Scott Ritter: Trump BOMBS Qeshm, Iran ROCKS Iraqi Gas Field – CENTCOM Siege Collapses

Scott Ritter discusses the US's third day in a row of "limited strikes" on Iran, this time hitting Qeshm island. CENTCOM has declared a new operation "Iron Gate" to cut off Iran's land routes while secretly telling Israel to be prepared to launch a wider war at any moment. This show breaks down what these developments mean for the region and the world as Trump finds himself stuck on the path of escalation on many fronts of the geopolitical landscape. Support Scott's work: https://scottritter.substack.com/ PATREON.COM/DANNYHAIPHONG Support the channel in other ways: https://www.buymeacoffee.com/dannyhai... Substack: chroniclesofhaiphong.substack.com Cashapp: $Dhaiphong Venmo: @dannyH2020 Paypal: https://paypal.me/spiritofho Follow me on Telegram: https://t.me/dannyhaiphong #iran #trump #iranwar

#Danny

Welcome back, everyone. As you can see, I am joined by former U.N. weapons inspector and U.S. Marine Corps intelligence officer, geopolitical analyst, author, and journalist Scott Ritter to go over the latest developments. Well, Scott, my first question to you was going to be about your comments on these limited strikes, as they've been called by the Trump administration. For the third day in a row, the United States struck Iran last night, reportedly targeting navigation systems on Qeshm Island. This comes as a drone hit the largest Iraqi gas field, which was taken out of service last night amid this clash.

The Iranian Navy is saying that they have disabled 11 tankers in the last 10 days, four in the last 48 hours. And the U.S. is saying that its strikes are in retaliation. I also wanted your comment on Task Force Iron Gate, the new United States effort, run from Tampa, to isolate Iran via its land routes. So, Scott, how about we start with what is going on with these limited strikes? Because we're hearing all kinds of reports about mediators in the background, Qatar, Iran. There are negotiations happening indirectly, but at the same time, CENTCOM has reportedly told Israel to get ready for a third wave of a larger attack. What do you make of these contradictions, and what are your thoughts about recent developments?

#Scott Ritter

Well, I mean, I'm always leery of, you know, press leaks about CENTCOM telling Israel to get ready for a third wave of attacks. And yet we hear about it publicly. It implies that somebody's leaking it, you know, to create a perception of impending action that is used to put pressure on Iran. To me,

the less we hear about something, the more worried I get. So when I hear, you know, "We're getting ready to do it, get ready to do it," I mean, you're literally telling the Iranians. You know, they're ready anyway. So I sort of minimize that. I do believe that J.D. Vance is engaged in negotiations through Oman. Both sides are taking these negotiations very seriously. I think it's the strategic objective of both parties to disengage, to find an off-ramp.

Nobody benefits from a continuation of this conflict, and this conflict has, you know, dictated certain outcomes that are unchangeable. You know, the United States isn't going to be able to will itself into victory here through negotiation. There are certain realities that we have to adapt to. Iran has a very strong position, but Iran is also under pressure from nations that need the flow of energy to continue or to resume, particularly China. So even though Iran has a strong hand, I think that Iran is subject to diplomatic pressures. Iran needs Russia and China. Iran needs Asia as a future market and for diplomatic support. And Iran can't play the petulant child and say, "Well, we won, therefore we get everything we want, or else."

There are certain red lines, of course, that Iran won't be expected to back away from. But I do believe right now that there's pressure on Iran to engage in good-faith negotiations to solve the global energy crisis. And so I think both parties are on the same page there. But as that happens, you know, neither party can afford to be seen as making concessions anymore outside of the negotiating table. So both sides are, you know, playing a very strict game. Iran has said that no shipping will be permitted through the Gulf, and so they are interdicting the shipping. My understanding is that, you know, one out of every four ships that transits is getting hit. That's a very high casualty rate. And some of the targets that aren't getting hit may not be worth the effort.

Iran seems to be hitting targets that are particularly valuable, and there are certain kinds of equipment that are in very short supply. Iran is rapidly depleting the global availability of this equipment, and when that runs out, navigation becomes difficult. So I think Iran is sending a signal, and the United States is also sending a signal that there is a price to be paid. The United States is hitting intelligence collection points or equipment that's used by Iran to track and target shipping. They're also challenging Iranian air defenses. Iran shoots down American drones, and American drones strike Iranian air defenses. So we have this low-grade war taking place. But I think it's just background noise to the larger negotiations.

