

Alex Krainer: Why The U.S. Can't Crush Iran.

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#Nima

What's going on physically, what's going on practically? The George H.W. Bush is heading to the region, and they're not going through the Red Sea. They've chosen another route to get there. And here is the report on Fox News.

#Guest

The USS George H.W. Bush aircraft carrier strike group, which left Norfolk, Virginia, on March 31st, had to go around the southern tip of Africa following threats from the Houthis to strike ships in the Red Sea and close the Bab al-Mandab Strait in solidarity with Iran. Remember, from March to May last year, the Pentagon carried out Operation Rough Rider, a six-week operation to degrade the Houthis' ability to threaten ships in the Red Sea. It cost over a billion dollars and led to concerns about depleting U.S. munitions stockpiles. \$200 million were spent on missiles in the first three weeks of that operation. The U.S. lost seven MQ-9 Reaper drones worth \$30 million apiece and two F/A-18 jets worth \$50 million each. CENTCOM hit more than 1,000 targets using these weapons, and yet the Houthis survived and are now threatening to disrupt global shipping by closing the Bab al-Mandab Strait, very similar to what they're doing in the Strait of Hormuz.

#Nima

Yeah. What is it, Alex? Because we've learned the other thing would be 10,000 more soldiers to the region. And there are some rumors that the NICC is thinking of a ground invasion. What we've learned from the Iranian side just yesterday, they said, welcome, if you want to start a ground invasion of Iran, nobody would survive that. You're not going to survive that if you do that. And we have the blockade happening. Your understanding of the current situation?

#Alex

I struggle to explain it to myself, Nima, because it barely makes any sense at all. I think that by now everybody understands that Iran is an enormous country. It has a 92 million plus population. It has a million plus man army. It has a very long coastline, which is difficult, mountainous terrain. What are you going to do with another aircraft carrier that you couldn't do with the first two? And one of

them is out of commission — the Gerald Ford is out of commission. Ground invasion — what are you going to do with 50,000 or 60,000 troops? It would be like sending 50,000 or 60,000 troops to occupy Western Europe.

It's just silly, and it seems to me that the only reason for all these moves is because Donald Trump cannot concede defeat. He cannot lay it to rest and say, we messed up, let's not do this anymore. I think you and I have discussed a number of times, let's say, prior to the 28th of February when Trump attacked Iran, that Iran actually should be Trump's logical partner in this region because it's a very rich country. It's the fifth richest country in terms of natural resource wealth. They have an estimated \$30–\$35 trillion worth of natural resource wealth. If you wanted to have a meaningful footprint in this region, you should partner with Iran, not with Israel, which is nothing but a liability for the United States.

This is why, purely on the basis of, let's say, rational assessment of the situation, I thought they would never do this. But not only has Trump triggered this attack, he remains committed to it. And I can't find a better explanation than he can't let it go because he can't admit defeat. Militarily, Iran definitely, clearly, obviously has escalatory dominance in this region. Everybody knew this. Trump was advised accordingly. We now know that Benjamin Netanyahu has begged every administration from George W. Bush on, maybe even Clinton, to attack Iran for him. Nobody has done it because everybody came to the same conclusion: it's too risky, it can't be done, the chances of success are too low, too little.

We're not going to attack Iran. Trump did. And now he just can't withdraw because there is no face-saving exit, and the Iranians are not giving him one. And so he's bringing more, he's escalating more. The rhetoric is escalating. Trump is, you know, like now you keep hearing about how, oh, we won, we won. Trump will repeat the same set of narrative points in the same conference with the press several times over, practically repeating exactly, you know, like he learned by heart: oh, we sank their ships, oh, we took care of their anti-aircraft, they don't have an air force, we killed all their leaders—as if that's somehow acceptable. And it seems to me that it's turned into a psychotic situation, you know, perpetuating the risk of war just because you can't admit defeat, right?

And you're going to keep insisting until your adversaries give you something that you can qualify as a victory. And then maybe you're going to say, like, ha, look, we crushed them, we win. Now, look, here's our token of victory, our trophy. And now we can close. Without that, it seems that they're just going to continue to escalate. But I don't see how they can. You can't do anything with two aircraft carriers. I mean, you can blow up things, but you can't take control of the country. You can't take control of the Strait of Hormuz. You can't open it against Iranian opposition. You can't control the coastlines, the islands, the oil terminals. You can't prevent Iran from striking at your targets in the region.

