

Pepe Escobar: Connectivity Wars - The U.S. War on Multipolarity

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#Glenn

Welcome back. We are joined today by Pepe Escobar, a journalist and author. Thank you for coming back on. It's good to see you again.

#Pepe Escobar

Always a pleasure, Glenn. And greetings from Buddhist, peaceful Southeast Asia.

#Glenn

Well, I think the first time we met in person was in Moscow. I was working there years ago. Yeah, it feels like ages ago now. But I was working there for a department focusing on the Greater Eurasia Initiative, that is, for Russia to integrate its economy through industries, physical corridors, and financial instruments from China to India, Iran. And you, as a journalist, have been working on this as well. So, yeah, that's been a while. But this whole initiative is seen as an effort to essentially reorganize the international economic architecture. And, of course, Russia and China tend to form the core, but India, Iran, and many others have an interest in this multipolar economic architecture. I thought a good place to start today would be to ask you, how do you see Iran's role in this whole thing, in this construct?

#Pepe Escobar

Well, stepping a little bit away, but not so much from the war, Glenn, this is one of my latest columns this week. I sent you a copy, which is an update on what I called years ago the war of connectivity corridors. So basically, we have all those connectivity corridors, part of the New Silk Road, the Belt and Road Initiative. There are at least six of them, maybe seven, in fact, including the Maritime Silk Road, east to west. Then there's the north to south, the North-South International Transportation Corridor through BRICS, Russia, Iran, and India, which is something that I had the

privilege, in fact, to follow last year in Iran when we were in Iran at the same time. And I remember they were very busy talking to them all the time.

And on my side, I was working on this documentary, which is the first one in the world in English about the corridor. And we were very privileged because we had full access, we had all the permits, so we could go from the Caspian Sea to Bandar Abbas, Persian Gulf, and then Chabahar, Sea of Oman, and see everything, and especially what's lacking, and the problems, of course, and the challenges. And I talked to some absolutely first-rate traders and geopolitical analysts in Iran about it. So that is one of the key new corridors of the future — north to south, across Eurasia, bypassing SWIFT, bypassing sanctions. And then there are two more corridors.

There are, I would not even say in progress, but for the moment, they are more like pipe dreams. One of them is IMEC. And the denomination is a misnomer because it's not only the India–Middle East Corridor. Most of all, it is the Israel–Saudi Arabia–Emirates–Europe–India Corridor. And the idea is to place the port of Haifa as a key trading port connecting with the Arab world, connecting to Europe, and connecting to India. As it stands, we can say that this is dead. And in fact, even Saudi Arabia is practically saying, by not saying, that this is dead. And then there are the Turks. And as you know very well, Glenn, they are always hedging. So they are even resuscitating, wow, a long-gone idea from the late 2000s, early 2010s — a pipeline from Qatar.

#Pepe Escobar

Across the Arab world to Turkey, and then they can sell Qatari gas to Europe. For the moment, also, it's just a pipe dream. So in this column, I try to analyze the pros and cons of these four corridors. But the logic is the same. The 21st century is going to be a war of connectivity corridors at the core of Eurasian development and Eurasian integration.

#Glenn

Well, yes, some would suggest that much of the past at least 200 years has been organized around wars over connectivity. I mean, in the early 19th century, we know when the Russians were expanding out from the center towards the periphery, this put them in a clash with British India. So this is what's, yeah, the Mackinder theory — that you have land powers connecting versus the sea power. And then, of course, in the 20th century, we had the, yeah, the discontinuing. And it's fascinating because if you look through the strategic documents, it's always, for the U.S. and Britain, they always formulated their claim to world power as controlling the seas. That's how they connect the world.

And then the land powers — Russia, worst case, connected with Germany, or even worse, connected with China — would then begin to rival the maritime powers. This has always been a key focus of geopolitics. And it does appear we're still into this. I mean, if you look at the BTC pipeline, for example, I remember in the 2000s that was a very big thing — the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan. And then

this was a way for the Europeans to go under Russia and above Iran. Exactly. Even getting Ukraine connected into the NATO orbit — this is a way of getting the energy transit country to ally with the energy consumers against energy producer Russia. So we already seem to be very deep in this connectivity war situation. But what do you see being the wider consequence of what's playing out now in this war with Iran?

