

# Prof. Ted Postol: Why Bombing Iran Will FAIL

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## #Nima

The latest, I think, when it comes to the war between Iran and the United States, one of the latest news is that, you know, we've learned that CENTCOM Commander Admiral Brad Cooper has briefed Donald Trump in the Situation Room about the potential final blow to Iran, according to Fox News. And what does it mean, Ted, for you to understand the situation? It seems that something big is going to happen anytime soon, a new round of war. I don't know how long it will take, or are we going to see the same sort of 40 days or more than that, or as they call it, the final blow. I don't know. What is your understanding of the current situation?

## #Guest

It's very hard for me to understand the mindset that's going on. I assume that these military, you know, most of these military people are at least, in practical terms, you know, competent. Some of them, of course, more than others. But I think there has to be an understanding that they're not going to bring Iran to its knees. So I don't know what they're going to do. I mean, if they do anything like strike power facilities or critical infrastructure in Iran, it's going to precipitate a retaliation that, I don't know, I don't see how Israel and the United States can cope with. The American bases in the Persian Gulf are already hardly operating. I mean, most of the people on these bases have had to leave. They can't protect them.

So I don't know what Iran would do, but probably it would just continue, you know. The critical nodes within these bases, a lot of them have been destroyed, so the real utility of the bases is lower than the fact that there are a lot of buildings still standing. But, you know, one of the things you can do is just do more general damage to the bases. And the other thing that, of course, would be serious for the Israelis is for Iran to go back to its full-scale attacks on Israel, both of which I would expect. So I'm not clear what the upscale side of this attack would be. There's a news report I just read actually this morning that the Americans just delivered a shipload, some 11,000 tons of military equipment to Israel. I assume a lot of it is just dumb bombs and things, but, you know, I just don't know.

You know, it just means, you know, it's just going to be stuff to drop on Iran. But again, where are they going to drop it? It's very hard to see how it's going to make a military difference. The critical infrastructure that Iran needs to continue fighting the war is all underground. And there's no evidence that the underground structures are in any way vulnerable to these above-ground attacks. You know, there's modest levels of damage, damage to entranceways, yes. But these structures have been very well designed so that, you know, you damage one entranceway, there's another available. So I really don't see how—it seems to me that if you had a realistic assessment of what the situation is, you'd say to yourself, we're in an endgame, and we just better try to resolve this in a constructive way.

That's the way I would assess the situation. I have no idea what these people are doing. You know, my joke with some people is I not only don't understand what they're thinking, I don't even understand if they're thinking. You know, it's that kind of thing. So, you know, maybe there will be a big attack. Won't surprise me. But I also will not be surprised if there's no real, certainly no military consequence to it. There may be more innocent people killed, which is, of course, extremely unfortunate. But I don't see how they can, you know, really do significant military damage. It's just not in their reach. So I don't see anything but an end to the ceasefire if they go ahead and do something. And that's not in their interest. It's really not in their interest.

## **#Nima**

Ted, considering what has happened so far, and when you see someone like General Keith Kellogg mentioning that they can go into Kharg Island because they want to reduce the Iranian capability or ability to export oil. So let's go to Kharg Island, an island that is to the western part of the Strait of Hormuz. It's not even close to the Strait of Hormuz. But his argument is, let's capture that island and put pressure on Iran and the economy, because I think the Trump administration is getting to the point that the blockade is not working. It's not working, and that's why they need to do something else. And here, what Keith Kellogg is talking about, you know, their goal to invade Kharg Island and maybe put pressure on Iran. How is that going to—militarily, how is that a reasonable or even viable choice for them?

## **#Guest**

Well, the argument, which I don't think is correct, is that it causes economic problems for Iran. They don't have the ability to produce and sell as much oil as they have been doing. But so what? I mean, the Iranians are pretty tough, you know that. And, you know, they're in a war for their survival. At least they believe it. I agree with them, actually. But, you know, you're not going to cause these people to cave in. You know, they have a highly sophisticated, developed society. They've got thousands of years of culture behind them. You know, it's silly to think that these people are going to cave in, you know, and what they're going to do is retaliate.

We, the Americans, will leave them, and the Israelis will leave them no choice but to continue doing horrendous damage to the global economy, which of course will cause tremendous damage to the United States, tremendous damage to Israel, but more importantly to the world. And, you know, I think we're looking potentially at famines down the line, you know, because of all the losses of fertilizers that we're seeing. We're looking at tremendous impacts on the manufacturing capability, the, you know, high-tech production of chips and things, because of the lack of special materials like helium.

## **#Nima**

You know, this is...

## **#Guest**

The implications of this are profound and very, very far-reaching, but I don't think... I don't get the sense that the people in the White House understand this, or they're either denying it, or there's nobody who— you know, these people live in a bubble. And incidentally, it's true of most of these political people. You know, it's a problem generally. I've talked about this on occasion on your program because, you know, I meet these people and they think they know things because somebody in the intelligence community tells them something. But, you know, I have had access to the intelligence. I had full clearances to everything. And let me tell you, if you don't know before, you know, specific pieces of information can be helpful.

