

Alastair Crooke: Iran War Is Now a Global War for World Order

Alastair Crooke discusses how the Iran war has become a war of all-or-nothing: Iran is not going back to crippling sanctions and endless military threats, and it needs to break up the US-led international economic architecture. Time is on the side of Iran, and the US is becoming desperate. Crooke is a former British diplomat and the Founder of Conflicts Forum based in Beirut. He was formerly an advisor on Middle East issues to Javier Solana, the EU Foreign Policy Chief. Follow the Substack of Alastair Crooke: <https://conflictsforum.substack.com/> Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glennDiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glennDiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glennDiesen> Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdiesen Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back. Today is April 27th, 2026, and I have the great pleasure of being joined by Alastair Crooke, who is a renowned British diplomat and negotiator who worked for decades on addressing conflicts in the Middle East. Alastair Crooke is also the founder and director of the Conflicts Forum, and the link to his great Substack can be found in the description. So thank you very much for coming back on the program.

#Alastair Crooke

Thank you. Thank you. It's a pleasure to join you.

#Glenn

So it seems that we are at risk of a greater war with both Iran and Russia. But I thought we could start with Iran. First of all, there's a lot of confusion here. That is, are the peace negotiations still going on? Is the ceasefire actually still in place? But overall, I also see the problem of how we can end this war. Is the United States seeking an end to the Iran war? And if so, what do you think is the possible off-ramp or exit strategy for the United States?

#Alastair Crooke

Well, there is a lot of propaganda and there's a lot of confusion. Most of it is propaganda. A lot of it is propaganda. So, I mean, okay, because there has been a substantial change lately, and we ought

to try and understand that. But first of all, to say that there was never a proposal for Arachi to meet with Kushner or Whitcock in Islamabad — this was a fantasy created by Trump. It doesn't refer to any plans or proposals. Trump has said very clearly, well, you know, there was really no point in having any talks with them until they get their act together and produce a plan of what they want. We don't know what they want. But of course he does, because what Iran wants was set out very clearly in the 10-point plan that was given to the Americans for the Islamabad talks, and which Trump said was a realistic basis for discussion, if you recall, at that time.

So they have put out very clearly in those endpoints their negotiating position, and they haven't changed it except now. And for some time, I've been saying, and I looked through and reread the JCPOA, even though I've been one way or another dealing with it for more than 20 years. I reread it and I looked at that and I thought, what on earth would Iran want to go back to that? It's like, you know, being on parole from prison. You know, you've been on parole for a few weeks, leave, and then, you know, the prison gate is opening and you're going to go back into your cage. I mean, not a literal cage, but a cage of being surrounded by American military bases everywhere, the cage of sanctions, of tariffs, of UN resolutions, of IAEA inspections. I mean, would you want to go back to that?

And what's happened over the last few days, and what Arachi's been busy with, what he went to Pakistan to do, was to tell them their new negotiation principles, which are basically not that different except for one bombshell difference: they're not prepared to discuss the nuclear issue. They're not prepared to discuss it until they have resolved the points about the war, about the blockade of Hormuz, about the attacks on them, on Iranians, and also the sanctions that are being imposed — you know, that tankers are being seized or rescued and seized by U.S. officials. So they said, this is it for the moment. These are the things we're going to discuss. We're going to discuss Hormuz, and we're going to discuss ceasefire or not. It may not be.

And we're going to discuss the ending of the attacks on us and on others like Hezbollah in Lebanon. So we're going to deal with that. Maybe later we'll talk about communitarianism. That's what they say. And Khalifa did a tweet, I think, last night, and he said, Iran, you know, Trump keeps saying he has all the cards. But listen to our cards. One is Hormuz. We control Hormuz, and we'll continue. We are able to control Bab al-Mandab and the Red Sea, and we can control pipelines. And what have they got on the other side? Well, they've got a naval blockade, and the question really—he didn't put it in these terms, but I'm saying—which is the shorter timeline?

The timeline between the Iranian blockade, which is passable — it's open to specific vessels — but what is the timeline between that creating serious damage in the Western economy and the timeline of the Trump American naval blockade, which is not very much observed, which is really quite porous? A lot of vessels have been passing through this channel. How long before that puts real pain on Iran? And the answer is, contrary to what Trump believes — that after the 26th of April, yesterday, Iran's oil supplies are all going to crash and they'll be broke — it's not true.