#Pepe Escobar

Well, I would say that the number one thing would be what's going to happen with the International North-South Transport Corridor. Russia is deeply involved. They are helping to finance railways inside Iran. They could even finance a railway skirting the Caspian Sea to the left of the Caspian Sea because the Russians think it's going to be much, much faster. They're trying to upgrade the Iranian port structure in the Caspian. And they're right, Glenn. I went to the port of Bandar Anzali in the Caspian, and it's stuck in the '70s. There's a lot of work to do. So they start getting, for instance, big cargo ships from Astrakhan. I saw some Astrakhan ships in the port, but small ones, not big cargoes.

So this is essential. And what's India going to do? We're all asking the same question. What about the relationship between Iran and India when, two days before the decapitation strike on February 28th, Modi was being received in Israel and they came up with that motherland and fatherland shtick? And it's a huge problem because India is a huge investor in Chabahar. When I was in Chabahar, it was fascinating. I was talking to the port authorities. They said, you see those cranes over there? They were bought and paid for by India. They are investing. It's a bit low at the moment — this was last year — but they promised that in a few months, they're going to help us develop all the parts of the port.

The port is expanding very, very fast. It's very impressive. It reminds me of Shenzhen 30-something years ago, to give an idea. So what's going to happen? The Chinese, of course, they look at Chabahar. They say, look, we can go there and in 10 minutes you have everything you need. And they told me, look, the Chinese, we always have Chinese cargoes. In fact, I saw two while I was there. Most of them go to Bandar Abbas, but some of them go to Chabahar, if they are, for instance, stuff that is going to be sold in eastern Iran or could be sold in Iran or in Afghanistan. There's a very good road that was recently finished from Chabahar to the Afghan-Iranian border.

So the Chinese, there's a strong possibility the Chinese will end up taking over Chabahar. There's going to be one more extra connection in their string of pearls of ports. And not far from Gwadar, which is crazy. You know, the distance from Chabahar to Gwadar is 80 kilometers across the border. They're practically sister ports. So China could use both easily. They're already using Gwadar, of course. So the big, big if is what's going to happen to the north-south corridor. And we didn't even talk about the Russian connectivity corridor, which is a thalassocratic corridor, which is the Northern Sea Route that the Chinese call the Arctic Silk Road.

This is a corridor that Northeast Asia, specifically, they are immensely interested in, especially South Korea. It's something that we see in those discussions in Russia during the Vladivostok Forum and in St. Petersburg. We're going to have the same discussion in St. Petersburg in about two months from now. In fact, less than two months from now. And, of course, the Southeast Asians are also interested in using it because Southeast Asia can connect to Vladivostok. Then you take the North Sea Route and you arrive in Murmansk, and you are almost in Europe.

So these are—well, it was not part of this column, of course—but these are the two key new connectivity corridors: the North-South and the Northern Sea Route. And, of course, the Chinese keep adding to what they have. For instance, something that is in the column as well: they finally finished the China-Iran railway only a few months ago. And guess what the Americans did? They bombed a stretch of this railway inside Iran two or three weeks ago. Very important, because this is from Xinjiang. Of course, everything starts in Xinjiang, but then it goes everywhere. It goes through the Trans-Siberian, it goes to Kazakhstan, the Middle Corridor.

And this one is particularly interesting because it's Xinjiang, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and then it crosses the border in Turkmenistan, enters Iran, and from Iran it can go to Turkey, and from Turkey it can go to Europe. And for the Chinese, this is the key corridor. This road, this railway—sorry—the Iranian stretch, it's part of what they call the East-West Corridor. And it's one of the most important corridors of the New Silk Roads of Belt and Road. There you go. It's all there. And everybody is interconnected. And the Central Asians are connected with all these corridors as well. So it's important for them as well because they also receive Chinese merchandise that stays in their countries and the rest keeps going.

#Glenn

Well, given that, well, you mentioned the attacks on the Chinese connectivity—China-Iran railway, yes. This is quite important. And I also think the connection with Pakistan is important. I mean, if you follow this China-Pakistan connectivity with rail and road, and then cutting down to the port of Gwadar, which is a Pakistani port operated by the Chinese, it's quite an impressive infrastructure. We see essentially this new Silk Road recreating the world as it was before European maritime powers took over the world 500 years ago.

