

John Helmer: Why Diplomacy FAILED: Inside Washington's Divide

A high-stakes analysis of escalating US-Iran tensions following a failed operation in Isfahan. The discussion highlights heavy military losses, internal divisions within Washington, and rising political risks. It argues that fear and pressure are driving more aggressive responses, while diplomacy remains weak. Iran's firm stance, including a 10-point proposal and control over the Strait of Hormuz, adds economic and strategic leverage. With global energy, currency shifts, and regional alliances at play, the situation points toward continued escalation rather than immediate resolution.

#Nima

What has happened with the American, the U.S. operation in Iran, which was supposed to be—well, they were talking about two other provinces in Iran, Khuzestan and Kermanshah. Then we saw the operation was actually in the southern part of another province, Isfahan. We've seen the destruction of airplanes, along with fighter jets, Black Hawks, Little Birds, and various other pieces of military equipment destroyed at the scene. But the operation, the way Donald Trump described it yesterday, was "successful." What's your take? What do you make of what has happened in Iran?

#John

Well, several points from the Moscow end, if you like—which is a little further away, but still very important. I think it's important for our audience not to get mesmerized by the military jargon, by the lists of names or code names of U.S. airplanes—let alone the code names that were used, like Dude 44 Alpha and Dude 44 Beta, the ones General Kane mentioned in the press conference yesterday. What's happened in Isfahan should be understood politically in the United States as a very, very serious problem for President Trump. And if you see what's happening as evidence of his political problem, then go back to his press conference and look at what he said he was doing on Saturday night and Sunday.

What you get is a very interesting insight, I think, into Trump's fear—what was happening politically for him. And it may have been the first time in his presidency, either in the first term or now, that he thought this was going to be a winning operation. Bear in mind, the calendar shows he wasn't having any official meetings on Saturday or Sunday. He stayed in Washington; he didn't go to Miami. I've done an analysis on Dances with Bears, so people can look at where he was when he was tweeting and where there's no record of his location. I think we can now say he was in the Situation Room, watching very carefully.

He reveals he was watching much of the, quote, "action" on Saturday night and on Sunday. What he must have understood were the catastrophic losses of the two C-130 transport planes and the destruction of at least two—maybe three, maybe more—helicopters, not to mention the loss of another aircraft, the A-10, I believe it was, which was acting in support. So imagine yourself, for our audience, imagine you're in the Situation Room and you think you are the commander-in-chief of the greatest military machine ever in the history of the world—that's his language—and suddenly you see the possibility of what has been a two-pronged operation.

That's the significance of Major Amanda Ryder's papers—that she allowed them to be left behind. Not only her ID and her Israeli visa—we'll come back to that in a minute—but also a packet of operational documents. You can see it in the video: there are maps, orders, codes. There it is. Those are top-secret operational details—names, destinations, orders—the entire story of what that operation was about. Somehow or other, Major Ryder left it behind. Now, in the latest **Dances with Bears**, for those who want to—ah—she's got a platinum American Express card. That's interesting.

I hadn't noticed that before. Not your regular American Express card, but a platinum one. Okay, as a major, you earn about \$110,000 a year. What we need to see here is what the evidence she left behind reveals about the nature of the operation. Then we go back into the Situation Room and put ourselves at the table where Trump is understanding two things. One, there's an operation to attack the nuclear facilities in and around Isfahan—capture nuclear material, kill everybody around, and then destroy the interiors of whatever storage facilities or bunkers they come across. That operation, if it was designed—and it's in those papers, in that package you just saw—has totally failed.

Second, they're trying to rescue the other crew member—the one Trump spends a lot of time describing as having power. He dragged his wounded leg up, scaling cliff faces into a cave on a mountainside, and so on. Trump is reporting what he was seeing on TV; he thought he was in a great adventure show, and he talks about it that way. The problem is that suddenly, with the Ryder evidence, we're looking at the possibility that's dawned on everyone in the room—especially Trump—that they're facing a Jimmy Carter-sized catastrophic failure of a hostage rescue mission. Two planes, big transports, and several helicopters destroyed—that's even more than Carter lost in May of 1980. Now, Trump remembers, and everybody in U.S. politics remembers, that Carter and Brzezinski thought they'd be giving themselves tremendous political advantage in that election year.

From May to November, if they had been able to pull off a military rescue operation of the U.S. Embassy hostages—but instead, they blew it in a very big way. The mission—you can look it up, folks, on Wikipedia. I won't bore everyone by retelling it, but the political risk to Trump was huge. He couldn't cope with the possibility of another one of those, especially when you look at the polls. You look at the polls right now for Trump and you see a steady increase in disapproval—it's going up like that. More disapproval, approval going down, but slowly, with about 16% to 20% undecided. If there had been a disaster of that kind, it would have been harmful. You'd suddenly see all the undecideds joining the disapproval, and instead of it being 54%, it would be 70% or more.