I mean, first of all, Iran is continuing to get tankers out by following the coast very closely into territorial waters, getting their tankers out, loaded tankers out. They have been earning more in a month of the war. They're earning twice what they ever earned in the best years beforehand. Just one day, you know, four tankers leaving Kharg Island a little while ago produced an income with 7.5 million barrels of oil, produced an income of just under a billion, \$815 million. They have oil at sea. They have something before the war — they put 200 million barrels at sea.

#Glenn

They have 130 left, I think. Well, 100 to 130.

#Alastair Crooke

So they can go on for months, really. And in any case, it's a misunderstanding of the nature of Iran and the nature of their strategy to think they're about to capitulate or to surrender. And we go into the reasons for that. But they are not just the usual nation-state that you take out a baseball bat and bash them and take away all their money, and then they'll come on their knees and beg for your indulgence. So, I mean, Iran is in many ways a very different vehicle. It started as a revolt against Western modernity with the influence of Sayyid Qutb and others. But it was always a civilizational state, civilizational and a revolutionary state, and not just a sort of 19th-century, linear, autocratic state — the nation that tried to enforce a national identity.

They deliberately didn't enforce a national identity, and they felt, you know, Islam was a civilizational element in it. So I don't think—I think that, you know, the calculation, the Iranian steel is in their favor, and I don't think they are thinking of—I don't know whether they intend ultimately, if they've got the right deal, to talk about the nuclear issue. I don't think there's any chance of Iran handing over 430 kilos of enriched uranium to the Americans, ever. So we're in a slightly new era, which is why I think there's mischief going on in Washington, because Trump's hopes, I think, for finding a quick solution to this conflict are evaporating. I know there are people who feel that a solution could be put together. I don't see a path to a solution, and I can explain why if you would like me to.

#Glenn

Actually, that's my next question. I was going to ask what the prospects are for a negotiated settlement. First, you described returning to the JCPOA as almost a prison. It does feel like this is the war objective of Iran, though — that it's a prison break in which control of Hormuz is essentially the main instrument toward this end. Because if they have the Strait of Hormuz, where they can set up a toll, set conditions for transit, essentially the countries who put sanctions on Iran, who threaten it with war by hosting bases or actually attacking — all of them can be, well, to some extent, disciplined if they want to have proper access.

So it seems very critical for Iran. If they don't want to go back to the past decades of crippling sanctions and the threat of war all the time, then the Strait of Hormuz is non-negotiable. So I wanted to ask how you see the possibility, therefore, of an actual negotiated settlement. But in making matters more complicated, you can throw in Israel's territorial ambitions and, of course, the desire to crack Lebanon like it did Syria. So how do you see the possibility of actually meeting halfway somewhere in a negotiation?

#Alastair Crooke

Well, going back to what you just said, I would just add to it — I'm sure you intended it — but we've seen supply lines beginning, there's a sort of rumbling of catastrophe already apparent because various crucial elements to us by then pass through Hormuz as well as oil and gas — helium, sulfuric acid, gallium — all of these things pass through. And, you know, what happens is that they go on getting slightly, slightly worse, and then they break. And when they break, we in the West are going to feel the consequences directly. There won't be petrol in the petrol stations or gasoline in the gasoline stations. There will be difficulty getting our children to school as a consequence. There will not be the food that you want.

You will not have aluminum foil in the shops any longer. Aluminum comes through almost overwhelmingly. So, I mean, you know, we're in this netherworld at the moment. We all have heard that it's going to be so serious, yet it hasn't had an impact. In Australia it has, in Ireland it has, where there are protests about not being able to get cars fueled. But it's about all the sort of economic experts of the West that stay in. So what I'm saying is that I don't think there's a path through this — well, certainly not one that's going to be very easily achieved. That is, there are two major roadblocks in this process. And the first major roadblock is Trump. I mean, I'm not just talking about his mental state, which we all know is a contributory.