But as you mentioned, I also noticed that the U.S. and Israeli bombing of Iran not only targeted the Chinese infrastructure, but also parts of the railroads that would connect the International North-South Transportation Corridor—Russia, Iran, India. So there seems to be a war on multipolarity here. That is, obviously, this seems to be a key target. Do you think China stands out uniquely as a country the U.S. would like to weaken as a result of attacking Iran?

#Pepe Escobar

Glenn, in fact, this is a war against multipolarity. There's no question. The number one target, of course, is China. But this is a war against Iran, against China, against interconnection, against Eurasian integration and interconnection, against Russia on another level, because this is the other country at war up there, which seems to be never-ending as well. And a war against BRICS. No question about that. But this has been announced since the start of Trump 2.0, when he first started blabbering about BRICS, which he still has no idea what BRICS is about. It doesn't matter, because the only thing that registered in his four-year-old psyche is, "Ah, they want to bypass the U.S. dollar." That's the only thing that registers. So, war against everybody. It's the empire of chaos, lies, plunder, piracy, and we bomb everybody that we don't like.

This is the American foreign policy now, right? So, obviously, the Chinese know it's extremely complicated because it's still not clear, especially for us foreigners. Even if we have access to China, we talk to people in China. I'm going back to China next month again. I was postponing it because of the war. But one of my first questions to anybody is, okay, what is more important for you, BRICS or BRI, or the New Silk Road? And how do they interconnect? And the second question is, are you fully aware that this is a war, especially against you? If you follow, I would say, relatively independent media, like our friends in Guancha in Shanghai, when you read some of their best contributors, scholarly contributors, they don't get into detail, but this is more or less.

They understand that this is a war against China, of course. And this is a war to try to prevent sources of energy from reaching China, which is something that they are seeing in front of them nowadays with the American blockade. There's already the blah, blah, blah about the Strait of Malacca, which is inevitable. But they have been prepared for a potential blockade of the Strait of Malacca for at least 20 years. And that's why they diversify their sources of energy. So you have multiple sources of energy. You have oil from Kazakhstan. You have a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan. You have a gas pipeline from Myanmar. You have Power of Siberia, which is at full capacity now, and soon Power of Siberia 2.

And, of course, all the effort that they made to diversify internally. And when you travel in Xinjiang, it's mind-boggling because you see miles on end, everything is electrified. You see forests of solar panels, wind turbines, those solar farms where you have that pole, you know, radiating energy hundreds of kilometers around. And something that I learned from our Uyghur contacts — Xinjiang has so much energy that they sell energy to the rest of China. So that explains why China nowadays is, I would say, 84% to 86% — they don't need to import oil and gas. So their import of oil and gas is about 13%, 14%. It's not much compared to their national needs. But they know that Malacca continues to be a very, very tricky situation. And now... it gets even more tricky, I would say.

This deal that the Minister of Defense of Indonesia made with the Secretary of War in Washington, signed in Washington, while Prabowo, the president, was going to Russia and spent five hours talking to Russia. This is Indonesia hedging all the time, but they cannot hedge everything. There's a limit to their hedging because the other BRICS, especially China, are going to say, what the hell are you doing? Are you considering giving overflight rights to the Americans in our Indonesian territory?

And at the same time, they're saying, look, maybe we should monetize Malacca. So now there's the idea in Jakarta. Okay, they looked at what happened in Hormuz. Malacca is very, very straight territorial waters, once again divided between Sumatra in Indonesia and Malaysia. So both of them can charge a right of passage.

Why not? So I'm sure this is going to happen sooner rather than later. So everything, of course, is changing. But this is going to be particularly important. And, of course, who doesn't like that? Singapore. But Singapore is not in the Strait of Malacca. The Strait of Malacca is to the north. Singapore is on the tip south of the Malaysian Peninsula. It has nothing to do with Malacca. Malacca is a Malaysia-Indonesia affair. So all these things, they are advancing in parallel. So it's increasingly complex. But it's a completely different system, and we still don't know where it's going. But the Malacca angle for China is crucial. And I'm sure they will exert a lot of pressure on Jakarta about this defense agreement with the Americans.

#Glenn

So when the U.S. develops naval strategies for putting this, well, limiting the reliable access for the Russians to seas on the western borders of Russia, they have three seas which can be cut off. There's the Black Sea, the Baltic Sea, and the Arctic. You see that the U.S. is going after all three. That was part of the purpose of toppling the government in Ukraine, shutting down the Black Sea fleet of the Russians. Essentially, it would make the Black Sea a NATO lake. You know, you have NATO now speaking openly about making the Baltic Sea a NATO lake by challenging Russia and Kaliningrad, of course, getting Sweden and Finland into NATO. I think that the former NATO Secretary General, Rasmussen, said that we could put a blockade now in St. Petersburg if we wanted to.