I just simply don't understand, and I think that the rational thing to do would be to simply say, okay, we lost, we withdraw, that's the end of the story. But we're clearly not dealing with rational actors

here. And so I don't know where this goes, but for the United States, it's going nowhere good. For Iran, in the short term, it may be painful, but in the longer term, Iran might reach a completely different level of national security by eradicating their enemy's presence in the region. So it's for Iran that slogan they invented some weeks ago, short-term pain for long-term gain, that might work in Iran's favor, but not in the United States' favor. For the United States, this is short-term pain for even more long-term pain.

#Nima

Yeah. Alex, when it comes to the blockade of, you know, the Strait of Hormuz, its blockade is happening in the Arabian Sea. And does it make sense for you, you know, to blockade the blockade? What is that?

#Alex

It doesn't make any sense at all. You know, the Gulf of Oman is about twice as wide as the Strait of Hormuz, so it's a large area of sea. In normal times, the Strait of Hormuz would be traversed by between 120 and 150 ships per day, every day. Policing this traffic would be an extremely difficult thing to do because you would have to—what would you do? You would have to board every ship to inspect, to look at their paperwork, to see whose cargo it is, who paid for it, who shipped it. How are you gonna do that a hundred times per day? And maybe today it's less, but still, maybe it's 30, 40, 50 vessels, I don't know. With time, the traffic is probably going to pick up. This is impossible. And then, you know, in practical terms, it's hard work. You may have to accost the vessels with other ships, or more likely with helicopters, but you still have to fly out those helicopters, land on the ship, bring the troops in, do the—you know, it's just heavy-duty policing work that nobody believes in, right? So I imagine that the US troops would not be super zealous about doing this work. They would probably slack off big time.

So it will inevitably be an extremely porous blockade. It's just not going to work. It may work as a narrative device, like you come out and you tell your public at home, well, they blocked the Strait of Hormuz, now watch us, we're gonna block it, not them, we block it, we control the situation. It's like when your girlfriend breaks up with you and then you say, no, I break up with you first, because your pride just can't take it that she dumped you, so you're like, no, no, no, I'm dumping you. That's how it strikes me. It's like junior high school. And it's consistent with Trump's social media posts of late. They really increasingly read like a mean high school brat who is making all those communications. I don't know how they came to the decision to block the Sea of Oman.

But they, well in advance of the attack on Iran on 28 February, knew that almost certainly Iran's countermeasure would be the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. So how is it that for 40 days this idea never occurred to anybody? Or how is it that in their studies and assessments of the possible

confrontation with Iran, when they came to the conclusion Iran's going to close the Strait of Hormuz, they didn't write somewhere, oh, the brilliant countermeasure is we're going to close the Sea of Oman. There. That's how we're going to deal with that.

So it seems to me that it's probably a decision that was reached in a certain desperation among a very narrow group of policymakers, you know, maybe Trump and Kushner and Witkoff and Pete Hegseth, none of whom apparently have any particular depth to assess strategic moves and what their broader consequences will be, or even operational capabilities, because this is operationally a very heavy policing homework that you've now imposed on your troops, who are already sick and tired, exhausted. They don't particularly know why they're there, what the point of all this war is. I think that most of them think they're fighting a war for Israel. Israel is not the United States. None of them swore allegiance to Israel.

And I think this is why we're seeing mishaps with American ships happen as often as they do, because, you know, rather than mutinying, American troops just sabotage their own equipment and say, like, yeah, you know, we'd love to go and fight this war for you, we just can't because our ship broke down, so we're gonna have to be hauled to some shipyard for repairs. And where are you gonna repair it? I don't know if their base in Diego Garcia has the facilities necessary to repair their ships. Maybe they have to take them back to the United States. I don't know exactly, but it all feels like sheer desperation. And the only reason why they're doing all this, that I can tell, is because they just can't man up and say, we cocked up, we're out of here, this was a big mistake, and we are going to cut our losses and leave.