Neither party can afford it. Nobody wants to send a sign of weakness in negotiations. So it's not as though the United States is going, "Well, we're going to stand down," because then Iran feels like, "Well, we got something without giving anything away." And the same thing: Iran's not going to stand down because the United States will feel they've got something without giving anything away. So both sides are going to maintain this pressure while the negotiations are going on. I personally believe that there's minimal risk of this spinning out of control, although anytime you have military assets dropping ordnance and making things go boom, you know, there's a potential for escalation.

But I think that Donald Trump got the signal from the elections that the American people are serious about bringing this war to an end. And I think, you know, we have to keep in mind that they're talking about a new Yalta taking place, and I think it's going to be in China for the APEC conference. And, you know, Trump can't come walking in there as the turd in the punch bowl. Sorry to use that analogy. But, you know, the fact of the matter is Trump has to be seen as a problem solver, not a problem maker, if Yalta is going to work, right? If he thinks he can come in and threaten China, that's not how this is going to work. He has to come in and say, "We're all working together to make the world a better place for the three of us."

And he has to be seen as somebody capable of creating the conditions for global energy security and stability. And so I think that Trump has told J.D. Vance, "I'm passing the ball off to you because the midterms are over." There's no political price Trump can pay now because of this, except for the legacy of his final two years. J.D. Vance is the man who has his eye on a potential presidency in 2028. And so it's up to J.D. Vance to make or break this deal. And that also helps Donald Trump because, basically, all the risk accrues to J.D. Vance, and Trump can either take credit for a victory or blame J.D. Vance for failure. But I think that we are actually, for the first time in a long time, moving toward a realistic possibility of a negotiated settlement.

#Danny

To that point, Scott, I wanted to ask you about these comments by Mohammad Ghalibaf, the chief negotiator and, of course, parliament speaker. He said he is being tipped off that the Israelis are working overtime to drag the U.S. into an endless war with Iran—a quagmire no president, now or in the future, Republican or Democrat, could escape. So unless Washington drops its Israel-first mindset, they are heading toward a dark age. What do you make of Israel's potential role? You know, I've heard a lot about CENTCOM in particular and Admiral Bradley Cooper being incredibly close to the Israelis. And that's why we hear these reports about all kinds of talks, maybe pushing each other back into war. But there is that contradiction you just noted in terms of J.D. Vance and mediators working in the background, and the hesitancy to go into a full-scale war. So how much could Israel really scuttle this and make it impossible for what you just said to actually take place?

#Scott Ritter

Well, when we speak of Israel, are we speaking of Netanyahu? Are we speaking of Eisenkot? Because my understanding is that the Israeli president has tapped Eisenkot to form a government. And while, of course, Eisenkot is not, you know, blameless in a lot of things, I will point to the fact that on the eve of the Israeli election, he called Benjamin Netanyahu insane on national Israeli television, saying that Netanyahu's portrayal of Iran as a nuclear threat possessing nuclear weapons is insane because everybody knows that that's a lie. So, having said that, if that's truly what he believes, then what is the urgency of a strike? There's no nuclear threat. What is the urgency? Moreover, people need to understand that Israel is not a military dictatorship.

In fact, the prime minister has no authority whatsoever to initiate military action. He needs the concurrence of a war cabinet. Netanyahu may have been able to bully and intimidate a war cabinet, but he wasn't tapped by the president. So the idea that Israel is going to engage in a conflict that could have dire ramifications for it, should it seek to strike Iran—Iran's retaliatory capacity is immense. Israel has no capacity to defend itself. So the idea of Israel committing suicide while Eisenkot is forming a government—a government that should ostensibly, at least, you know, embrace his fundamental understanding that Iran doesn't pose an existential nuclear threat to Israel, therefore taking away the urgency for a strike—I think that Israel is not a factor right now.

I don't see Israel getting engaged militarily in a significant way. Again, I am very hesitant at this time. Look, the commander in chief has tasked his vice president with finding an off-ramp for the conflict. That's the strategic direction of the president of the United States. And Bradley Cooper doesn't get to make decisions. Bradley Cooper is an implementer of policy. And I believe that the potential for Israel to influence American policy is significantly diminished because of the political limbo they find themselves in with a new government. So I understand where the Iranians are coming from, but I think that his tweet was written 24 hours too soon, that there's newer data right now that modifies his concerns. I don't see Israel putting pressure on the United States at this time.

#Danny

Well, Scott, one thing you and I share is our loathing for Marco Rubio. And I think one thing that's so, I guess, grating about this administration is that they talk out of both sides of their mouths. So we hear one thing, and then we hear another, and they're often the opposite of each other. So here's what Marco Rubio said about negotiations. He was not so enthusiastic, despite the fact that, technically, his job as secretary of state is to represent the United States diplomatically. Here he is in the top one. Here's what he said.

