

# Larry Johnson: U.S. Desperation Grows as Iran Is Winning

Trump and Putin speak for 90 minutes as Russia offers its support to Iran, while the US is growing desperate as the war and economic war fail. Johnson is a former CIA intelligence analyst who also worked at the U.S. State Department's Office of Counterterrorism. Read Larry Johnson's Sonar21: <https://sonar21.com/> Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glennDiesen.substack.com/> X /Twitter: [https://x.com/Glenn\\_Diesen](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/gdieseng](http://buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng) Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

## #Glenn

Welcome back. We are joined today by Larry Johnson, a former CIA analyst and writer at Sonar21. I've left a link in the description. I'm glad to see you again, Larry. Yes, sir.

## #Larry Johnson

You've been staying busy.

## #Glenn

Yeah, I'm trying to.

## #Larry Johnson

Educating the world like a good professor.

## #Glenn

I'm trying to finish a book at the same time, so it's long hours.

## #Larry Johnson

Yeah, that's tough. Yeah.

## #Glenn

Well, I guess what makes it much more difficult this time with these wars now is that there's so much focus on narrative control. And with all this sea of propaganda, even unpacking reality has become a formidable task. And then, of course, you need analysis on top. Right. But when we look at something clear, undisputed, such as how the U.S. has depleted its weapons stockpiles and its inability to ramp up production to significant levels, it means that Trump, he can't really continue this high-intensity war with Iran. And I was wondering... you know, he has to respond to this in some way. He can't pack up and go home. So is this why you think Trump agreed—or not agreed—he pushed a ceasefire? Why he started these fake negotiations and also switched to economic warfare?

## **#Larry Johnson**

Yeah, I mean, the economic warfare part of it is particularly puzzling because it rests on some assumptions that, frankly, are false — that Iran is entirely, 99%, dependent upon the oil being loaded at Kharg Island, and that the U.S. blockade is effective. I mean, it's 100%. It can shut down anything. So let's first address that myth. Iran loads up an oil tanker, sails it out through the Strait of Hormuz, and keeps that oil tanker within 75 miles of Iran's shore, and can sell east — or, you know, the better it sells to the east. The United States Navy is not going to get closer than 200 miles from the Iranian coast because Iran has short-range ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and drones that can hit those ships.

If they get in any closer, they are vulnerable, and Iran will attack them and possibly sink them. So that's why I say this is all political theater, where the United States is touting, "See, we've seized this ship, we've seized that ship." Well, first there's the distance problem with the blockade. Iran can basically stay 100 miles close to their shore — the U.S. won't touch them. Now, once they get out of Iranian waters, then you get the second problem for the United States. If Iran, let's say, takes a convoy of 20 ships — 20 tankers sailing along the coast, 100 miles off the coast, 75 miles off the coast.

Then once they hit that spot in the Indian Ocean, from the Arabian Sea to the Indian Ocean, they then scatter. The United States does not have enough ships to stop and seize every one of them. They might be able to seize one or two, but that's not going to be crippling to the Iranian economy. And remember that if a U.S. naval vessel seizes a ship, then at least one of the naval vessels involved in that operation has to stay with that ship until it's taken to port or wherever. They don't just say, "All right, we captured you, tag, you're it," and then leave. No. So that's the second problem with this, quote, blockade.

The third problem with the blockade is with respect to imports. You know, the same principles apply in terms of things being brought into Iran by keeping them close to the Iranian shore until they reach Chabahar or Bandar Abbas. Chabahar or Bandar Abbas — they've got this wide-open border

with Pakistan. Pakistan reportedly has identified six different road routes and railroad routes into Iran that are being used to ship thousands of 40-foot containers that normally would be on a ship. So that may add some of the transportation costs a little bit. But the point is, Iran's not cut off.