#Nima

Alex, one of the very important figures in Washington that we usually talk less about is Stephen Miller. He's so powerful in Washington. And here is what he said on Fox News.

#Speaker 04

Embargo and every other option is on the table as President Trump seeks that final, safe, secure outcome for the people of the world.

#Alex

All right, Stephen Miller.

#Nima

Yeah. When you talk about if he won, he won, the final safe and secure sort of solution. But what is missing, Alex, in my opinion, in Washington, is that they don't know who's Tehran, who's Iran, who's... Because you remember, every time they're talking, and Marco Rubio, every time he talks

about Iran, he's saying these radical Islamists, you know, ideologists, all of this sort of nonsense. I think Iran has proven so far they're more pragmatic than, you know, being radical, and they know what they're doing. They didn't, you know, even with the case of civilians, killing civilians, they didn't, you know, respond the same way. They knew what would be the main targets on their part and what would make sense for them. And Iran, I think, Alex, looking at the history, because every time they're talking, these are terrorist, you know, governments in Iran.

But, as our friend Larry Johnson has mentioned multiple times on this podcast, looking at the numbers, it's not even there. The policy in Israel is assassination. Whenever they have a spy in Iran, they want to find these high-ranking people to kill them, to assassinate them. But on the other hand, you see Iranians are totally the opposite. They want to get the information out from Israel. I think this shows hugely what is happening in the mind of the Iranian leadership, which is missing in the calculation of Washington. I think the first step would be to understand your enemy. You have to understand your enemy, what your enemy is, and what is the process of assessment on their part, the way they feel, the way they respond. That's missing in Washington. Nobody's talking about that.

#Alex

Well, Nima, what you say would make sense, except that this administration, and the Israelis, seem to be driven by hubris. They think that they are so superior to everybody else that they don't need to learn anything about anybody. They can just make their way by force. You can see how they responded to the Pope in this recent spat. They're like, we are the United States of America, we do what we want, and you better make sure that you're on our side if you know what's good for you. That's their mindset: we are so big, so powerful, so invincible, we don't need to waste time learning about these Iranians or whoever. We can just crush them.

We can just crush them, and that's the end of that. And, you know, maybe even learning about the Iranians would—maybe they would think that that's like demeaning themselves, you know. Why should they? But I'm glad—Nima, I'm glad you brought up Stephen Miller, because Stephen Miller is one of these shadow entities that you don't hear so much from or about. But I would—you know, I would expect that he played a very important role in leading the United States to this war. Because, you know, back in 2019, when the British ambassador, Sir Kim Darroch, mounted a pressure campaign against Trump to try to persuade him to go to war against Iran during his first term.

Trump declined, and then the ambassador was very upset that Trump didn't start a bombing campaign against Iran. But then, in the correspondence that emerged, he was saying that, well, we could still pressure Trump into attacking Iran. We could achieve it. And he said that this could be done by surrounding Trump, flooding the zone around Trump with so-called Trump whisperers. And then we got some names of these Trump whisperers that would push Trump to start a war against Iran. And one of them was Stephen Miller. And so he is... he probably still has that role. He's

probably still connected to the networks that wanted this outcome. And he's part of the problem for the U.S. administration and for the American people, because the American people never wanted this.

American people voted for Trump because he actually explicitly promised that there would be no more wars, that the United States would not attack Iran. And somehow all of this was thrown overboard on 28 February this year. And I suspect that Stephen Miller played a very, very important role in this. And so statements like he gave recently—and he said more than what you just played—I heard his statements. It's all more rah, rah, rah, we're the winners, we're going to do what we want. I think that he's also defending his own legacy, defending his own position in government, because this is a massive screw-up, a colossal blunder that he is responsible for, and he certainly knows it. And I think that many people in the administration also appreciate that.

#Nima

Yeah. Alex, looking at Russia and China today, you heard from China, for example, Donald Trump said, by the way, this blockade is—China is happy with that because we are helping China to open up the Strait of Hormuz. You know, the Strait of Hormuz was never closed for China since this war started. They were using the Strait of Hormuz without having any sort of difficulties. Iran is their partner in the Middle East. But when it comes to China, do you think they're—it seems to me that the war in the Middle East has put them in a very different position right now.