You know, they can be helpful, you know, when you're doing your job. But, you know, if I want to know, you know, what is our best assessment of the weight of the, you know, the Sarmat missile, you know, because, you know, okay, you know, I'm doing an analysis, I'm trying to understand something. But, you know, generally understanding the world, you're not going to get from these intelligence briefings because, first of all, when you get the general briefings, they're idiotic because they're driven by all kinds of bureaucratic and internal kinds of prejudices. So you don't get anything. If you want to read a book about Iran, you don't read the intelligence. You read books about Iran by authors who know the country.

And the only way to do that, to become educated, is to read open literature and to understand what it means. And most of these people in government jobs understand nothing. You know, I had a conversation with the president and CEO, both, of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists last week. It was incredible. This woman understood nothing. And not only did she understand nothing, she didn't care. I actually lost my temper. And I know she thought it was because I was just generally cantankerous. I lost my temper because she was so indifferent during this discussion. She knew nothing. She arranged the meeting without reading a thing. She had no idea what she was starting.

My wife, who's a senior executive, you know, when my wife heard how this meeting was conducted, her first statement was, you'd be fired in the job I was in if you ever conducted a meeting this way. Coming into a meeting knowing nothing, not having read anything, prepared in any way, you know, and this is a person—she was in the government in a job. And my guess is if the Democrats retake the White House, she'll be back in the government in a job, not knowing anything, indifferent to the real facts, you know, and this is common. This is not uncommon. What's uncommon is when you meet a person like Chas Freeman, who's from a different generation. If you listen to Chas talk, you can see what an erudite, well-educated person he is.

He didn't learn that in the government. He learned what was going on in the government. He understands how to work the system, what's going on in the system. That you learn when you're in government. But you don't learn—all that erudition doesn't come from being in the government. None of it comes from the government. And so you have these people, they talk to each other. They think they know something, but they know nothing. They really know nothing. And the White House is a very extreme case of that. But let me tell you, when you look at, you know, the Democrats and the Republican senators and members of Congress, they're largely ignorant.

They just, you know, and their staffs are largely ignorant. And, you know, sometimes you meet a person who really knows something. No question there are good people in these jobs, but they're few and far between because they're not really well educated. You know, they just don't have this background knowledge. And that comes from education, and it comes from a sense, from an impulse to be inquiring. You know, you have to have an input. You know, it's the—I don't know if I've mentioned this—Schopenhauer has this way, he calls Schopenhauer's idiot. He talks about idiots as people. They can be well educated, they can be intelligent by the measures that are used to measure intelligence.

You know, they can do arithmetic, they can read, they can remember historical facts, but they're idiots because they have no ability or willingness or character, as sometimes the way he might state it, to open their mind and eyes to the world around them. What they know is what's in their bubble, and there's no looking outward. And he argues that most people are just, you know, functionally idiots. And you see that, you know, I think I mentioned this in one—so I don't know if it was here—but, you know, I was in a meeting with McGeorge Bundy very late in his life, you know.

And this guy, I mean, he wouldn't even look at you when you were trying to talk to him. You know, he wouldn't even look at you. You know, it was like you weren't in the room. Now, the guy was, you know, he was intelligent in the sense that he was a person of substantial intellect, but he was functionally an idiot. And of course, his policies were functionally idiotic too. And that's an extremely capable person by the simple measures of capability, not the broader ones. And most of these other people are not even close. They're not even well-educated. You know, they go to prestige schools, but they don't learn anything.

They sit around congratulating themselves on how much smarter they are. They think they know more than everybody else. They think they're experts, and they don't even know, you know, and it's just shocking once you step back and look at it. So who knows what these military officers understand. And of course, they are under tremendous pressure. You can't go in and talk to this guy Trump and say, look, Mr. President, this is silly. We can't. There's nothing militarily useful we can do. You go in there and do that, you're going to be fired. And, you know, some of them want to do the job more than they want the job. And we've seen some of these really fine military officers fired by this guy Hegseth.

These are the kinds of officers we want, I want, in the American military. But, you know, they paid the price by just saying, look, you know, I'll give you the best answer I can give you, but it's the truth. Sorry, I don't want to hear that. You know, you're fired. So who knows what's going on in these briefing rooms, you know, with the president. No way of knowing. You know, Trump is obviously completely out of touch. You know, there was a little article. I don't spend a lot of time on this because I don't see it as, you know, actionable information for what I do. But I was just reading an article. This article was, you know, from insider discussions, which I believe are real.

And, you know, this particular report was, this journal article was saying, well, you know, Trump no longer compares himself to Washington and Lincoln as presidents. He now compares himself to Alexander the Great and Napoleon. It's like, what a, you know, I mean, I know the guy has a problem. I mean, we all knew that before, but something else is going on now. I mean, there's some kind of serious, significant mental deterioration going on further beyond what he already had, which was serious enough. So who knows what's going on in these briefings? I just have no way of knowing. But it's really a problem. Nobody in the U.S. government wants to stand up and do anything about it. Nobody in a position to make a difference. So, not yet.