#Marco Rubio

But I wouldn't say we're on the verge of a breakthrough. The president would always prefer to solve this and every problem diplomatically. Sometimes that's not possible, unfortunately. But if there's a chance to do it, we'll explore it. Right now, it hasn't been very productive because the Iranian demands are not just unacceptable, but in some cases outrageous and ridiculous and really not realistic.

#Danny

So Iranian demands are outrageous, unrealistic, unacceptable, and there’s no breakthrough on the horizon, despite all these efforts, which are real. J.D. Vance is definitely doing a lot of background work, however people want to interpret that. But Scott, your reaction to this? I’m sorry, you’re muted.

#Scott Ritter

I think you muted yourself. Yeah, as long as the dogs are going after the neighbors, I'm trying to keep myself muted. That's all right. But they seem to be quiet right now. And for all the dog haters out there, again, I'm in a good mood today, so I'm not going to use bad language, but you can just pound sand. I'll just leave it at that. You know, you can comment all you want. I don't care. The fact of the matter, though, is that J.D. Vance has the lead, not Marco Rubio. And this is something that we need to factor in when talking about this. Rubio doesn't have the lead. He, of course, can sit there and snipe from a distance, which is what he's doing. But he's not the man on the ground. He's not leading the charge.

J.D. Vance has built his own team that's engaged in this process. We also have to remember that Marco Rubio is sort of the end result of a $200 million bribe by Miriam Adelson to Donald Trump. With that $200 million, Marco Rubio was supposed to be the vice president. But Trump wouldn't take him as vice president for obvious reasons. They don't like each other. And so Rubio is now secretary of state. Rubio has a specific lane that he operates in. And just look at the big-ticket items out there, whether it's the Iran issue, Gaza, or Ukraine. Marco Rubio is not leading the charge. He's in the background. So I think we have to take what he says with a grain of salt. You know, he will posture, but he's not the one making the call.

It's not up to him to decide whether or not the seven points that Iran has put on the table are unrealistic. That's up to J.D. Vance. Marco Rubio is not the one who's going to be reporting back to the president on the potential for conflict. The president didn't give Marco Rubio the marching orders on what parameters would be acceptable to the United States. So I just think we have to be careful. And remember, Marco Rubio is a man who aspires to be president. He has run for president. He ran aggressively against Donald Trump, and he wants to be president in 2028. So that means he can't be on the J.D. Vance cheerleading bandwagon. There's just a lot of politics at play here. I'm more interested in what J.D. Vance says than I am in what Marco Rubio says.

#Danny

One small question for you about Marco Rubio: How dangerous would it be for him to gain traction as a presidential candidate and then maybe become president? Just so you know, I've actually been thinking about that a lot, since the Republican Party is obviously in disarray and the field is kind of wide open now after these midterm elections.

#Scott Ritter

I mean, I think he would be one of the worst possible presidential candidates we could ever empower with the office of the presidency. When we take a look at the recent elections, many Americans were saying, “Make America great again, not make Israel great,” not sustaining the pro-Israeli policies. Many Americans are waking up to the evil of the state of Israel. And Marco Rubio is

somebody who is firmly in the camp of this evil state. So if he were able to become president, I think it would be, you know, not a case of two steps forward, one step back, but, you know, one step forward, five steps back. We'd be going in the exact opposite direction from what the American people want and are demanding.

So, yeah, it would be a very bad thing, which is why I don't think Marco Rubio stands a snowball's chance in hell of ever being president of the United States. You know, he right now is empowered. He was empowered as a senator. So, you know, when given the microphone, he can talk authoritatively, but he's never had any real power. Now he's the Secretary of State, but he's not trusted with the big decisions. He's not being given the big cases. This is like joining a big law firm, and you end up doing the drunk driving cases of the dog catcher. You don't get to do the drunk driving case of the senator and the senator's son. You get to do the little ones.

You don't get to do the big mergers and everything. So I think we're actually seeing the diminishment of Marco Rubio. And the other thing we have to remember is that heads are going to roll because of what happened to Donald Trump in the midterm. You know, Susie Wiles' head's already gone. Pete Hegseth's head appears to be about to be separated from his shoulders. And Marco Rubio isn't going to be around much longer, I believe. I know he said that the rumors about him quitting and leaving are just that—rumors—and that he fully plans to support the president. But what does the president want from Marco Rubio? Because Marco Rubio has not been supporting the president's policies.

When the president's looking for a solution to Ukraine, Marco Rubio is just the obstacle. When the president is looking for a solution for Iran—and he has been looking for a solution to Iran—Marco Rubio is the obstacle. And maybe instead of going around the obstacle, maybe it's time to remove the obstacle. And I think that might be the direction we're heading. And I think JD Vance would also like to see Rubio diminished because, you know, the less competition there is for your future aspirations, the better.