#Nima

So Trump is—yeah, it was called—sorry for interrupting you, John—it was called Operation Eagle Claw.

#John

That's right. Great bird names—Epic Fury, Eagle Claw. They never name operations "Operation Sparrow," but there you are. That was what happened. But the politics—and that's what I'm emphasizing—go back from the military risk to the politics. Just bear in mind another thing that Trump admitted during the press conference. He was asked, "Has anybody opposed your operations against Iran?" And he admits, yes, there's military opposition. He says—Trump says in the press conference—that there were military objections, people in the military objecting to the rescue mission. What he really means is there were military objections to the attack, the mission, the operation to seize the nuclear material.

That was an operation the military thought was too risky, too potentially dangerous, too likely to lead to a Carter-like disaster. And it did. And it did—except that, by Trump's luck, they recovered the second crewman. So what we have in the press conference is a demonstration that Trump inadvertently gives when he offers his thank-yous and answers press questions—a clear sign of a significant split in the White House and Trump's fear of a major catastrophe. Let me put it another way, sum it up quickly, and get back to your questions: when Trump's afraid, when he has an episode of fear of losing, he becomes even more violent than he was before.

And that's exactly what happened coming out of Sunday. First, he celebrates the capture—two tweets—or the recovery of the crewman. Then he gets even tougher, nastier, using swear words again against Iran, talking about bombing them back into the Stone Age—plural. There you go, there's the swear word. You'll find more swear words from Trump, new ones, in the press conference if you look hard. So politically, what we have here is something I'd like to call the Jewish faction, which is in favor of escalation, and the Christian faction, which is against it. Who are they? Trump thanks Vitkov and Kushner. Why are they involved in a military operation?

Why were they in the room? Trump wants them in the room. He relies on them. He relies on Hegseth and Kane—the two military types—Kane, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—to take orders. But we already know that the chief of the Army staff has been forced to resign. We know from Trump that there's military opposition to his adventurism. They don't want to lose people. They don't want a military catastrophe. Trump doesn't listen to them; he's listening to Trump. Vitkov, Kushner, and, uh, Netanyahu—they want to annihilate. They want genocide against Iran. They have wanted, if necessary, tactical nuclear weapons.

Trump thinks—and the U.S. military is against this for all sorts of good reasons—that he can pull off brilliant operations without resorting to nuclear weapons. So he's persuaded the Israelis to join him

in this Isfahan operation. Reuters papers show that she was ordered into Israel on March 20. That's when her visa entry begins. She's to be there until June 20, 2026—three months. The planning for her trip started at least a month earlier. So we now know, in retrospect from that small amount of evidence—and the Iranian side has much more—that Trump and Netanyahu were planning this operation before the war started on February 28.

There's quite a lot to learn from the catastrophic outcome of those two fixed-wing aircraft and the three helicopters that burned up on the ground. Politically, in my opinion, what our audience has to do is put themselves in the room and understand that when you're the President of the United States, you're facing not only defeat on the ground but humiliation—a political loss on the scale of Carter's. And what that will mean for Trump is personal. If he loses control of Congress in November, he faces the likelihood of a coalition to impeach him. He knows that impeachment will lead to prosecution—for himself, his family, his sons, the whole group.

So he knows what that's like. He's just come out of that after many years, right? So the stakes are personal for Trump—on Saturday night, Sunday—personal. Therefore, he projects himself, and he says it; you can see from the words in the press conference, he's projecting his own fate in the movie he's watching of these operations. So I think what we have to do is wait, learn more, and understand that Trump's apparent loss of self-control, loss of anger management, his increasing escalation of threats, all relate to his fear on Saturday night, Sunday, and his determination to absolutely crush the source of that fear in Iran—now, today, 8 p.m. tonight.

#Nima

Here's what Lindsey Graham said about tonight at 8 p.m., John.

#Speaker 03

This time tomorrow night, we're going to have one of two scenarios: either a capitulation of their desire to rain terror on the world through diplomacy, or a massive military attack that destroys this regime's capability to ever wage war again.

#Nima

This is Lindsey Graham's understanding. But what we've just learned from the Iranian president, who tweeted moments ago, is that over 14 million proud Iranians have declared their readiness to sacrifice their lives in defense of Iran—and he's one of them. He registered his own name. For many people talking about the war in Iran, it's about everything right now. It's about the future, the history, what Iran is today, what Iran represents today. It's about everything. That's why I don't see anybody in Iran backing down.