And the entire economic war model that Scott Bessent is touting is cutting off Iran from all sources of potential support. And it's just impossible. They can't do it. So this statement that Trump will see what happens this week, the statement Trump released yesterday on his Truth Social page said that, oh, Iran, its leadership has collapsed. Nobody, nobody's in charge. And, you know, we're going to have to help them. I'm thinking, oh, that's curious. So if Trump turns around and says, okay, in order to help Iran, we're going to lift the blockade. So he could be setting that up as an excuse.

The problem with continuing to declare Iran's leadership as chaotic, broken, riven with strife—it's just not true. I started looking into it in earnest after I had a conversation with Professor Morandi, and he described how, when he enlisted in the Basij—he was a volunteer—the Basij was sort of subservient to the IRGC. He fought alongside the older brother of Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei. The younger brother, Mojtaba, actually enlisted in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. So I started saying, let's look at all the other key players. Let's look at Pezeshkian, the president. Let's look at Araqchi.

Let's look at Ghalibaf. And then, of course, let's look at the head of the IRGC. Obviously, he fought during that war. It turns out Pezeshkian was a medic and served with the IRGC. Araqchi, he was an enlisted guy in the IRGC. Ghalibaf, also IRGC. So basically, all your top five leaders, or people that are out front, they're all former IRGC. They've got ties together. And you remember what it was like during your time in the military. You formed friendships. Now, you guys weren't under fire, but you still formed friendships in the military that last a lifetime. And this is the same thing that happened to these guys.

I'm not saying they all served at the same time, but they all had that same shared experience of fighting what was, for Iran at the time, an existential war against a U.S.-funded entity. So in a way, what happened with Israel last summer and then what's happening now—they've experienced this before. So if anything, I would argue the current Iranian leadership is better prepared, better equipped by virtue of their shared experience in combat to deal with the current threats issued by the United States. Whereas by contrast, all the United States has got is Pete Hegseth. And, you know, he's not exactly the brightest light bulb in the tanning bed.

## **#Glenn**

Yeah, this new effort to shape the narrative is that the Iranian leadership is so divided. That's why it's impossible to get a deal. And also, this is why Trump, out of charity, is extending the ceasefire. I mean, it's an interesting narrative that they're trying to push. But the reality, though, is quite the

other way around. In the United States, the leadership seems to be extremely divided. That is, I kept thinking, you know, who can actually make a deal with the Iranians now? Because, yeah, Witkoff and Kushner, they don't seem to have much credibility anymore.

They seem like cutouts for Mossad at this point. I mean, there's no... Yeah, the Iranians don't seem to have much faith in them. And then I would have bet something on Vance. But, you know, whatever horrible deal they can get now, it's... Nobody wants, I think, to have their fingerprints on such a deal, because that's the end of their political careers if, you know, you have AIPAC and, well, all of them smearing whoever signs this horrible deal. So, do you see this being a problem on the American side, the...

## **#Larry Johnson**

Well, yeah, they're not paying attention to what the Iranians are doing. So let's look at the events that unfolded over the weekend with Araqchi. So first, he starts in Pakistan, and in Pakistan, he delivers basically a paper, a new policy position of the Iranian government. And instead of one that's going to beg the United States to come back to the table — we're hurting so bad, we've got to get out from under this — no, they did the exact opposite. They said, okay, there are still the original ten demands. Those remain. But the first step is this: the blockade is eliminated, or there's nothing else to talk about. And once the blockade is eliminated, then we'll talk about the Strait of Hormuz, and just let the Americans know, as far as nuclear enrichment efforts, that's off the table.

We're not talking about that anymore. They can forget about that. We signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty. We're still part of that treaty. We're just like any other country in the world. We have a right to enrich uranium, and we're going to abide by international law and tell the Americans that's the case. So Iran took a tougher stance, not a weaker stance. Then he flew to Muscat in Oman and talked with the head sheikh there, basically to coordinate — hey, going forward, let's recognize that the Strait of Hormuz is in the territorial waters of Oman and Iran. Some have argued that that's an international waterway. It is not. Those are territorial waters of each country. And so Iran's coordinating with Oman on how we're going to manage this, we're going to work together on this, etc.