I mean, it's kind of aggressive language. An American general said we can invade Kaliningrad and there's nothing Russia can do. And as well, you see the militarization of Scandinavia and the U.S. ambitions to cut off the Russians in the Arctic. And yes, overall, I think this is also a goal of taking Greenland. So they, you know, they're going after the Russians. But when you don't want to go after the Chinese, you have the dual island chain, which is important.

But in all American documents, which, you know, since the 19th—well, for a long time—but also in the Chinese documents, there's always a special place for the Strait of Malacca, where they see this as where the Americans would come to try to cut off or shut down the Chinese connection with the world. So, as you said, closing off between Indonesia and Malaysia, I think at the narrow area it's just like 2.8 kilometers or something. It's very narrow. This is easy to shut down. But how do you see us moving towards that, though—the war over Malacca? Do you think this is a possible actual war? I mean, do you see a link between Iran and Malacca, essentially?

#Pepe Escobar

There is already, Glenn. Did you see that they boarded an Iranian ship not very far from the Strait of Malacca? So, you know, this is probably a message, right? This is an Indo-Pacom operation. And I was joking with some people, saying that basically this American task force or invincible armada are cowards, because they are not in the Gulf of Oman. They are in the Arabian Sea or in the southern Indian Ocean. They are very, very far from the Persian Gulf or the Sea of Oman. I was joking that this is already an Indo-Pacom operation, much more than Centcom. And then when you see that they apprehended a ship already in the Indo-Pacom area, that's the beginning.

This is just the beginning. So the Chinese, I'm sure they are horrified about that. I couldn't read any deeper analysis so far. Maybe there is some in Chinese military channels, only in Chinese on Weibo or on WeChat, whatever. It's possible. So this is something I'm trying to do in the next few days. But obviously they are horrified, because this is exactly what they have been thinking since the early 2000s, when they started their very, very well-coordinated diversification. But still, all the oil that they import from the Persian Gulf has to go through Malacca. They cannot get rid of that. For instance, they were thinking about Gwadar.

Because Gwadar, they could build, which is something that they could, but it's going to cost a lot of money, take a long, long time. A pipeline from Gwadar to Xinjiang across Balochistan and then parallel to the Karakoram Highway would be a mega engineering feat. Yes, they could do it, but it's very costly and would take a lot of time. But it's still... it's there. The idea is still there. Then they would completely bypass Malacca. That's one possibility. But, of course, it all depends because we are in, I would say, it's, what, three weeks ahead, the meeting between Xi and Trump in Beijing. It's going to be on the 14th.

So, obviously, Trump is positioning himself to arrive in Beijing with strong cards in his hand, including extortion cards, intimidation cards—typical Trump administration. The Chinese, of course, as we know, are cool, calm, collected. They play Go. This means that they surround the adversary and they see long term. They don't play this stupid poker that the Americans do. But, of course, they are worried. And, of course, they're worried, even though they have this gigantic reserve—1.3 billion barrels of oil in reserve. This is something we cannot even imagine. But they have it. They accumulated this. They were ready for something similar to what's happening now.

Not Malacca, but Hormuz as Malacca, in fact. Because as it stands, not much oil is flowing through Hormuz, because, of course, of the second blockade. The first non-blockade, the Iranian blockade, it was free-for-all in terms of Chinese cargo. Now with the second one, it's more complicated. But we still have not arrived at a real cliffhanger. Will this invincible armada have the balls to actually board a Chinese tanker in international waters? I don't think they will take that risk. And the Chinese are betting on it as well. But of course, the quantities they are receiving are not enough compared to the past. It was 1.3 million, 1.4 million a day from Iran, plus the others, plus the oil from Saudi and the UAE.

#Glenn

As you said, the Chinese, they know what's going on. They see what's happening. And there's this incrementalism in which we're moving towards it. First, we see this partial blockade on Venezuela. And again, the Chinese see they're part of the target. The Americans weren't subtle about this either. They made it very clear. It's not that they have to open up to the U.S., it's that they have to shut down the trade with the Iranians. And then, of course, now we have the blockade on Cuba, we have the hijacking of Iranian ships, we have the piracy and hijacking of Russian ships. And so you see this, again, connectivity wars, if you will. And given that the Chinese see themselves as being, well, they're the peer rival of the United States, they are the ultimate target, how do you think the Chinese are going to react to this situation? Because they do have a calm demeanor, you know?