#John

And Lindsey Graham's just made it clear that it's capitulation or destruction. He called capitulation a diplomatic solution, but he means capitulation. And the giveaway in the press conference—the psychological, psychopathological giveaway that Trump mentions—is that they've humiliated the Iranians with their rescue mission. This is back to front. In fact, he's afraid of being humiliated. And without too much psychoanalysis of Trump—his niece, Mary Trump, has written a whole book about that—I can hardly bear to read it. But it's there to understand that the man is psychologically very dangerous right now, and we have to be very serious about that. So the Iranian side, as you've just described, both people and government, have to understand that capitulation or destruction amounts to the same thing.

#Nima

Yeah, John, when it comes to the situation right now, we know that Donald Trump is somehow coordinating. In my opinion, he's putting himself in a trap by sending these kinds of ultimatums to the Iranians. That's not going to help him if he really wants to resolve the problem. That's what we learned from the Iranian side yesterday. They responded to Donald Trump and his administration in a letter through the Pakistani government. And they were talking about everything. I think that's the main objective on Iran's part. It doesn't matter if Donald Trump decides to attack Iran or continue this war—Iran is prepared, from what I've learned and from what we've seen so far. But if Donald Trump is serious, he has to seriously think about those points that Iran sent to the United States through the government of Pakistan.

#John

Well, we can go through it. The reply involved ten points. We talked last week and the week before—let's call it the evolution of the Iranian position, from Mojtaba Khamenei's five points to Ambassador Jalali's statement in Moscow, which amounts to four points. And now we're back to ten points because the Americans threw fifteen points at them. Basically, I use the word "evolution." The Iranian position has been very consistent; it hasn't changed. But the ten points have some interesting—let's call them angles—that a rational U.S. side might consider.

The most interesting thing—let's just remind everyone—is that Mojtaba Khamenei and Ambassador Jalali's statement in Russia involved reparations, removal of U.S. bases, and a permanent solution so that it wouldn't just be a ceasefire, meaning Iran wouldn't be exposed to another round of Israeli-American planning to attack again. It also included preservation of control over the Strait of Hormuz, lifting of sanctions, no limits on missile capacity, and readiness to accept nuclear enrichment at civilian, not military, levels. Those were the main points before. The new ten-point reply that came from Islamabad adds a couple of interesting issues.

At the beginning: a permanent end to the war, lifting of sanctions, and an end to regional conflict—in which Iran links the conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon to this negotiation. Guarantees against future attacks—we've just covered that, and you did too. Reconstruction reparations, a Strait of Hormuz

protocol, and a transit fee proposal. The wrinkles here, I calculated in a tweet this morning. If Iran sets up a toll system—which is the proposal—there are about 120 vessel transits a day. I'll just give you the arithmetic so people can understand the money, because this is how the reparations could be paid. There are approximately 120 average vessel transits every day, half of which are oil and gas, and half bulk and container ships—the box trade.

Fifty thousand a year, roughly—a two-million-dollar toll per vessel adds up to about a hundred billion. Now, suppose Iran gives itself a free pass, lifts sanctions, and gives friendly and poorer states significant discounts for their own cargoes—let's basically say a fifty-billion-dollar discount. Then you take off another fifty percent because Iran's promising to share the Strait toll with Oman, and you end up with approximately twenty-five billion for Iran, which in the ten-point plan is committed to restoring and repairing war damage, nothing else. So there's a proposal. It's got arithmetic, it's got numbers—intelligent, reasonable people could negotiate it. When Trump was asked about this yesterday, you know what he said? He said nothing. "To the victor go the spoils. I'll take the tolls," he said. "Why should they have them?"

Now, the man's mentality is absolutely dominated by Kushner, Vitkoff, and the other Jewish member of his circle, Stephen Miller. "Violence makes victory, makes spoils, makes ours." That's their line. You don't see any sign of the so-called national security advisor, Marco Rubio—either in the Situation Room or at the press conference. He's gone. You only see the two military yes-men. And we have the opposition—the opposition based on polling (that's Fabrizio in the White House), legal issues, war-crimes issues, future-immunity issues, and the military-risk issues. You just don't see on the U. S. side any shaping up of diplomatic negotiations. There's nobody there. There really isn't. Vitkoff and Kushner are not diplomatic negotiators. They're not going to negotiate at all. So what's left? Answer.

Iran is having its effect through its capacity to retaliate with more violence than the U.S. expects and to inflict more damage than the U.S. and its allies—including Israel—can tolerate. The U.S. can tolerate some of it; Israel can't. Kuwait can't. Bahrain can't. Saudi Arabia, and so on. So it's only by responding, tit for tat, with symmetrical and asymmetrical violence that Iran can persuade the non-negotiator in Trump and his faction that the risk—the one the Christian faction, the Pentagon, the generals are warning him about—isn't worth running. Does that answer the question? As far as I can see, there's no negotiation. There's an exchange of papers. And until Trump exhausts his fear and can be persuaded that he's won, we'll see continuing escalation. I don't see an alternative to that, no matter how reasonable the Hormuz Strait toll system might turn out to be.