And so then, originally he was supposed to fly up to Russia, but he turned around and flew back to Islamabad to get the message back, you know, basically, okay, what did the Americans say to you? And just to, you know, thank the Pakistanis for all they did. And then Pakistan basically lifted the security restrictions that had been in place because of the potential for attacks. It was a sign — no further talks with the United States. And then Araqchi flies to Moscow, has an extended meeting with Vladimir Putin and Sergei Lavrov and Ushakov, Yuri Ushakov, and the head of military intelligence. So it was the whole — it wasn't just — it was the whole shooting match: diplomacy, military intelligence, military support, and the president, Putin, saying, you know, it wasn't a protocol.

As you say, I don't meet with foreign ministers. I meet with the president. No, he met with the foreign minister. And the exchange was very warm, very friendly. And the message that Putin put out in public was, we're 100% behind you. You've got our backing. So, you know, the United States is in a bit of a bind now because Iran is certainly in no mood to surrender. And Iran, frankly, holds more cards. And globally, this is the week that the full impact of the cutoff of oil from February 28th is now taking hold. And we've seen just in the last 24 hours, the price of Brent has gone up about \$8, \$9 a barrel. The same for West Texas Intermediate. So those two numbers had been below 100 last week. They're now up well over 100, and they're going to be headed higher.

## **#Glenn**

Well, I saw Marco Rubio. He made several references to, or claims — very specific claims — that the Strait of Hormuz is international waters. So this is something Iran can't set up a toll with. But this is just, again, this is factually wrong, as you said. It's not international waters. And, you know, he could have pointed to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which would then allow for transit passage. But the problem is that Iran hasn't ratified it. But maybe more importantly here, the United States hasn't ratified it either. So it means it's not a very good argument for the U.S. to make — that Iran should ratify it and permit it if the U.S. won't do it either. So he doesn't really have a leg to stand on, which is why, I guess, they just create their own reality, saying that it is international waters. But no, it's not a great argument.

However, Iran, though, by allowing Trump to shift this into a low-intensity economic war where the U.S. can then replenish its weapons, it seems as if Iran is allowing Trump to fight this war on his own terms. I mean, for me, it's a bit strange because I think one of the reasons why Iran has been winning this war is because it rejected, essentially, the escalation dominance of Trump and allowing the U.S. to dictate the terms of this war. So, for example, striking the Gulf bases, shutting down the Strait of Hormuz, essentially not allowing Trump to dictate what are legitimate targets. By doing this and also not allowing the U.S. to decide when the war ends, this was an important move, I think, which made it possible for Iran to put significant pressure on the U.S. It just seems as if the U.S. now says, okay, we're going to take it off the high-intensity war because we can't do it anymore.

## **#Larry Johnson**

Yeah.

## **#Glenn**

Now we're going to do this blockade where we fire on your ships, hijack some of your ships, and you do some massacres in Lebanon, but you can't do anything in return. Yeah, it seems like they're now essentially accepting a battlefield that is shaped by the United States.

## **#Larry Johnson**

Well, yeah, actually, the United States can't replenish its supply of precision missiles for one very important reason. I've looked it up now for both, and I was just, while you were talking, I was listening, but I wanted to just double-check. For both the Patriot PAC-3 interceptor and the THAAD missile, also a defensive missile interceptor, the Tomahawk missiles—there are, according to open-source analysis and technical discussions, at least four to six specific rare earth minerals, known as rare earth elements, that are required to produce a Tomahawk cruise missile. Let's see—samarium, neodymium, dysprosium, and others. So a lot of these go into magnets and such for precision. But guess who controls all those rare earth elements? China. China.

And China is withholding. They're not trading those freely and sending them to the United States because the Chinese recognize the United States is talking about attacking China. And China's got a—why would we give you the means to attack us by providing you with the essential elements that you need to produce the magnets that are involved with the precision guidance systems in these, in both the Tomahawks and in the Patriots and in the THAADs? So it's not just a simple matter that the United States says, oh, we're out of this, come on, guys, let's work harder, let's run the factories 24 hours a day, let's put some more money in there, we're going to produce these. They don't have the materials they need to produce them. So that, I mean, that changes the picture entirely right there.