#Danny

Yeah. Climbing out of the approval ratings nightmare and dealing with the midterm election is going to be a tall, tall task in the next couple of years. And it's always been really interesting watching Marco Rubio operate as Secretary of State, yet not really perform any of those duties when called upon.

#Scott Ritter

And you referenced Ukraine and Iran, but he never does any of that. Did you see the photograph of the G7 foreign ministers in London? No, I haven't. I mean, my goodness. There's not a happy face amongst them. I mean, they look miserable. They look like they ate bad Indian food and they're two steps away from a disaster, and they're just sitting there. And I'm like, is this supposed to engender

some sort of confidence in the Western world and be intimidating to the rest of the world? And Marco Rubio is just standing there like he has constipation. So, yeah, Rubio has the title of Secretary of State, but he doesn't function as one.

#Marco Rubio

This is the earlier one in France. I'm talking about the one they just did in London.

#Scott Ritter

They are miserable.

#Danny

I mean, it's just not a good look. Oh, gosh. Yeah, I'll have to find that one. Rubio would be a nightmare for sure. But how about some of the policy now? I wanted your comments on—well, I guess they're not calling it an operation. They're calling it Task Force Iron Gate. Your thoughts about this, Scott, as somebody who's been in military circles, who's done intel, and who studies war and economic warfare quite deeply? What are your thoughts about this next step that Trump has endorsed and CENTCOM announced, in terms of trying to blockade Iran now through its land routes and its massive borders?

#Marco Rubio

Yeah.

#Scott Ritter

Well, first of all, let's just start with the fact that smugglers have been around since time immemorial. We've never been able to stop smuggling across borders, and this includes the borders between Iran and Pakistan, Iran and Iraq, Iran and Turkmenistan, Iran and Azerbaijan, and Iran and Turkey. Smugglers have their routes. So the idea that we're going to make Iran leak-proof, so that nothing can leave, is just stupidity. Smuggling routes have long existed. But we're not talking about smuggling routes here.

We're talking about the fact that the U.S. blockade, as you and I have talked about, is irrelevant because Iran has turned to shipping its oil overland through Pakistan, through Iraq, maybe less so through Azerbaijan, but also going through the Caspian Sea into Russia. How are you going to stop that? So, you know, the goal, therefore, is to choke them off. Now, how do you do this? First of all, it's not being done by U.S. troops. We don't have, you know, a military presence there anywhere

near the level necessary to accomplish this task. It's being done through liaison and coordination. For instance, the United States has gone to Pakistan and said, "We need you to enforce controls at your border crossings more effectively."

We've turned to the Iraqis and said, "You need to enforce your border." We're maybe putting in some intelligence monitoring capabilities so that we could say, "Hey, you're not enforcing your border security enough. Things are getting through." You know, so this is more of an intelligence liaison-driven activity, and it's just doomed to fail. It's a political gesture designed to create the perception that we are somehow restricting Iranian economic intercourse with its neighbors. You know, until they publish more information, this is a lot of speculation.

But just looking at the reality of the area, guys, if you haven't been to Iran, if you haven't been to Iraq and looked at the border, you don't understand the stupidity of trying to control that. It's impossible to do. And the other thing you have to understand is that there are certain economic incentives attached to, you know, this economic activity. And, you know, what are we doing? Are we threatening them now with secondary sanctions? You know, what's the cudgel behind the policy? And how enforceable is that? So I just think this is a lot of posturing. I think this is a politically motivated activity that has very little practical application.

#Danny

Yeah, well, it seems like that's a big theme recently, especially around this war: a lot of attempts to save face while, in the background, trying to figure out how to come to some kind of satisfactory stoppage to this war. And my last question to you before we move on to Ukraine is: Is there a set of demands or terms that you believe the United States could actually accept? Because you mentioned earlier red lines that, let's say, Russia and China wouldn't expect Iran to drop. It seems like those are also terms that the United States can't accept. For example, those seven terms of the MOU—there are more than a few of those that it seems like the U.S. just doesn't have the stomach for. But I'm wondering if you believe there are terms it could accept. There have been some floated around, but then Iran keeps on saying, "These are all rumors. There's no truth to the idea that we're going to accept only one or two of these points versus all seven." So, your thoughts on this?