They're not there even, you know, just looking at the sequence before the war in Ukraine and after the war in Ukraine, before the war in the Middle East and right now. What is China? We have the opposition leader going to Beijing, meeting with Xi Jinping—the opposition leader in Taiwan. These are huge changes. I think Taiwan is learning something from the Middle East, from GCC countries, from what has happened so far. What is that, in your opinion?

#Alex

Well, I think that Taiwan doesn't want to end up like Ukraine, because they use these so-called allied nations as proxies to fight their fights. And it does seem that this war is partly, or maybe primarily, motivated by weakening the position of China, which is dumb and desperate, but it seems that this is what they're doing. This is why they're bombing the China-Iran railway, which is part of the BRICS—uh, sorry, Belt and Road Initiative—which kind of smacks of the World War I scenario, where the Germans built the Berlin-to-Baghdad railroad and the British decided that they needed to completely destroy all this. So they did. They even engineered the overthrow of the Ottoman Empire because most of that railway was going through Ottoman territories in the Middle East. And they orchestrated the Balkan Wars, uprisings against the Ottoman Empire, which had been present in the Balkans for 500 years, and then engineered World War I to destroy Germany, which they all did successfully. Now that power is no longer Germany, but it's China, and China is building alternative infrastructure so that they make themselves resistant to maritime control of the choke points. And,

you know, the trade choke points are things like Gibraltar, the Bosphorus, the Red Sea, Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, the Strait of Hormuz, and then, very important, the Strait of Malacca, right? Because I think that most of the Chinese trade with Western Asia and Europe goes through the Strait of Malacca—meaning something like 80% or 90% or more.

And so, the potential—Hormuz and Bab al-Mandeb are two of your choke points, but a more important one is the Strait of Malacca. And then we saw just today, 16th of April, three days ago, the U.S. Secretary of War, Mr. Pete Hegseth, went to Indonesia to sign a military cooperation agreement with—sorry, Malaysia. And it seems, it's not completely clear from the communiqués that we saw, but it seems that the idea is for the United States to be able to take control of the Strait of Malacca so that they can again say, like, oh yeah, we'll keep the Strait open for you, but it's going to be on our terms. We are in control. You're going to have to submit to our conditions and terms.

And so, with the action that we see in bombing Iran, trying to take control of the Strait of Hormuz, trying to take control of the Strait of Malacca, it does seem that, at least in part, the grand strategy is aimed against China. The other part is supporting Israel so that they have this grand bridgehead into Western Asia. And so the talk, you know, I think that the idea that Trump had was to go to China as a victor, you know, to have really, really strong cards to play against Xi Jinping. It didn't work out that way. And I think that this deal three days ago with the China military cooperation agreement with Malaysia was to try to get some new cards to play against China. But the whole world sees now what happens to the American friends and allies.

You know, they can see that quip by Henry Kissinger, that it's dangerous to be an enemy of the United States but deadly to be a friend, that this is literally the truth. Because look at what happened to Ukraine. It's practically destroyed. More than one million men have been sacrificed in their proxy war against Russia. Look at what's happening to the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain—who knows, Saudi Arabia—they all end up sacrificed as pawns in this game. And who knows, you know, maybe Pete Hegseth's attempts to get Malaysia on their side are not going to work out. But people in Taiwan can see. They can see what's going on. And I think, like, do we want to end up like Bahrain, like Ukraine, like all these countries that end up completely wasted and broken, fighting somebody else's imperial war?

And so a lot of people are now probably realizing we can't do this. And so, of course, the leader of the opposition goes to Beijing to say, we want a peaceful reintegration with China. And I think that, you know, I remember some local elections that were being held in Taiwan, and it turned out that a significant majority of the people all voted for the parties that were looking for friendly relations with China. So I think that this is already happening—probably a dominant point of view in Taiwan. And I think that as the Trump administration shows itself to be incompetent and fumbling and very dangerous in their desperation, I think that more and more countries are going to be recognizing that it's not in their interest at all to be the pawns of the empire in this very dangerous game.