I mean, in this series, a dominant factor, because he still runs the show in the White House. He hasn't been, not like Biden, but he's largely conservative, removed from it. He's very much in control of it. In control — I say loosely in control. But nonetheless, he likes to present himself as being there. But more than that is the roots of this, in many ways, in his feeling about Iran, has been his dislike of Obama and the sense of rivalry that he's always felt with Obama. So what he's always said was that Obama's JCPOA was terrible, it was awful, it was defective, and I can do much better. But he needs something like that — a better JCPOA than Obama — to prove that he, Trump, was a better negotiator. There's a long history to this sort of bitter rivalry.

And when you look at this, I mean, even before what I said at the beginning about the change in tactics, I mean, there wasn't going to be a better JCPOA coming out of this. It would be, if there was a JCPOA2, it would be more favorable to Iran than the first one. Otherwise, it would not. So it would have to be more favorable. And that would not go well with Trump, nor would it go well with Netanyahu. And so the first thing is, you know, the only thing that could really assuage him — and

he, in advance, recognized it — was the one thing that could do it would be the Iranians would suddenly hand over 430 kilos of enriched uranium. He would hold it up like a football trophy at the end of a game and say, look, I've won. We've succeeded.

#Glenn

There'll never be a nuclear weapon.

#Alastair Crooke

Well, I don't think Iran is going to do that because they realize this is a great asset in these negotiations, and they're not going to hand it over. But also, you know, Trump didn't like it when Vance started talking from Islamabad. By all the reports we hear, when Vance was saying, you know, well, yes, they will continue to charge a fee on Hormuz, and they will have control over it, and they'll share it with Oman, etc., Trump was like, but then they will become more powerful. You know, Iran will become one of the big states, because if they control Hormuz and get fees for the next, you know, half year or a year, I mean, they'll have money rolling in.

So supposing Vance went back to these talks, you know, with his two minders, Kushner and Vance. If he went back and he came back and said, look, we've got a deal on 3.6% uranium enrichment, and the timeline would be extended, and there would be monitoring and all of that. Would Trump say OK, or would he say no? But this isn't a win for me because this is just the JCPOA. This is Obama's JCPOA. And this doesn't show that I've achieved anything. So I think there's a real problem there. And of course, there's still the other problem of his mental condition. I think various people have spoken as of late who've got more direct knowledge. Robert Barnes and others have explained how... it's more than just being erratic.

It's a sense of confabulation taking place with Xu Jiangda and Pepe, unable to take criticism, unable to really understand what's going on. I mean, very serious. And so one question is, you know, well, how would the team manage this if things get worse? How would they manage Trump? Not the conflict, but how would they manage Trump? I mean, it seems from the reporting that not the Saturday, but the Saturday before, General Cain said no. And it seems even this last Saturday, when there was a meeting about Iran, there was some sort of agreement by the team when there was a proposal for further mass bombing of electricity and infrastructure. All of them, maybe bar one, said, no, this is a war crime.

This is not a mission we can accept. Yes. Can this continue? I don't know. I mean, you'd have to ask someone better equipped in the American field how long this can go on like this, because there's no real way I can see for them to change that so easily. I mean, you know, the 25th Amendment is unlikely to be possible. Are we going to be prepared to go down the route of some sort of indictment or impeachment? But this is the second reason I say it's extremely—this is the first barrier that I described to coming to some sort of agreement. You know, if it's not about the nuclear issue, what

would it be? I mean, the next stage then would possibly be another attempt to go to Isfahan and take out—if it's ready in Isfahan—to go and take out the enriched material from Isfahan.

After what happened, I mean, it was, you know, Joe Kent keeps telling him, well, you know, if you go on like this, you end up being like Jimmy Carter, after Jimmy Carter's disastrous attempt to rescue the hostages from Iran—the hostages seized in the embassy there by Iran. And when the helicopters crashed, if you remember, it was a disaster. He was lost in the presidency. So the panic keeps filling in there, and I think it hurts. So I don't know if they'll do that. Well, that only leaves what's there—bombing, carpet bombing. And it hasn't succeeded in destroying Iran's missile capabilities. So we're talking about either just repeating bombing mountains pretty pointlessly, or it will be more likely just bombing civilian infrastructure, around people, knocking down blocks of apartments, which you have to ask the lawyers if that's going to be considered a war crime or not.