#Scott Ritter

I think that the United States is going to end up accepting all seven. I mean, there's no other alternative. Now, the question is, how is it going to be sugarcoated? And how is it going to be presented to the public? I think there's going to be a lot of kabuki dancing going on, you know, shadow puppets, you know, so we want to shape perception. But the reality is Iran is going to get what Iran wants. They won the war, and the consequences of continuing this fake war are going to be, you know, disastrous for the Western economy, for the United States. You know, it's not going to be good for Iran, but the fact that we're trying to implement Task Force Iron Gate proves that we don't understand Iran's economy at all.

Look, what are the seven conditions? You know, we will have to lift sanctions. Wake up, America. That's just going to have to happen. We were supposed to do it under the JCPOA. We failed to comply with our obligations. But, you know, I'm fairly certain that we will lift the sanctions. We will unfreeze Iranian assets, 100%. It's a guarantee. It will have to happen. You know, the question is whether it's a sequencing of events, what wrapping paper we're going to put around it so it can be sold in another way. But the end result is that sanctions will be lifted and assets will be unfrozen. This is non-negotiable. It's just the way it's going to be. The Strait of Hormuz is going to be operating under, you know, some sort of Iranian control. That's just the reality. It is what it is. We can't undo it.

So, therefore, we're going to have to accept it because the consequences of not accepting it are going to be dire. You know, the United States—we're in a situation where our military posture in the region has already been crippled. We've evacuated bases. We're not going to be able to rebuild these bases. So, you know, is the United States going to say, "Yes, Iran kicked our ass, therefore we're retreating from the region"? No. But is the United States going to say, "We've created a sense of stability, and now there's no need for us to rebuild these bases. We're putting together a new security architecture that's more regionally defined, as opposed to being imposed"?

"And the United States is going to fulfill the promise and expectations that were attached to the National Security Strategy of 2025 and begin to strategically withdraw from the region because we've engendered stability." That's, I think, what's going to happen. The nuclear case is, again, difficult, but it's solvable. I mean, the bottom line is, you know, the Iranians aren't willing to give up their nuclear card—the 60% enriched uranium and, you know, the concept of them being a nuclear threshold state. They're not going to give that up up front. Trump may be asking for it up front, but it's not going to happen up front. The United States is going to have to take the first step. You make the first moves, such as lifting sanctions and unfreezing assets.

But eventually, we're going to get down to the nuts and bolts of a nuclear agreement. And I believe that, at the end of the day, the issue of Iran's 60% enriched uranium will be resolved to the satisfaction of the United States. But the specific technical features are unknown. We know Russia is working hard to help come up with a solution. China is there as well, working. And I think it's going to happen. So I believe that the United States is going to end up, you know, conceding all seven points. It's just a matter of sequencing, timing, and how it's wrapped, how it's explained. But the functional thinking behind each one of the seven points is going to be met to Iran's satisfaction.

#Danny

Well, we can pivot now to the Ukraine situation. I wanted your thoughts. There are talks going on between the United States, Ukraine, and Russia, all three sending delegations to meet. It's being reported in mainstream media. I know you've been covering issues like the European security framework and these kinds of developments. But what exactly is going on in the conflict right now?

What are these talks? CNN is asking what makes them different this time. But I think that question is better directed to you, Scott, rather than whoever CNN got to write their piece. What's going on here, and what is the state of the conflict right now?

#Scott Ritter

Well, the state of the conflict is that Russia is winning. I know the West doesn't like to acknowledge this, but it's just a statement of fact. And Russia will continue to win. There's literally nothing the West can do to reverse course. The Ukrainians are able to articulate policies that adhere to their previous convictions, but they're no longer valid. What's valid right now is that Kiev has been without electricity, blacked out a couple of nights in a row. There's a good chance it may become permanently blacked out, which means it's a dead city. There are other Ukrainian cities that are likewise being impacted by energy shortages. As the months get colder, people are not going to be able to live in urban areas. You're going to see a mass flight of refugees leaving Ukraine because they have no other choice. You're seeing the military just being slaughtered. I know everybody's reading things, you know. The BBC published a report about Russian casualties, you know, putting them in there.

#Danny

400,000. Yeah, 400,000.

#Scott Ritter

400,000. To be honest, when you add up the Ministry of Defense casualties with the casualties of the Lugansk People's Republic and the Donetsk People's Republic, the Wagner casualties, and then other volunteer casualties, Rosgvardiya, that's not a fake number. This is a high-intensity conflict that's been going on for a long time. Four years, yeah. So this is not an unrealistic number. But, you know, it's more nuanced. The Russians tend to report the Ministry of Defense numbers, and they don't report numbers that aren't directly attached to the Ministry of Defense. But when you look at the totality of the casualties, this is probably an accurate number.