## **#Glenn**

What about the peace talks now, then? Is it only performative, or is there any substance left there, you think?

## **#Larry Johnson**

Well, no, we'll see what the—so Trump talked to Putin today. I haven't seen a readout of that. That conversation apparently just took place within the last couple of hours or so, and I suspect that it's not a coincidence that on Monday, the Iraqis were in talking to Putin, and now Putin today, on Wednesday, is talking to Trump. And I'm certain one of the issues is Iran and Russia. Russia will be happy to see what it can do to broker an end to this conflict.

But at the same time, Russia is taking a tougher stand with respect to Ukraine and NATO. Just as you've commented on in your previous broadcast, Lavrov's remarks last week that Russia is at war with NATO—not possibly going to war, but is at war, so present tense. So Putin will continue to talk to Trump, even though I think there is growing recognition on the part of the Russians that Trump is mentally, he's not there. He indulges in a lot of fantasy and confabulation and thinks he's agreed to things he hasn't agreed to or thinks he's accomplished things he has not accomplished.

## **#Glenn**

I think my impression is that the recent escalations we see from Europe—that is, this massive drone program, the very open rhetoric they have about essentially fighting Russia—combined with, I think, what is very clearly now attacks from NATO territories, and, of course, the assistance from NATO countries to strike the oil refineries of Russia. All of this put together, I think this could be the straw that broke the camel's back. There's too much anger building up now, I think. And also, yeah, well, they can't continue like this.

It seems as if something is going to escalate, but related to the Iran war. But again, I don't see why—I think if Russia stays away from Iran not to anger Trump, it essentially makes them as subservient as the Europeans. I mean, you can't have the US assisting in attacks on Russia in this way, and somehow Russia—if it doesn't respond in some way, this weakness won't be rewarded. It would be seen as, again, a weakness. But how about the role then of the Russians? I mean, how can they play a role in the negotiations? Are they playing a role in negotiations or simply providing support for Iran, which strengthens the autonomous hand of the Iranians? Or how do you see Russia, I guess, their role in this wider game?

## **#Larry Johnson**

Well, a couple of ways. One, they can provide security guarantees to Iran—some concrete security guarantees—perhaps going as far as doing what they did with North Korea. Basically, if you are attacked, we will consider that an attack on Russia. So it could potentially go that far, which would put the United States on notice, as well as Israel, for that matter. So that could be one way they could play a role, a decisive role in getting a negotiated settlement, because that is one of Iran's critical, essential demands. The other element, though, is what Russia's been doing, you know, at least since last June: providing intelligence, technical advice, and material assistance to improve both the armaments and the operation of equipment with the Iranian military.

So, Russia recognizes Iran as a critical country, a member of BRICS going forward, and will play a vital role in the economic expansion of the BRICS nations once it's out from under all of these Western sanctions. See, already it actually is freed from that because both Russia and China, who had been signatories and willing to support sanctions back, you know, 11 years ago when they signed the JCPOA, both have now said, no, we're not doing that anymore. We're not going to enforce sanctions against Iran. So that way they're free to deal with each other and in their own currencies. And the United States says, well, we're not going to let you use dollars. They say, fine, we'll use our own currencies. We're going to stop buying treasuries. We're going to buy gold. So this is actually where the United States' effort to try to control the situation has ended up isolating itself.

## **#Glenn**

But one of the consequences of, or it seems one of the key objectives of what Glenn Diesen refers to as Project Economic Fury—that is, going after Iran's economy—appears to be also, of course, targeting China, as the overwhelming majority of Iranian oil goes to China. So I'm assuming that the

people sitting in Beijing are aware that China is a key target in this war. But how much oil is the U.S. able to shut down in terms of overall energy exports to East Asia? Because I see reports that the U.S. is trying to replace it with American energy. Much like NATO's proxy war against Russia has allowed or enabled the U.S. to replace Russian energy supplies, similarly you see some developments taking place also in East Asia, in which the U.S. is pushing its own LNG projects and essentially trying to replace some of the energy from the Middle East. Do you think this is something that's making China nervous, or do you think it's too low level? So how do you see this?

