

Max Blumenthal: US Strategy Collapse: Persian Gulf States Fear Collapse

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Max, looking at the war since the start of this war, since the beginning of this war, they basically said regime change, then the nuclear program will be on right now. Nobody knows what the strategy is on the part of the Trump administration. Every time he's talking about it, he says the only problem I have is the nuclear program — no nuclear bombs, no nuclear... but is there any sort of, you know, basis for their strategy? What do they want? Because since they want, in the case of the Strait of Hormuz, in the case of what is happening with the war on the ground and with the case of the ceasefire, I haven't seen anything being laid out by the Trump administration or somehow drawn by the administration to show the public what is the objective. What are the objectives, if it's more than one? What is that, in your opinion?

#Max

Trump doesn't care. He never cared. And those around Trump knew that the objectives were — the rational figures who would be in the Pentagon brass, for example, seemed to understand that the objectives were unachievable, which is why Dan Kane, CENTCOM chief, lobbied Trump against this war and also understood what we talked about before — the procurement issues and the potential to run out of cruise missiles and interceptors. The Strait of Hormuz issue was never discussed, I think. And it's unclear if Donald Trump actually would have understood it. But the Strait of Hormuz issue was never discussed. Trump was simply told this war would be handled and resolved through a series of decapitation strikes and that the Iranian people would rise up and overthrow the Islamic Republic.

And he went in. And when he was told that in meetings with Netanyahu, where Netanyahu assumed the head of the table, as reported in The New York Times — something that didn't surprise me and echoed a report that we published at The Grayzone a year before about how Trump was kind of manipulated around the 12-Day War — Netanyahu sits at the head of the table in the White House Situation Room with the director of the Mossad behind him on a kind of live stream, David Barnea.

And he tells Donald Trump that this can all be easily achieved through a quick series of assassinations. They have the coordinates of Iran's leader. He's going to be at his office on February 28th. Initiate this now. We can do this, and then it'll all be over.

Netanyahu knew that by enacting that assassination and just getting Trump to say yes initially, it would drag the U.S. into a long-term conflict that would benefit Israel, whose goal is the destruction of the Iranian state, but also the direction of U.S. force into a regional focal point and away from Asia and other deeper priorities. And so he got that out of Trump. But in this report, Marco Rubio, even John Ratcliffe, a very pro-Israel CIA director, and everyone except Pete Hegseth — I think Dan Kane as well — all said what Netanyahu is saying is complete hogwash. It's all a lie. I think Marco Rubio called it absolute bullshit. But none of them stood up to Donald Trump. And Donald Trump made the decision on his own to authorize that strike and set himself on this crazy train to economic and political ruin. And now here we are.

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I think what Donald Trump is trying, because many people were arguing that Netanyahu is — actually, I did this many times — I said Netanyahu is running the show in Washington. But Donald Trump is not helping himself. Every time he comes out and says that there is no difference between Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu. At this particular moment, how do you see the administration? Is there any sort of difference between the Trump administration and the Netanyahu administration?

#Max

I think there is an anxiety among political operatives who are directing Trump's operation about the perception within the Republican base that Netanyahu is in charge. And the collapse of—there's a new poll, a Pew Research poll—showing that American men under 50 now have a negative 47% net favorability of Israel. Negative 47. Which means a 23-point drop from 2020. American men under 50, that's pretty much Donald Trump's base. Well, that's a part of Donald Trump's base—white men. And they are disgusted by Donald Trump's submission and prostration before Netanyahu's agenda. That's what this is about. I mean, there's a meme in American social media of guys being in traffic screaming, like, "Why, Netanyahu?" or like, "Netanyahu, stop the traffic! Open up this lane, Netanyahu!" They're basically saying Netanyahu controls everything because they see him controlling Donald Trump to the point where Donald Trump is utterly destroying himself and alienating not just his followers, but his closest America First co-conspirators.

Tucker Carlson being one example, who today said there's nothing he regrets more than supporting Donald Trump. He's haunted by it. The collapse of support for Israel among the future generation of the Republican Party is definitely frightening these operatives. And they just want this war to go away. But it won't, and it can't, because of the hold that Israel has over Donald Trump. How does Donald Trump find an off-ramp? Which way can he—how can he extricate himself from this war

without allowing Iran to declare victory and to have, like, you know, remixes of Majid Entezami's Khoramshahr Suite playing in the streets of Tehran? I don't think there's a way.

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That's a trap. It's unbelievable what he has done to himself. But, Max, how the war has changed the Middle East with all these big, beautiful bases—U.S. bases in these GCC countries for such a long time. They have been paying for everything there, everything. And what is the problem, the outcome of the war so far for the United States? Together, I don't know—how do you find the perception of the GCC countries, on the part of them, and how they perceive the whole situation with the war as time goes by? Because their economy has been, as you've mentioned with the case of the UAE, their economy is facing huge challenges right now. It's the same for Qatar. It's the same for Saudi Arabia. Kuwait is unbelievably devastated. Bahrain is the same. What is happening to the GCC countries, in your opinion?