But you have to, you know, keep in mind that the Ukrainian number is around 3.5 million. That's the number that I was given when I was in Russia by somebody who is in a position to know. So, you know, this has been bloody for Russia, but it's been even bloodier for Ukraine. And right now, the kill ratio is, you know, overwhelmingly in favor of Russia. A lot of the Russian casualties came during the initial phase of the operation, the difficult months in the fall of 2022, and in the spring of 2023, especially in the Bakhmut area, where Wagner started using some very aggressive tactics in an urban environment and paid the price.

You can attribute close to 10% of those casualties to Wagner's Bakhmut campaign. But things are much more stable today. The Russians have refined their tactics. That doesn't mean that they don't

have bad days. The Ukrainians are expending tens of thousands of drones a day—tactical drones. And so, you know, war is hell. War is tough. But the Russians are just eviscerating the Ukrainians. You know, one of the things that happens here is that the Ukrainians tend to project their own experience onto the Russians. We saw that when, you know, they started saying, "We're killing 30,000 Russians a month." Wow, that's a lot. But then we have Budanov saying, "We need 30,000 recruits a month to maintain the status quo."

#Marco Rubio

Hmm.

#Scott Ritter

That implies it's Ukraine that's suffering the 30,000. And then, you know, Ursula von der Leyen has come out and used the number 27,000. Others who have access to the information have given similar numbers. But now what we're hearing is that 54,000 Russians are dying a month. Anybody who knows how to do casualty calculations—probability-of-kill factors based on terrain, munition types, weapons, et cetera—knows it's not even close to that. I'm not going to say it's impossible, but no, it's not even close to that. But what is happening is that Russia is inflicting about 54,000 casualties on the Ukrainians now. The war is lopsided. Just keep in mind that Ukraine lacks sufficient air defense, which means that the Russians are able to maintain what they call operational control over the area of operations.

So if the Ukrainians move, drones hit them, artillery hits them, aircraft hit them. Right now, because there is no effective Ukrainian air defense, Russian fighters carrying the FAB bombs, the glide bombs, are able to come in closer to the front. That means that as the drones penetrate deeper into Ukrainian airspace, the Russian aircraft are able to deploy their FAB bombs deeper and deeper and deeper. So where the Ukrainians start to assemble troops to prepare to send them to the front, these assembly areas are being hit repeatedly, repeatedly. The village that was just hit in Zaporozhye—you know, the one with the underground school—is where everybody's crying about the number of dead civilians.

First of all, that village was being used by the Ukrainians as an operational area. The 158th Separate Mountain Brigade was coming in to reinforce the 65th Brigade, which has been doing the fighting around Orikhiv. And the Russians detected that unit coming in. They struck it. They also knew from other intelligence that the facility being used by the police and ostensibly for humanitarian work was home to a drone unit that was causing them a lot of trouble, the Ronins. That facility was destroyed. Ronin is the drone battalion for the 65th. They have sections that are involved in what they call mid-strike. This is the use of the Hornet drone. This is the drone that, you know, when I was there in June, was the bane of Russian traffic on highways.

They called it the Highway of Death. You know, so it's real. The drones are there. They're causing problems for the Russians. Nobody's denying that. I saw it firsthand. And so these units have become the number one priority for Russian targeting. And when you have a Ukrainian political blogger on September 17th talking about this particular underground school, saying, you know, "There are no students. They haven't been there since January. It's been turned over now to the police, to the local administration. And our drone boys are in there. Our drones are operating in there." And then you have the Ronin go in because, you know, military units that are supposed to operate in the shadows are their own worst enemies. Everybody wants credit. They have a Telegram channel.

They have a YouTube channel. And they started posting things about how effective they are. And if you go and take a look at their posts, which I did, you find that some of these command posts have color schemes similar to the paint on the concrete walls of the school. They appear to be in a facility that has been equipped for, you know, cabled internet connectivity. Gee, and then they go around and they post things. And, you know, it's not just the content you're posting, but how you post it, et cetera. Mistakes are made.

And next thing you know, the Russians, who have a lot of intelligence capabilities, are able to, you know, take the blogger's report that the school is being used for drones, and they corroborate that with other information, much of it coming from further assessment of the posts made by the Ronin Battalion, their drone strike capability. So I believe that the Russians had every reason to know that that school was being used for drone operations. And we're starting to see reporting on the casualties coming out of the school. There were a lot of military guys in there, and I think we're going to find that many of them were involved in drone operations. So, you know, this is the nature of the war, but it's not going well for the Ukrainians.