#Pepe Escobar

Exactly. I'm waiting for—I'm very curious now to go to China, because I decided to go, because I think maybe there is an interval before Trump arrives. It will be the best time to go, and then start asking questions there. And while Trump is there, it's the perfect moment to talk too. Of course, as you know, talking on the record with Chinese officials in China is immensely complicated for us foreign journalists and analysts. But of course, we have our connections—in my case, scholarly connections, former PLA officials now retired. And even if we talk off the record, many of them, they talk, but they say, look, it has to be off the record. No problem. We always get nuggets of information that you won't find in Xinhua, in Global Times, in China Daily, etc. But for the moment, they are not even... It's typical Chinese.

They are reflecting upon it, so it's too early to talk about it. But obviously, this strikes a nerve. Malacca, for them, is a taboo subject, and now it's getting very, very close to home. With this first seizing, relatively peaceful—there was no gunfire involved, apparently—but it was obviously an Indo-Pak message to the PLA Navy especially. And that's why this is so dangerous. Let me ask you something, if you allow me, Glenn, considering your fabulous experience in Russia. How do you see the Northern Sea Route being implemented for good within the next few years? When you go to those roundtables in Vladivostok, for instance, they say, OK, there are lots of challenges, but it can be operational by 2028, 2029. Do you think that's realistic?

#Glenn

Well, I've been to those Eastern Economic Forums in Vladivostok as well, and on those panels. And, well, there's a timeline. I'm not sure if they're able to get it up and running by then. Again, it's, um, on one hand, it's a very competitive advantage because the Arctic corridor of Russia—I mean, this is connecting Europe with Asia through the Arctic—it saves a lot of time and money, so it's a very competitive international maritime route. And it will be pretty much the only one in the world which is not dominated by the United States Navy. So it has a lot of benefits. And even if the U.S. would try to force its way, if you will, you need the search and rescue ports, all these things across the Russian Arctic coastline. So there's no way to really circumvent the Russians there.

So the Russians have great... And also, because of the relationship with China, everyone gets the impression sometimes that the Russians can get a bit antsy because they will be more dependent on China than China is on Russia. The Russians overcome this by having a certain degree of strategic autonomy there, and also diversifying their partnerships. As we've seen in the Arctic, they make sure not just to invite the Chinese, they also invite the Indians, South Koreans, Indians, yeah. Yeah, exactly. But also, because the ports and all are sovereign Russian territory, it creates more balance in the relationship with the Chinese. So it kind of has all the perfect recipe for being a good project. But this being said, it has limits as well. I mean, the Arctic is... it can't become the main corridor.

It's simply one of many, which allows countries to diversify. And again, I think often people see it as, you know, it gives the potential of a Russian stranglehold. But I think this is exaggerated because it won't reach that degree of traffic. I think, if anything, having more corridors prevents other countries from using corridors as a weapon, because then people lose trust in it. And so the Russians have an interest in keeping it open to have trust in it. But it can never be so powerful in terms of the amount of traffic that it would pose any threat or, you know, give the Russians too much power. So overall, it seems like quite a reasonable project. But nonetheless, the U.S., its hegemonic strategy builds on, and has always done so, on maritime supremacy.

That means two things. All the oceans have to be under U.S. control, and also you have to reduce the physical connectivity. So you want to make sure that Germany is cut off from Russia. You know, bombing Nord Stream, all of this is achieved. You want to make sure that the Chinese are cut off from the Russians, the Russians are cut off from the Indians, Turkey is cut off from Russia. So it's... yeah, essentially divide and rule. I think this is how the maritime powers... And if you go to the Russian conservative scholar Savitsky and others in the 1920s, they made it clear.

This is why they consider the maritime powers to be naturally imperialistic, because they can only dominate if they divide. And they had a vision that the Eurasian land powers can only become competitive if they cooperate. Because, yes, China's more powerful, but China's objectives can't be achieved without cooperation with India, Russia, Iran. So there's a natural incentive to cooperate there. So this is why they kind of frame the land powers as being more cooperative, while the maritime powers are inherently more imperialistic. I think I drifted a bit away from your question, but I do think it has a lot of potential. The Russians have all the icebreakers.