## **#Larry Johnson**

Yeah, no, I don't think it's making them nervous at all. It's frankly irritating them or making them angry. I think they're getting tired of this Scott Besson bullying and thinking that he can coerce China into doing what the United States demands. If China can receive all the oil it needs out of the Persian Gulf, and particularly if they sail in convoys, the United States doesn't have enough ships to stop a large convoy. It simply doesn't. And then, particularly if it's Chinese-flagged vessels, the United States is not going to risk going to war with China because China does hold the edge here completely. So the United States has boxed itself in with these threats that it can't really deliver on, because it's not going to. They're counting on the Iranian economy becoming crippled in the next two to three weeks.

Okay, at the end of May, the Iranian economy is still going to be okay. In fact, it may be a little bit better because, you know, assuming the ceasefire is going to hold. And see, this is the problem the U.S. has, that Trump has in particular. There is no good military option. Going forward, you've got three basic options. You've got air, you've got ground, and you've got maritime. Well, there is no ground option. And we know that because of the way the current command structure is set up for this operation. You have the Joint Forces Commander, the commander of CENTCOM, which is Admiral Brad Cooper. Then you have what's called the Combined Forces Aviation Component Commander.

That's an Air Force general who commands all of the air operations in the region. And then you have the Combined Forces Maritime Component Commander, who's an admiral. Now, so those two guys, they basically manage the operational forces—the naval forces and the Marines and the aviation forces—primarily Air Force, but also coordinate with the Navy. But what you don't have, you don't have a ground force commander because there is no mission yet that's considered viable or plausible for ground forces. So the air guy is briefing, I'm told, that, you know, he's told his boss, Admiral Cooper, "Look, Coop, we have, you know, we've expended a significant percentage of our precision-guided missiles during the first five weeks of this war against Iran."

We've hit about every viable target there is to hit. Now, we can go back in and start hitting some of those targets again, but this time we're going to be up against a more formidable foe because Iran has taken advantage of the last three weeks to improve its air defense systems, thanks to the Chinese and the Russians. And they just, you know, last week—last Thursday, I believe—we had a

sudden flash on Telegram channels about, oh, there are explosions in the air over Tehran. We thought, oh man, here it goes, they breached the ceasefire. No, it was Iran conducting a live-fire exercise with its new air defense systems. So they're ready to go.

So the advice coming from the Air Force general in charge of air operations is that, apart from the fact that we don't really have many more viable military targets to go after, we've got two other things to consider. Number one, we're running real short on these precision missiles. And if we, in fact, get tasked that there's a need to use them in China, we're not going to have them. And as we talked about before, it's not a matter of just kicking in an order, saying, hey, produce more. That's not going to happen. The second thing is, though, Iran is positioned to retaliate and inflict more damage on the remaining U.S. positions in some of the bases throughout the Gulf region, as well as on Jordan's airfield, Muwaffaq Salti, as well as on Israel, so that this could increase the damage that the West has to contend with.

So that's where, you know, and the same maritime option—the ships, the aircraft carriers, and the Marine amphibious units—they've got to stay offshore about 220 miles. If they get inside that envelope, they're targeted, and they are vulnerable. So you've got the fact about how close the U.S. Navy can get to conduct military operations. And then you have the actual numbers. Do they have the actual number of ships to be able to actually blockade, you know, a thousand ships? They do not. So that's why I say this is sort of—I'll call it blockade theater.