The Russians are winning. The Russians are going to win. And, you know, this is reality. Europe can't reverse this course. There's nothing Europe can do. They don't have troops. They don't have a viable defense industry. They have nothing. They even lack the political will at certain levels. So Ukraine is on its own. The United States is out of this game. We've opted out. The only player that's in with both feet is Russia. And Russia is in the process of making Ukraine an extinct nation. And so, as they gather in Abu Dhabi for these tripartite talks, it's really just two parties. It's the United States and Russia, with Ukraine there basically to sign on the dotted line when the time comes. You know who wasn't invited?

Europe. They're totally irrelevant. Now, I think they're sending people there just so they can pretend to be part of the game. But neither Russia nor the United States is going to let the Europeans come in because the Europeans aren't there to further the prospect of ending the conflict. The Europeans are there to sabotage whatever it is the United States is doing, now that they feel empowered by

midterm elections that have returned Democrats to control of Congress. You know, the Europeans and Ukrainians are spending money that they haven't earned yet. They're just assuming that good things are going to happen. Nothing good's going to happen to them.

#Danny

Yeah. Well, there's still a couple of months until they come in. And even after that, you know, Scott, that's been a concern I've had because, certainly, the Trump administration has been a warmongering administration, and we've talked about this over and over again, especially since the Iran war was launched by the U.S. and Israel. But at the same time, the Democrats are quite vocal about what their focus is, which is reorienting U.S. foreign policy toward aggressiveness against Russia. And I'm curious what that means to you in terms of, you know, what we've been talking about: what could actually change on the battlefield.

What could the U.S. actually do for Ukraine at this point? It seems that the Trump administration is almost ignoring it. Obviously, there are so many forces in Washington that are divided on this question of how to go about this that not much has changed. But what has changed is the focus and the attention. That's for sure. The Trump administration has tried to keep that conflict from being a U.S. priority. But what are your thoughts on what could change when this new Congress comes in? Do you see a return of Russophobia escalating into more dangerous moves by the U.S. in this conflict? I mean, of course, we have the Democrats who are going to have a voting majority in both the House and the Senate, but not a veto-proof majority.

#Scott Ritter

And therein lies the rub. There's a new reality that Democrats haven't fully embraced yet. Again, they get empowered in January—what, the second is when they get sworn in this coming time? You know, there's almost two months before then, and things are just going to devolve rapidly. There's nothing the Democrats can do to stop the collapse of Ukraine, right? When they get empowered, they're going to be confronted with a new set of facts that they have to adapt to. I mean, one of the things is that when the Democrats were in power, we ostensibly had a reserve of Patriot air defense missiles that we could parcel out to the Ukrainians as we saw fit.

Today, people are saying, "Oh, they need Patriots." We don't have any Patriots, and we have a competing need for them. You know, so Congress has to deal with that reality. You can't just say, "We're going to buy Patriots and give them to them." If it were that easy, it would have been done. But the other thing is that they can't override a veto. The president right now, if he can commit to a coherent policy, if something good can come out of it, he has two years of executive control, executive power.

And if he plays his cards right, because the Democrats are so incompetent, he may be able to help spring, you know, a J.D. Vance into the office of the presidency, which would, again, you know,

mean having somebody whose interests are tied to normalizing relations with Russia, creating peaceful coexistence with Russia, and having executive power. Unless Congress has the ability to override a veto, I think we're in for the president holding the line. And the other thing is, you know, when you go to overturn a presidential veto, that's a politically risky move. Is Congress really going to be able to articulate to their constituents why they are doing the things they do about the war in Ukraine?

Because this isn't the day of Alexander Vindman and, you know, people in Washington, D.C., spinning things as though Russia is controlling Donald Trump again. You know, the Russophobia in full blast about collusion and all that. I think we're past that right now. There are people, of course, who don't like Vladimir Putin because they're ignorant about the reality of Russia. And that will always be the case until we find a way to inoculate them with fact-based truth, and suddenly they have clarity of vision. But, yeah, you know, the fact of the matter is that Democrats have nothing. They don't have a policy. You know, opposing Donald Trump isn't a policy. It's a political posture. They don't know what they're doing.

They don't understand the problem in Ukraine. You know, and I've always said, if you can't define the problem, then you can't come up with a solution, because if you haven't defined the problem properly, whatever solution you think you're pursuing isn't addressing the real issues. We have to accurately define the problem. And the Democrats didn't come in with a wave of change. They didn't come in with people saying, "We demand you do X, Y, and Z." They came in because a lot of people said, "We're tired of Donald Trump and the lies." So they came in with really no legislative momentum. There's no real legislative momentum behind them. So they're not as strong as one would think. And Donald Trump is.