#Glenn

Anyway, maybe he will double down and say, "Well, I've got to put pressure on them."

#Alastair Crooke

They've got to agree, because otherwise my chances for the midterms are fading very, very far. We've really got to put pressure. And so I don't really see what it is that Trump could obtain from these events. Iran is not about to, I mean, fully open. I was listening to some of the Gulf states, and they said, we can't have tolls there. They must be open. It must be without tolls. We can't accept that. You know, it's not possible, which is one of the reasons why Pakistan is, of course, very close to Saudi Arabia. And Saudi Arabia—oh, we can't have tolls on Hormuz. It's got to be as it used to be before, on the 27th of February. Come on. I mean, what do you mean? You know, you don't like tolls.

I mean, nor do I. I used to be able to read newspapers without paying anything. You know, you go online and you could read them. And then suddenly there was a subscription and a toll posted on it. And of course, you know, I got used to reading them for free. And it's always an adjustment, a painful adjustment, when you have to pay. If I drive a car on the motorway here, I have to pay a toll. I mean, you know, grow up. This is how things are. And that proposal to put a toll is, I'm not a lawyer, but I think it's legal under the UN Treaty on the Law of the Sea, because all of Hormuz, the actual Strait of Hormuz, is within Iran's territorial water or Oman's territorial water on the other side. There's no international water there at all. It's too narrow.

So they will continue with this, I believe. And so this doesn't offer a very easy solution for Trump to deal with. His barricade, his naval barricade, is porous. Iranian vessels are going in and they're coming out, and we've seen that. Voyage Shipping put it in the Financial Times. And I think Trump was rather angry that it said something like 30 Iranian ships in the last few days. This was a few days ago that had traveled the straits at this time. So where is the solution other than sort of

bombing Iran? Which won't be a solution, because it won't cause the Iranians to come back. I mean, one of the things that is so clear is the change in atmosphere in Iran. I mean, there is a new energy, a new sense of the revolution updating. It's the young more than the sort of...

#Glenn

Oh, the generations who participated in the Revolution.

#Alastair Crooke

No, these are Basijis. These are great columns of young women armed to the teeth, going out onto the streets every night in support of the Iranian state. I mean, it's something that is going to have long-term impacts, I believe, beyond Iran in places like Russia and China, too. That's what I hear, that, you know, this sort of robust expression of a rejection of one, you know, reality and the determination to find and achieve their own sovereignty. And that makes it, you know, is also actually based in disagreement with America. You ask the young, I mean, you can see it. It's on many of the videos. You ask them about what they see the structure, and they say, why are we negotiating with America at all?

Why are our leaders talking to us? Why? When they're bombing our houses and our schools and our hospitals? No. Because the mood is hardening at another level as well, which is important. It's not reflected in the Western media and their understanding. But you've only got to look at the videos, and the evidence is there. I mean, you see these women going out to defend bridges and power stations and so on. Maybe they're threatened. And then you come to the second barricade. Supposing you find a solution with Trump, how do you find a solution with Israel? And I wrote a paper for the Center for Substance about how, you know, Israel had changed.

Some 15 years ago, I said you cannot go on understanding Israel from sort of secular, rational, Enlightenment-type structures. You have to understand that it's becoming a conflict of religious poles in the Middle East. And it really has changed further in that direction because what we see is that Israel has now become much more messianic, apocalyptic, eschatological—70%, basically, of the Jewish-Israeli supporters. And the most important thing, I think, is that it's not some passing moment that is going to come and go with the elections, and then we'll be back to an Ashkenazi secular regime, because, as the great Jewish historian Gershom Scholem has written, messianism has been a very important impulse in the Jewish faith over the years, from the 1600s to the 19th century, with Yitro Prance and others.