## **#Nima**

Ted, if they decide to attack Iran again, how do you see the situation with the stockpile of the United States? Because you mentioned sending weapons, sending missiles to Israel, or bombs to Israel. But how do you find these reports, for example, on CNN, which say in some areas, you know, considering JASSM, considering interceptors, THAAD interceptors, Patriot, PAC-3, and our friend of this podcast, Larry Johnson, believes that the situation is far worse than what was reported on CNN. Wouldn't surprise me. I think Larry is very informed.

## **#Guest**

And I haven't been focusing on that, although I've been listening. And there's very little doubt in my mind that we are very short of weapons. But some of these weapons don't matter. For example, the Patriot PAC-3s, they've had almost no intercept capability against ballistic missiles. So the fact that they're running out is really irrelevant, for example, for the Israelis. The things that could be important for the Israelis are, for example, the Iron Dome interceptors, which also are useless

against ballistic missiles from Iran, but they are capable against drones. And the problem is that they've depleted most of their Iron Dome interceptors shooting at missiles they have no chance of intercepting. They made a strategic blunder there.

So I think the bulk of the damage that will happen once things get back going—and it looks like they will—I mean, it looks like at some point we are going to see the Iranians again launching attacks on Israel and elsewhere. And I think over time, the bulk of the damage is going to be from drones. The warheads are smaller, but they're much more accurate. There are large numbers of them. And, you know, over time, you can do a tremendous amount of damage with these significant but smaller warheads, plus what you can do with the ballistic missiles, which are not, you know, which are significant by themselves but, you know, somewhat less precise. So I think Israel's in for a real bad time once the ceasefire ends.

And what worries me about Israel is that the political leadership is so crazy that eventually they could reach a point—it's not immediately in front of us now, but it could be over time—where they start losing, it becomes so apparent that they're losing to their own population, that they start feeling pressure to think about using nuclear weapons against Iran. I don't believe the Iranians—you know, it's a funny situation, all this talk about the fear of Iran using nuclear weapons on other states. It seems to me the Iranians are extremely well thought out so far on this. Of course, now that the Americans and the Israelis have killed off much of the older leadership, there's a lot of younger leadership that may be more radical.

And that's really potentially problematic because it really is in Iran's best interest not to build nuclear weapons, but to be poised to build them. Just by accident a few days ago, I was having a chat with a very old friend of mine I hadn't talked with for a long time. It turned out he had been in Iran quite a while back during the negotiations for the JCPOA, and he was quite involved in it. He was telling me about a conversation he had with Mohammad Zarif, the negotiator of the JCPOA, a very erudite man—I mean, you know, tremendously well-educated, very sophisticated man. And this friend of mine was telling me how Zarif described to him why Iran should not have nuclear weapons, and he went through the argument I just gave you.

In fact, what got me started on this with my old friend is I was telling him my assessment of why it's not in Iran's security interest. And he said, well, that's exactly what Zarif told me. Zarif had thought it through completely. And it wouldn't surprise me if Zarif and others are the architects of this policy. Once the JCPOA was abandoned, this policy of building up to 60% enriched uranium as a potential threat to be a nascent nuclear weapon state would not surprise me if he played a role in that strategy, which is a brilliant strategy. The strategy is, look, we don't want to become a nuclear weapon state. You can see we have the International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors here. They're watching.

We don't mind. But, you know, we have this stuff now. And, you know, we can do it if we need to, but we don't want to. So that's a very good posture to have. And I think—in fact, what I wanted to

talk a little bit about today was the fact that that posture is still viable. And Iran, you know, really the most intelligent thing for the United States or the West to do is to recognize the reality of Iran's potential. You can't wish this away. You can't bomb it away. It's all in caves and tunnels. You can't kill enough scientists. It's a country rich in scientists, talented people. The expertise is there and growing. So you have to acknowledge it and deal with it. And you have a country that basically wants you to stop attacking them.

And in return, they're not going to build nuclear weapons, although they want to reserve the potential to do it. And you're not going to stop that. So reach a deal, because at some point, if they decide to build these weapons, there's going to be hell to pay for everyone—for everyone. The Israelis are going to be facing Saudi Arabia that's nuclear, Turkey, Egypt. It's not just the Iranians who are smart enough to know they don't want this, but these Israelis—it's like there's no second step in their thinking. It's like dealing with these people at Stanford, my favorite place to kick. They talk about things, and you always say, what's the next step? You know, Mike—Mike McFaul—you want to get rid of Putin.

Well, what happens next? Well, you're talking about something, you're talking policy. Don't you think about—you know, you're supposed to be a policy guy. You run around. Don't you think about what a sequence of events means? You know, the world is a sequence of events. It's happening all the time in front of you. And it's this kind of thinking, you see? And what I'm worried about is we'll get some people who have similarly short horizons in the leadership in Iran, and they will change the policy and proceed to build nuclear weapons. And that will be bad for Iran and for everybody else. But, you know, the Americans continue to provide no choice for the Iranians.