They're building the infrastructure. New technologies, especially drones, make a lot of the infrastructure required for search and rescue much cheaper and more reasonable, especially in areas which aren't that heavily populated. I tend to be optimistic about the Arctic route, but the problem is, in the past, it was just a frozen desert. There wasn't that much competitive strategic interest, but now with the maritime corridor and all of these natural resources becoming available, it's lined up to become the center of a zero-sum geopolitical standoff. Again, that's why the Americans want Greenland, so... exactly.

#Pepe Escobar

And wow. And Putin is personally implicated. It's what he tells us in Vladivostok every year. This is a federal project, and they are investing a lot of money in Arkhangelsk, in Murmansk, in the ports. And they take this as a matter of national security, so it's extremely serious. At the same time, it interests the Chinese because one of their corridors, for instance, they cannot use for the moment — the Trans-Siberian. They cannot use the Trans-Siberian anymore because of sanctions. So that's why they are investing so much in these middle corridors — east-west corridor, etc. — going south. Going through the north is impossible. Going to the deep, deep north in the Arctic is perfect and relatively fast.

#Glenn

And, yeah, well, that's why it's funny that Vladivostok on the Pacific coast of Russia is connected also now with India. So India will also partake in the Arctic project. People don't consider India to be an Arctic country. But this is kind of the weird stuff, because once Sweden and Finland became part of NATO, you essentially have all the Arctic states. You have all the Arctic states as NATO members except for Russia, which is half of the Arctic. And in the past, the Russians, because they wanted to integrate with the Europeans and to have a common European home, as Gorbachev framed it, they essentially earmarked all Arctic cooperation with the Western countries.

But now that it's become obvious that there will be no common European home, we'll only have block politics. The Russians are looking towards the East, so now the Arctic is becoming this roof of Eurasia in which they're inviting Eurasian powers instead of the West. So I think in the future we're gonna kick ourselves for what we've done — that is, the Europeans — because all this Arctic gas, which was supposed to fuel our industries with cheap gas for the next 30 years, has now been signed over to the Chinese instead, because we are obsessed with defeating the Russians instead of finding a political settlement. So it's just — I think historians will look back at this period here as one of the most ridiculous and full of self-inflicted... no question.

#Pepe Escobar

No question. Yes. And you saw the latest 90 billion — and they think, they actually think in Brussels that this is going to be paid by Russian reparations.

#Glenn

Yeah, I saw that. But that's why they call it a loan — 90 billion to Ukraine. How is it a loan? They can't pay it back. And then they explain, oh, well, after we defeat Russia, they will pay in reparations. So essentially, the Europeans can't afford peace anymore because they have to defeat Russia. Otherwise, they don't get their money back either.

#Pepe Escobar

Otherwise, they're not going to get their money back.

#Glenn

I always ask, though, what exactly is this plan? If you see Russia considers this to be an existential threat, how do you defeat the world's largest nuclear power, which considers itself to be in a fight for its survival? Exactly to what extent do you want to be successful? I mean, this is a horrible war on so many levels — humanitarian, strategic, I mean... I wanted to just get back to the Iranian-Chinese aspect of this, though, because from what I hear now, the Iranians have begun to outline the rules of this new toll system. That is, everyone has to pay a toll. If I'm not mistaken, those who participate in the attack on Iran or sanction Iran, they get a little bit of extra bonus on top in terms of what they have to pay. Also, they don't want dollars.

#Pepe Escobar

Only rials, yes. Probably rials, but obviously they will accept yuan, but they won't advertise it. The backup currency will be yuan.

#Glenn

So how do you see this impacting then? I mean, this is why countries want control over international corridors and maritime corridors. Then you can extract political concessions and economic ones. And this would effectively strip the U.S. of much power, though. Is this why the Americans can't leave? Or even though they more or less lost the war against Iran, is this why Trump can't go home?

#Pepe Escobar

Of course not, because if he gets this off-ramp, wherever that is, this is admitting your strategic defeat. The strategic defeat is already there for the whole planet to see. The thing is, the degree of this strategic defeat is going to be extremely humiliating, or there's going to be some face-saving built in. We still don't know. But he has to take an off-ramp, and he's begging for an off-ramp. That's a completely different story. The Iranians can sit on the current situation for months, even though they are paying a horrible price. They already pay a horrible price in terms of the infrastructure that is destroyed. There are numbers floating around reaching as much as \$270 billion to rebuild what was destroyed during the war.