#Max

Yeah, it's sad. I know people who have left the UAE for obvious reasons. Their children didn't like the bombing, for example. And that's many people. I know other people who are still staying there and other people around the region. One thing they all seem to have in common is they're afraid to talk to me about what's actually going on because they're afraid of those governments, because those governments are hacking into or able to surveil everyone's WhatsApp exchanges. They're spying on everyone.

They have locked up someone, a journalist I've known for many years, Ahmed Shehab Eldin, in Kuwait, who is an American citizen, an American-Kuwaiti citizen, who filmed or published footage of the downing of one of the F-15s by a Kuwaiti aircraft, which is a very strange incident. Like, how do you down three American F-15s by accident? And he's now been locked away, essentially disappeared, and faces a tribunal. Bahraini citizens have been tortured to death for protesting. The level of repression is so extreme in these countries because they are facing the brink of extinction of not just their economic model, but their very existence.

And if Trump goes back into another round of conflict at a time of extremely hot weather, everyone needs air conditioning, when you need more water in these regions, then, uh, that's going to be the end. Because all Iran has to do is strike the desalination plants, strike some oil infrastructure, energy infrastructure, and there will be a mass exodus. And why would anyone come back? Dubai's entire model is based on tax-free living for extremely wealthy foreigners. Well, they're not going to be able to provide that anymore because it will not be economically viable to do so. I mean, I'm hearing that hundreds of hotels are closing in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. So that's the legacy of this war.

That's what Donald Trump decided to do after the Emiratis and Saudis paid Jared Kushner billions of dollars and paid Trump. I think Trump walked away, he and his family, with nearly a billion dollars

after his last trip to the Gulf. And what did they get? What did they get in exchange for that? And that's the decision they made too. And they deserve the consequences of that decision because they made that decision instead of making peace with the largest regional power, Iran, and finding a form of regional accommodation. The U.S. bases, I can't imagine them coming back. It's going to cost too much, and I don't know how they're going to be able to— I just don't know how they're going to be able to build them back, which means the extortion racket—sorry, the protection racket—that has governed U.S. relations with countries like Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait for so many decades is over.

There's no one to protect your oil fields. And those bases were also there to protect those hated dictatorships from their own populations. So they're going to have to deal with their own populations in a different way. And I don't think the Al Khalifa family has any answer for that. And then if there's another phase of this war, we'll see more power projected from Israel, which is now proposing to actually host U.S. bases directly on its soil as an alternative to, for example, the Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar or the Al Salem Base in Kuwait. Or we could even see Azerbaijan used more aggressively to attack Iran.

And then there's another factor here, though, regionally, that I think is worth mentioning, which is the constant threats from influential figures within the Israeli military intelligence apparatus and the political sphere to attack Turkey after the war on Iran is over, which is a message to another major regional power, a mid-level power that has a population deeply sympathetic to Palestine, deeply anti-Israel, and which is held back by Erdogan using clever, intense anti-Israel rhetoric while shipping gas through Azerbaijan to Israel, becoming Israel's second-largest gas supplier while remaining a member of NATO and maintaining a NATO listening station on his soil directed at Iran.

Turkey has been trying to kind of play—Turkey under AKP leadership has been trying to mollify the anger and indignation of the public after watching the Gaza genocide, while currying the favor of its imperial masters to prevent the collapse of an economy that is deeply tied into the Western financial structure. And Israel is threatening to smash that contradiction down into bits and force the anger of the Turkish public to the surface. So it's really forcing it—it's time for Turkey to decide at this point, because the writing is on the wall. If Israel achieves its objective in Iran, they will be next. And NATO has been rendered meaningless by Trump, so Turkey must realize NATO and Article 5 will not matter in the face of an Israeli threat.

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Here is what the Iranian foreign minister moments ago tweeted on X: "Blocking Iran's ports is an act of war and thus a violation of the ceasefire. Striking a commercial vessel and taking its crew hostage is an even greater violation. Iran knows how to neutralize restrictions, how to defend its interests, and how to resist bullying." I think, Max, what is happening with the case of Donald Trump is that he has gone too far with the war, with the devastation of the radars in the region. As you've mentioned, Israel is asking for a new base in Israel because they're short of radars.

And without communication with these radars, air defense systems are not going to work properly. And not only that, they're short of interceptors, and there are many reports from Israel. We don't see that much footage coming out of Israel showing how this has influenced or devastated some parts of Israel. But it seems that reports show Israel has to spend a lot of money to rebuild what has been devastated so far. And making new radars, making new bases, is not going to be something overnight. It's going to take time. That's why I think Donald Trump is in a very bad, desperate situation, because he has to make a deal.

He has to make some sort of agreement. If not, he has to continue the war. As these reports on CNN and various outlets are telling us, the United States is short of cruise missiles. Because looking at the offensive capability and the defensive capability, and the case of radars and Donald Trump achieving some sort of agreement with the current situation in the Strait of Hormuz and the nuclear program of Iran, it's too difficult, in my opinion, for Donald Trump to get out of what he has made for himself, being capable of selling that he's winning—somehow he's winning. How do you see the chaos that he has made for himself?

