran has been

threatened for about three decades now, to be attacked by both Israel and the U.S. Now Iran wants to put a final stop to this whole process, and now it has the opportunity. Trump has given Iran the opportunity to achieve a full stop for that, and that's exactly what Iran will strive for. The more Trump waits, the more Iran will gain advantage, and the less freedom of decision the U.S. will have. And we have exactly the same thing with Ukraine. That's the reason why, on both sides, Vladimir Putin said, "Well, if you don't want to negotiate, no problem—we'll continue."

We'll achieve what we want through force. And you have exactly the same answer from Foreign Minister Araghchi and others in Iran. They say, well, if you don't want to address the fundamental issue of the problem, and if you don't want to move toward a definitive peace, then we'll continue. And the price for that—and that's something I said even before the war, when we discussed it on your channel, more than two months ago—I said, well, the price for an attack, what's at stake then, is the existence of Israel. Because obviously Iran cannot destroy the U.S., but it can destroy Israel. It probably wouldn't destroy the population, but it could make life in Israel absolutely impossible. And we already see signs of this.

So the thing is, the more the U.S. and Israel wait for any political solution, the more leverage Iran will have over them. And that's exactly where we are. In essence, we may see some tactical success from the U.S.-Israeli coalition, in the sense that they can probably destroy a few command centers or bomb a few places in Iran. These are tactical actions, but they have no strategic impact. We've seen that, for instance, killing Ali Khamenei was, in essence, a tactical success but not a strategic one, because it hasn't influenced Iran's capacity to make decisions or to continue fighting. So in that sense, killing Khamenei was a tactical success, but not a strategic one. And if you look now at the balance between the two, you can see that.

And as usual—because that's something I've also noticed in the Ukrainian conflict—you see that in all the wars the West has waged over the last 30 years: we wage wars at the tactical level, while others wage war at the strategic level. Even the terrorists, in fact, have waged wars at the strategic level. It was less successful because, fortunately, they have less power. But nevertheless, they were not completely defeated. And that's exactly what we see when we talk about defeating ISIS. For instance, the U.S. never managed to defeat ISIS; it just changed its form, changed its name, changed its appearance. But the spirit of the whole thing hasn't disappeared. So all the wars we wage are tactical wars.

And now with Iran, the U.S. is confronted with a new situation. It's not exactly a peer, because the U.S. is much more powerful. If you take the global reach and capabilities of the U.S., it's obviously much stronger. But if you look just at the Middle East theater, the balance of forces is more or less there. So the U.S. is a peer. And even Israel, which used to think it was superior to Iran, has noticed it is not. Meaning that we have here a very balanced theater of operations, if you will. And that's exactly the kind of situation the U.S. has not faced in the last 30 years, and probably even longer. So now they are confronted with a force they cannot defeat—at least not in the short term.

Maybe this would last for 20 years—well, maybe not 20, maybe one or two years, I don't know. But what I mean is that Iran cannot be defeated in the short run, as was anticipated by the U.S.–Israeli coalition. And that makes Iran much stronger. It makes Iran a very credible actor in the Middle East. And when I say “credible actor,” I mean that now a few Arab countries may understand it's probably a good idea to have good relations with Iran. Instead of having U.S. bases that attract fire on Europe, it's probably better to have a deal with Iran. So that's the situation: the U.S. is on the path to a strategic defeat, and Iran is on the path to a strategic victory. We can summarize it that way.