So obviously they badly need a toll booth in Hormuz. This is going to help. They cannot expect the Americans to pay reparations because this will never happen. Or they will have to force the Gulfies, especially the Emirates, which are for all practical purposes at war with Iran now — not Saudi Arabia, but the Emirates — to pay reparations. So what are they going to do? Attack the Emirates

again? Yes, they can. They can immobilize the Emirates in a matter of hours. Very, very easy. And in fact, if the Americans attack again, the number one target apart from Israel is going to be the UAE, and not the Emirates — Abu Dhabi specifically. Dubai, the business model of Dubai is already dead, and it's not coming back. Dubai. How so?

#Glenn

The business model is.

#Pepe Escobar

Exactly. Because I would say the conceptual brain of aligning with the U.S. and Israel in a war against Iran is MBZ, Mohammed bin Zayed. He's a very, very dangerous gangster, in fact. Did you see that he sent his son to Beijing, was received by Xi Jinping, and he was lecturing Xi Jinping in Beijing about the Iran-Russia relationship? It's absolutely mind-boggling. These people are gangsters and self-entitled. That's even worse. And they made their bet a long time ago. Those famous \$1.4 trillion — I think it's a little bit too much, but it's probably much less than that — that they committed to invest in the American economy, and the Americans can build all the data centers that they want in the Emirates. And, of course, the direct connection with Israel, which is part of the IMEC as well. Assuming the IMEC one day would happen — probably not.

The link between Haifa and the UAE is essential. And they still have to build it. These railways don't exist. If you sum it all up, I think it's over 1,000 kilometers of rails that still have to be built linking Israel with the UAE. So they made their bet even before the war. And obviously, they provided their own territory for U.S. attacks against Iran. The Iranians won't forget that ever. There will be payback. It has already started, but it can get much, much more hardcore later on. And if the Americans try something funny in the next few days, once again, rumor mill — but we have to deal with the rumor mill as well — there could be something happening within the weekend. Well, the Iranians already said what's going to happen. It's very, very simple. We attack Fujairah, we attack Yanbu, and we close the Bab al-Mandeb. That's it. Can you recover from that? No, nobody can.

#Glenn

Yeah, when Yemen closes down the Red Sea, I think then it's game over.

#Pepe Escobar

That's game over. And everybody knows that, Glenn. Everybody doing models or whatever, everybody knows that. And that's why nothing happened with the Bab al-Mandeb so far, because this is the ultimate joker. Then it's total collapse. The global economy is already collapsing even

more because of this absolutely ridiculous blockade, which is not blockading anything. Ships continue to go through. And it's fascinating because if you navigate in the Iranian territorial waters, Pakistani territorial waters, and Indian territorial waters, very close to the coastline, that's it.

You go from Karachi to Mumbai. Very simple. And I'm sure a lot of cargoes now are doing that. Tankers are doing that now. Why do you need to navigate in the middle of the Arabian Sea? You know the Americans are there. Or at least they tell us. We still don't know where exactly they are placed. There's no visual identification of where these destroyers are placed — somewhere between the Arabian Sea and the southern Indian Ocean. That's very, very far away from the coastline of Iran and Pakistan.

#Glenn

Given that they're so far away, the region gets so stretched out as well, which means a lot of ships. So just from the amount of manpower, the ships being used, I mean, they're really exhausting their resources, making matters worse at some point. You know, where do you dock? Where do you do the maintenance? A lot of these are going to make them very vulnerable. So it's a dangerous strategy they're playing if we're going to back into full-out war. Mm-hmm.

#Glenn

The U.S. could be in very bad shape.

#Pepe Escobar

Yes.

#Pepe Escobar

If we go back to war, these ships are going to be attacked by missiles and drones — swarms of missiles and drones. There's no question. The Iranians are just waiting. This will be part of the war 2.0, one of the first things. Okay, let's attack the U.S. Navy, wherever they are.

#Glenn

As the Chinese would say, "Interesting times." Oh, wow. Thank you very much for taking the time.

#Pepe Escobar

My pleasure, Glenn. I hope to see you in Russia soon.

#Glenn

Yeah, I'm going soon, so thank you.

#Pepe Escobar

Cheers. Take care. Bye-bye.