## **#Glenn**

So if they're unlikely to go back to war, that means just continuing this drawn-out economic war, or economic fury, as Besant calls it. How long do you think this can go on, though? Because a lot of the economic pain is being built up, such as with fertilizers—it will still take a while to really, you know, go through the system, in which you'll have the shortage of food and the spike in prices. So how long do you think before—well, what do you think is going to crack in terms of what makes it too painful for either the U.S. or Iran? I mean, what is going to make one side blink first?

## **#Larry Johnson**

I think, candidly, it could be as soon as three weeks simply by—I draw the three weeks from Besant's claim that Iran's—supposedly its oil wells are going to collapse. They're going to be in desperate economic straits in three weeks. I think in three weeks, the U.S. is going to come to the realization that the predictions about the collapse of the Iranian economy turned out to be just as good as the predictions about the collapse of the Russian government if they just killed the top officials on February 28th. Turned out that was not true, and these claims about the economic pressures on Iran are going to turn out not to be true.

So then, you know, they've got a problem. They're going to have to come back and say, what do we do? Trump's only viable option is to figure out how to declare victory. Oh, we've wiped out their air

force. We've wiped out their army. We've wiped out their navy. We've wiped out their nuclear force. They've obliterated it. So we've won. So we're going to move right along. We're going to come back home and focus on Cuba. But, you know, the reality is Trump's going to have to do a version of what he did last May in the Red Sea, where he declared victory and pulled out.

## **#Glenn**

Yeah, the problem, though, is always the Strait of Hormuz. I think this is the main problem because this is what can essentially make Iran quite a powerful country—not just the economic benefits, but the ability to essentially pressure the Gulf states to stop threatening Iran by hosting the bases or trading in dollars or whatever, or simply just having them pay reparations. Because we've also seen some reports that the Iranians are now putting extra tolls on countries who either back sanctions or have participated in the attacks. So they're creating an economic incentive system to abandon this anti-Iranian alliance.

## **#Larry Johnson**

Yeah, exactly right.

## **#Glenn**

So this is either now or never, it seems, because if one wants to declare victory and go home, the region will look very different after a year's time. It just seems it's going to be very hard to sell in Washington, especially with the powerful Israeli lobby standing behind them.

## **#Larry Johnson**

Well, you know, I think this is one of the other reasons for Araghchi's visit to Moscow—to enlist the help of Vladimir Putin in dealing with the Gulf Arabs. Because Putin and the Russians still have some decent relationships with the Saudis and the Emiratis. I think Putin's going to make a very compelling argument to them, saying, hey guys, look, you hitched your wagons to the United States, who promised you security and promised to protect you. And as you can see, that didn't work out at all. The UAE in particular is facing economic collapse. I was amused yesterday when they said, oh, we're pulling out of OPEC. Well, great.

You're not producing anything anyway, so you're not going to be missed at this point. It's only when the flow of oil gets going again, and that's where Iran's going to have a lot of leverage. Countries that want to align themselves with Iran, pay fees in yuan or in the rial—I guess the Iranian currency—those countries will be able to start moving goods. So the disrupted supply line will actually be able to come back online to a limited extent. It's still not going to be open the way it was, but countries that are, as you said, allied with Iran, they'll be able to pass freely through that strait.

The problem will be for those ships destined for countries that are not supportive of Iran—in fact, that are condemning Iran, etc. Iran will let them suffer. But they'll do it in a polite way, and they'll do it in a sort of—it won't be just a threatening, you know, like the mafia hitman saying, hey, pay us the protection money or your store might catch on fire tonight. It won't be that. But Iran will make it clear that, hey, there is a benefit to being our friend. You know, be our friend. One of the benefits is you get safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz.

## **#Glenn**

Yeah, well, that's usually why great powers have always sought to control key maritime corridors for this exact reason—not just military benefit, but also the economic and political capital that comes with it. My last question was just about the recent phone call between Putin and Trump, because as we know, there's a lot of focus on the foreign minister of Iran going to Russia, meeting with Putin, and everyone was wondering how this can be interpreted by Trump, because it seems as if the Russians are now going all in in terms of offering their backing and friendship to the Iranians. And now, of course, Putin and Trump held this 90-minute phone call. As Ushakov stated, they mainly talked about Iran. On the Ukraine issue, I think Putin suggested a ceasefire on May 9th, which is Victory Day, when the Red Army defeated Nazi Germany. But most of it was on Iran. Do you know the significance of these talks?