And he predicted some years ago that religious Zionism, which he said in recent decades has aligned with Likud and the settlements—and this is him—operates as a militant, apocalyptic, and radical messianic movement that tries to force the end by demanding that the state engage in, for example, massive territorial control. I.e., this is Hemingway thinking—they demand territorial conquest for end-of-times reasons. So forcing the end is about forcing redemption and the messianic age coming into

being. So my point about this was, you know, if you go back to the Reagan administration, when they tried to, and to a certain extent did impose restraint on Israel, is this likely in the new atmosphere of Israel? I mean, are they going to accept restraint because that might be in America's interest?

#Glenn

And it is in America's interest.

#Alastair Crooke

Let's be quite clear. Of course it's in America's interest. They don't want the whole Middle East set alight in a sort of move towards Armageddon. They want that so that they call for restraint. But look, you know, is it reasonable to think that that's going to happen? I think not. Because I think, and if you listen to the latest statement by Katz, threatening everything against, you know, that Israel will attack this disgusting country of Iran, will move it—I mean, the language was extraordinary. It was purely apocalyptic language coming out of the defense minister of Israel. So I don't think restraint is going to be possible, and it's not possible because in Israel, Netanyahu's under huge pressure because the people are saying, well, your war on Iran failed.

#Glenn

It didn't achieve any of its objectives.

#Alastair Crooke

And your war on Hezbollah, which you told us was so successful—so successful Hezbollah had been eliminated—now we find that was never true. And you tell us, of course, that the war on Iran is going to be a great success.

#Glenn

It's not true.

#Alastair Crooke

So he is in dire trouble. So he needs the success. And so what you see in the press, in the Israeli press, even today, this morning, is that we have to get the Americans to continue the war. Is this in the American interest? I doubt it. But this is, if you like, the messianic interest of Israel—to get the US to continue the war. And so what's going to happen? Well, when you look at it, when there is a

divergence of interest between the United States—who, I would argue, actually, the interest of the Republican Party, the interest of Trump personally—is to find a solution, to an end to the war. And that is the American interest, largely.

Not everyone in America agrees with that. Mark Levin wouldn't. But if you put it this way, I mean, I would say actually, at the end of the day on this, Israel doesn't give a damn about America, and it doesn't give a damn for the Gulf states either. It has something which surpasses all those rational, you know, mechanistic strategies of saying, but it's not in your—I mean, surely it's not in Israel's interest to go to a major war with Iran. Well, I remember Sartre six or seven years ago in a video to the Likud, which I watched then. And he said, listen, this was the plan. We're going to get rid of all the Arabs from the land of Israel.

But I have to tell you, to do this, to complete the plan, we need a major crisis or a big, big war. And then we will finish the plan. In other words, you know, to tell them that if you do something silly, you'll get Armageddon. They want Armageddon with this. They see this as a path towards salvation, redemption. So I find it very difficult to see a simple path. I don't think the idea that Iran can be persuaded by Russia and China to go back to a JCPOA agreement is now on the cards. And now Iran has said on the record publicly, no, we're not talking a nuclear issue. Now we're talking almost, and we're talking economic cards, and we're talking about sanctions and tariffs.

#Alastair Crooke

This is going to be the discussion.

#Alastair Crooke

You know, maybe if all that's resolved, who knows, we can talk beneath your issues again.

#Glenn

Yeah, so, well, that's not the United States, but I saw von der Leyen from the European Union making the point that sanctions will not come off Iran because of, you know, values. The regime has to change this and that. And it's intended to sound very principled, but it also comes off as, well, delusional at times. But they do the same with China and Russia. That is, if they fail to achieve anything, I think part of it is because there's difficulty in transitioning to a multipolar world, because being what they want to get prevents them from seeing what they actually can get, or how they want the world to be. They fail to see how the world actually is, and they often frame it in morality.

#Alastair Crooke

That's my point about mechanistic, sort of secular thinking, that, you know, is so embedded in their particular grasp of reality that they're completely incapable of seeing that others have different ways

of thinking and see reality from a different perspective. And they can't understand that. And, of course, this is why I said I can't see Iran going back to this JCPOA agreement, because they know. I mean, we're talking all these seven years since the first sanctions were put on. They're never going to do this.