#Max

Well, I think I've been explaining how I see that throughout this conversation. I don't have that much to add there. I would say there are different possibilities here. While I would suspect that Donald Trump's blockading of Iranian ports, attacks on Iranian shipping, the fact that there are Iranian ships with 160 million barrels already at sea, which will allow Iran to continue exporting oil through July—which is probably past the point where Donald Trump can continue the blockade politically and economically—would lead me to believe that Donald Trump is going to authorize military action again. And it will be terrorist military action attacking civilian infrastructure because the military objectives have all failed or petered out.

They have this mantra inside the Beltway of tactical victory, strategic failure—that the U.S. and Israel have achieved a tactical victory but a strategic failure. What is the tactical victory? I don't even know what that means. I don't know what tactics have—what have they done? Destroyed some part of Iran's conventional navy? Okay. Why is the Strait of Hormuz closed? Because the IRGC has a navy, and you haven't destroyed it. And the navy can be concealed in mountain bases. They're small boats. They can still attack shipping. They can attack your destroyers with cruise missiles. So where's even the tactical victory? The only thing they have left is terrorist destruction. But that kind of hints at another scenario, which is, you know, to leave regime change for another day.

Destroy Iran's steel plants. Destroy as much of Iran's infrastructure as possible. And try to render it poor and place it under harsh sanctions like Syria, after the dirty war—the 12-year dirty war—and the imposition of the Caesar sanctions, which put 90% of the Syrian population below the poverty line. And eventually, the Syrian state sort of collapsed, and Jabhat al-Nusra just walked right into

Damascus. I wonder if, by the way, Ahmed Shara regrets that today, after he had to sit through, like, a basketball halftime show featuring a Missy Elliott song. It was like watching—I don't know if you saw that video of Al-Shara, but it was like the perfect punishment for him.

Anyway, this kind of serious scenario lingers, and I think that's been discussed by the Mossad director too, or hinted at by the Mossad director, David Barnea, when he declared this week that the Mossad was moving towards phase three, which was kind of a frozen conflict in which the Mossad would intensify its sabotage operations, its attempts to arm so-called protesters, regime change rioters, and promote instability and economic destruction and ruin inside Iran. The U.S. is also playing Globocop. It arrested an Iranian citizen in Panama and accused him of violating U.S. export licenses. So it's basically taking Iranians hostage around the globe to use as leverage against Iran in negotiations.

But the one difference between Syria and Iran is, again, the Strait of Hormuz. I mean, there are many differences, of course. Iran's like a major regional power, an industrial power. It's not facing an internal civil war. But the Strait of Hormuz, as long as Iran maintains control there, it can extract revenue, which it can use for reconstruction, which would effectively defeat the Syria strategy. So, again, I don't see a way around another attempted round of conflict here for Donald Trump unless he simply is willing to listen to reason and do what his base and what the American public wants. But that's not who he's been listening to throughout this war.

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The case of Lebanon is important, Max, because before this first round of negotiations, it was a precondition on the part of the Iranians just to put it out. And if we go after some sort of ceasefire, it's going to be on all fronts, on all fronts. They were talking about Lebanon. And as we know today, there is some sort of ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon, while Israel is defining a yellow line in the southern part of Lebanon the way they did in Gaza yesterday. And how do you see the situation in Lebanon? I don't see Iran letting that happen, because right now, with the escalation that has happened so far, I think those red lines are all removed from the calculation on the part of Tehran and Tel Aviv. And the case of Lebanon is so important for the Iranians.

#Max

Well, Iran stopped the... After the Black Wednesday massacre, in which over 350 Lebanese civilians were killed, Iran at least applied its deterrence to guarantee that that wouldn't happen again in the near future. But we don't have... It's obviously not a real ceasefire if Israel's imposing a yellow line, imposing the Gaza model, destroying entire towns. You can see the footage that the Israeli military published from Aitaroun, where their soldiers are burning homes and burning shops and torching the entire city in order to make it uninhabitable and imposing this kind of, in order to impose a buffer zone.

They've destroyed Bint Jbeil, or large sections of Bint Jbeil, after failing to capture it, and are destroying Christian villages all across southern Lebanon, leading to these images of the desecration of Jesus Christ by an Israeli soldier, which has caused an international incident. This is not a ceasefire. It's not a ceasefire that's being enforced by Europe or by the U.S. No one is doing anything to stop Israel from illegally occupying Lebanon and carrying out societal destruction.

And when I say no one, that includes the Lebanese president, Joseph Aoun, who plans to send a delegation this Thursday to Washington to meet with Israeli Ambassador Yaakov Leiter, a former member of the terrorist Jewish Defense League and settler activist, as well as State Department representatives, to negotiate Lebanon's submission. They're going to negotiate extending the ceasefire, which means extending Israel's illegal occupation of southern Lebanon. And at the same time, Lebanon will be providing a green light for further violence as they call for the disarmament of the one group that had defended southern Lebanon from this kind of terrorism and religious warfare, which is Hezbollah.

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Yeah. Just to wrap up this session, Max, you had Spain, Slovenia, and Ireland?

#Max

I actually have to go now. Okay, okay.