## **#Larry Johnson**

Yeah, Trump is desperate to get an exit out of this. It's blown up on him. His opinion, you know, the public support for him is down around 33%. Sixty-four percent of the public disapprove of the job that Donald Trump's doing. And the price, you know, we'd had sort of a lull in the first five weeks. There was an initial spike in the price of gas. The ceasefire was declared, and then the Trump administration started unloading oil from the strategic reserve in order to try to suppress, depress prices a little bit. That's over now. Gas and diesel are headed back up, and they don't have any more strategic reserve to apply to it.

Trump has clearly been told, from my understanding, by his military advisors that there is no military solution—that they don't have a magic weapon they can pull or a magic operation that will force Iran to surrender and open the Strait of Hormuz. Iran can effectively continue to keep that strait closed as long as it wants, by virtue of the fact that the United States does not have a means to counter Iran's ability to launch short-range ballistic missiles, coastal defense cruise missiles, and a variety of drones—both maritime surface drones, underwater drones, and the conventional drones that fly through the air without a care. So, you know, he needs help, and he's looking to see if Vladimir Putin can help. And, you know, Putin, I'm sure, will be willing to offer his good offices, but not at the expense of Iran—if anything, maybe to help Trump find some face-saving way out. But this is, you know, Iran, despite Trump's claims to the contrary, Iran holds the trump cards, not Trump.

## **#Glenn**

This persona of Trump that is going to be both a strongman, which would be respected, as well as the peace president—at some point, I think the two would come into tension because he wanted to pressure all countries to essentially reorganize according to his will. And now, of course, it's pushed him into using military force. It shouldn't come as a surprise that a lot of Americans have turned on him. I know that there's a hardcore MAGA base who accepts the argument, well, before, America First meant no war, but now it means America First—that we defeat all our enemies.

But this effort by Trump to sell himself as a great war president, it seems so self-destructive. Indeed, they always have to go back and revisit his whole selling point that he wasn't going to do this war. That's why I was so taken aback by this speech a while ago when J.D. Vance made a point that, well, in the past when we had these forever wars, the difference is those presidents were stupid and Trump is very smart. I mean, this is not what you want to hear when you explain why they flipped to such an extent, but yeah, here we are.

## **#Larry Johnson**

I don't think the West fully appreciates that this current group of Iranian leaders, you know, from Pezeshkian, although he doesn't, you know, control the Islamic Council, to Mojtaba Khamenei, the new Ayatollah, to the head of the IRGC, to Araqchi, and to Ghalibaf. Those men, when they were the ages of 17 to—well, Ghalibaf and Araqchi, they were probably 25, 26. Pezeshkian was the old man in the group. He was in his 30s. But they all fought in this war against Iraq that shaped their lives. That was an existential threat. Two hundred thousand Iranians died, soldier-wise, and maybe as many as 60,000, 70,000 civilians. So that war experience is part of them. And so now, you know, at the time, they were the foot soldiers. They were on the front lines. Now they are controlling the reins of power. And they understand what war is.

They understand the costs. They understand the sacrifice. And that's the problem for the United States. We don't have anybody, including Hegseth, that really understands what they're potentially facing. These guys know. They've been there. They've done that. They got the T-shirts. Now they're in a position, you know, I liken it to what the United States experienced in the early '60s until the assassination of John F. Kennedy, where, you know, here's Kennedy who just, you know, 20 years earlier was driving a PT boat out in the Pacific, and his boat got cut in half and he had to save his men from dying. He knew what the cost of combat was. And so you jump ahead to 1962 when they're faced with the Cuban Missile Crisis.