Not while Israel has any safety. And, of course, von der Leyen is representing Israel as much as anyone else in this process. No, of course, there must be containment, sanctions, a siege on Iran. Break the Iranian spirit. And that also gets some support from Gulf states, but principally from Israel and from elements within the United States. So this is why I keep saying, you know, Iran's aim in this war is to break the whole paradigm, the master paradigm of putting Iran—you know, you put it in the words of the Gerber. Exactly.

#Glenn

Just a final question. It seems like this is then a war of attrition, both in the military sense but also economic. That is, who can absorb the most pain and, of course, inflict pain on the other side. Do you think it's clear, though, that time is on the side of the Iranians? Or how do you see it? Because it seems all sides are under great pressure now.

#Alastair Crooke

Oh, no, the time is on the side of the Iranians in an unqualified way. They have been, I mean, they have been making more money during this war. I mean, revenues. I don't keep talking about businessmen, but money, revenues to the state have come in far, far higher since they've had control of the state, almost straight, almost in charge of this money. And, you know, Iran is not short of money, and it has, you know, probably 130 million barrels of oil still at sea, on the sea, that they will sell off gradually. They can keep going for a long time. They may start charging fees for passage through the Bab al-Mandab Strait, too.

Whereas we in the West are closer, and as I say, I don't think people have appreciated that we have about two weeks before it's going to really hit. And when it hits, you know, people won't be able to afford to fly. They won't be able to easily get their cars refueled. I mean, there are many things. The cost of electricity and things are going to go shooting up. And Europe is going to be in dire pain. We are out here in Italy, and there's a huge cost of living crisis. You know, there has been no increase in real wages since Italy joined the Euro. No increase in real incomes since then. That's a long, long time to sort of squeeze and squeeze and squeeze down.

And, you know, people, when they're being in the protest and they're creating a mistake, how do you expect people to go on when, you know, the income that they're getting has run out by week three of the month and they have, you know, four weeks in a month? I mean, you know, it's just not working. So I think, you know, the pain is going to come very much, you know, to the economic elites, the ones that are trading it. But I just want to say one thing, if you've got a minute before—I

know you want to finish—but I will just say that this is also something much bigger. It is, and this is why it's part of a global war.

The other thing that Iran is fighting in this war is, if you like, the financial architecture—not just the dollar hegemony, not just the petrodollar, but the whole structure by which the Gulf states were sort of set up in 1973: keep the oil price high and transfer the enormous excess savings that came from this into Wall Street. And this underpinned the financialized world that we live in, which incidentally is the source of much of our problems because it's come at the price of, if you like, depressing or suppressing the real economy in favor of an economy that is all about trading, about making instant money on markets, but not by actually producing things in the real world. It's much quicker.

You can make a few hundred million in an afternoon by trading, insider trading on the markets. And one of the things that I think is going to be a long-term consequence of this is the complete destruction of markets and pricing that's taken place as a result of all of this insider trading, all these, I mean, complete disparities that people can see for themselves. You know, we pick up the paper and they say, oh, well, oil has just gone down, you know, from 98 to 93. Try buying a barrel of oil at that cost. It's just completely manipulated. If you want to buy a barrel of oil, you're going to have to pay over 200. Sri Lanka has just been paying well over 200 to get oil just to keep going.

#Glenn

I mean, so what's pricing?

#Alastair Crooke

What are markets? What is this market that says the price of oil is 93 when you actually have to pay double as much to get real, physical oil—oil that you can put into the system and keep it running? I mean, this is going to have a huge impact. So Iran, that's why the Iranians are saying, I'm sorry, but if you want to have relations with Iran, you've got to get rid of Microsoft and Amazon and all of your links. We don't want that type of economic umbrella which has suffocated us and been antagonistic to us for 47 years. The umbrella of the hegemony of the dollar and the hegemony of the military, coupled with the hegemony of a financialized world, coupled with, if you like, the sense of the control of the UN, the IEA, and all these structures that are employed against Iran. So I think that it has this global aspect in...

#Glenn

That's interesting. Well, I don't think Trump expected that this war, which was supposed to be a quick Venezuela-like operation, would turn into a war that could bring down the American-led world order. It's quite a dramatic development. Anyway, thank you very much, as always, for taking the time.

#Alastair Crooke

Always a pleasure to join you.