He's reluctant to go to war because he knows what the cost of war is. And he actually had to hold back some of the generals. Again, these generals, some of them had been colonels or majors during that war. They'd got a taste for it. But right now, you don't have even—Hegseth is the only guy with any military experience. The rest of them are civilians. And they think that this is like a video game. And Trump's failing mental faculties, his critical thinking skills—he believes the last thing he's told.

And he's been told lots of crazy stuff by people like retired General Jack Keane and retired General Kellogg and Lindsey Graham. So, you know, depending on who he listens to, he may be inclined to think, oh yeah, we can fight our way out of this. And then he's going to find, no, you can't.

## **#Glenn**

Well, that's an old truth, though, that every generation seems to have to learn to respect war by having a war themselves, because as we see the former generation die out, who actually did fight these kinds of wars, like the Second World War, we end up with people who sound like they're playing video games, who don't appreciate the consequences and the cost of war. And when you couple this with this tendency to underestimate the adversary—be it the Iranians, the Russians, the Chinese—I mean, at every turn, the assumption that the adversary will just fall apart if one blows hard enough at them. I mean, this keeps happening over and over again, but I don't see any learning curve. It's very frustrating. The Chinese were going to fall apart with a little bit of sanctions on the semiconductor exports—well, imports for the Chinese.

The Russian economy was going to fall apart within the weekend with these sanctions. And of course, they're going to be defeated on the battlefield. The Iranians, you know, the air campaign was, you know, going to kill their leader, and then the Iranians would just take to the streets waving American flags. I mean, this is really crazy stuff. I think this is also a curse of the unipolar moment, which we left behind, in which there is no respect for anyone. When there are no opposing centers of power, there's nothing to respect, there's no one that can balance you. And also, war becomes something, you know, when we drop bombs on people far away, it's not on our lands. But this could change fairly soon. So, any final thoughts before we wrap up?

## **#Larry Johnson**

I say, I know it's particularly frustrating for you as a historian, because you're trying to tell people about history and hoping, hey, can we learn some lessons from the past that might be applicable here? You know, I don't know how much you've studied of the American Civil War, but the outset of this war with Iran reminded me very much of the Washington attitude at the first battle of Bull Run. It was fought out in the Virginia countryside, out past Dulles Airport—anyone that's been to D.C. knows. And you had people that went from downtown D.C., they got in their carriages, they rode out to the battlefield—it was about a good three-hour journey to get there via horse and carriage—with, you know, picnic baskets. "Oh, this is going to be a lark. We're going to watch this great victory. They're going to overrun the Confederacy. Oh, great."

## **#Glenn**

And man, it turned out just the opposite.

## **#Larry Johnson**

And then it turned into a grinding four-year war. And, you know, that's what happened to the United States. They thought, February 28th, we're going to decapitate the Iranian regime, the people of Iran are going to rise up and overthrow the mullahs, and we'll be on our way. And the exact opposite happened. So it's important to listen to people like yourself, Glenn, with all the research and scholarship that you've accomplished. Let's learn some lessons from the past. It might keep us from making mistakes in the future.

## **#Glenn**

I agree. That's why I loved having on a few times Ambassador Jack Matlock, because he's a walking, talking history book. Well, he's 96 now, but still very, very sharp. And so he shares the lessons of—he was stationed in Moscow during the Cuban Missile Crisis, and in the 1980s he was the ambassador under Reagan, negotiating an end to the Cold War. He explained to me how, before they were able to negotiate peace with the Soviets, first they had to deal with the hawks in Washington, because everyone was convinced that the Russians didn't really want peace. I mean, it's pretty much a copy-paste of exactly what's happening today. So some of our leaders should, you know, because they're so clueless—their Russian experience seems to come from binge-watching James Bond movies—they should really pick up the phone, speak to Ambassador Matlock, and, you know, get some of his experiences. But they don't. So anyway, I've already taken a lot of your time, so thank you very much, and I hope to see you again soon.

## **#Larry Johnson**

All right, my friend. Thank you. We'll see you. Thanks, Glenn.