We have a situation now where a vacuum has been created in the American domestic political dynamic because a large number of voters either stayed home or voted against Trump. They are angered by the fact that Trump lied to them when he became president, especially the lie about no permanent entanglement in wars in the Middle East. Well, what do we have? So, you know, we have these voters who have turned their backs on Trump, but they didn't go and embrace the Democrats. There's nothing to embrace. The Democrats are the same losers who were, you know, defeated two years ago. They're offering nothing new. So, yes, a vacuum is created by having these Republicans who are disenfranchised and aren't happy with Donald Trump.

They didn't vote, but the vacuum wasn't filled by the Democrats. So there's a vacuum there that Donald Trump can exploit. And I actually think that Donald Trump is going to exploit this vacuum of political activity and try to enact policies that win back the voters who rejected him. If he can get a lasting peace in Iran, one that isn't artificial—I mean, you know, it's going to be hard for Trump to live down what he did with the memorandum of understanding: signing what was supposed to be a comprehensive agreement, only to turn around and say, "No, no, we're not doing any of that. I only signed it because we're out of oil and I needed to fill up the oil." You know, that's tough. How can he be trusted? But the bottom line is…

I think the Iranians are smart enough to understand the United States better than many Americans do. And I think they can see the direction that Donald Trump's heading. Of course, the Iranians have to protect their left and right parameters. They don't want to agree to things, or be seen to agree to things, that are incompatible with Iran's vision and purpose, you know? But I also think that they know the United States well enough to understand that Donald Trump's trying to do something to bring an end to this conflict. I think the Russians feel the same way. And I'm hopeful that, you know, the Trump administration will resolve the problems we have with Iran and resolve the problems we have with Russia, and that Congress won't be able to be disruptive.

#Danny

Yeah, well, it'll be very interesting to see how those things play out. And I'm wondering about your thoughts on this because you did mention the APEC summit. Hopefully, we do get to speak one more time before that happens. But Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin, and Donald Trump will all ostensibly be there in Shenzhen, I believe. That's what, November 18th, 19th? And they're supposed to meet, all three of them. And as you noted earlier, the conditions under which they meet are going to be very important. I wonder if you would comment on that because—and I've always found this interesting—Donald Trump's personal warmongering appetites and, of course, those of the people he has around him in his Cabinet cannot be denied.

But at the same time, there is something about Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping that seems to have a bit of a disciplining effect on Donald Trump. You know, I don't know if we can expect the Trump administration to accept all seven points of the MOU or the abbreviated MOU and then resolve, as you said, the issues between the U.S. and Russia over Ukraine. But I wonder if you see this APEC summit meeting as a potential catalyzing moment toward those ends. Or could it just be more publicity for Trump, as we saw with Anchorage, et cetera? Yeah.

#Scott Ritter

Yeah. Trump just got bitch-slapped by the American voter. I mean, I don't like to use bad language, but that's what happened. He knows it now. He knows that, you know, things have gone bad. Now, there's the Donald Trump that would, you know, put a giant chip on his shoulder and go around and crush everything and be mad and lash out. And there's a Donald Trump that actually goes, "I just got bitch-slapped, and I know why. I mean, this Iran war is a problem. We have to solve this problem. And I have two years to fix the mess that exists today." So he's somebody who's bought into this notion—and we've seen it with his social media posts—that, you know, China, Russia, and the United States are the big three.

And, you know, as soon as you say “big three,” we’ll bring up Yalta. And he’s looking for a new Yalta-type experience where, you know, the three big powers come together and sort of decide how the world’s going to operate. And I don’t think the Russians and the Chinese are in the business of

divvying up the world. You don't build an institution like BRICS or talk about the Eurasian Economic Union or Shanghai Cooperation Organization only to turn your back on them for short-term political gain with a president who's a two-term man. So I think the onus is on Donald Trump to make changes that make him part of that team, not to sit there and say, "I'm Donald Trump. You have to become part of my team."

So I think that, you know, there's a lot of room for behavioral adjustment on the part of the United States right now. And I know as soon as I say this, if I look at the chat, people are like, "Ritter believes in Trump. What a naive fool." Yeah, well, what do you believe in? And does your belief allow for anything positive to happen? I mean, if you're just going to sit here and say, "Trump sucks," then what? We just have war, war, war, war, war, war, war. I happen to believe that some of the people around Donald Trump are rational human beings who don't want war, war, war, war, war. And I think Donald Trump learned a hard lesson. Whether or not that lesson resonates is another question only history can answer. But I think the fact is that Trump knows he made a mistake. And Trump knows that he paid a price.

And Trump understands that there could be consequences that accrue beyond simply, you know, his term as president. If he doesn't resolve this issue, impeachment and conviction loom as possibilities down the road, you know, et cetera. So I think the man has such an ego that he is going to be looking for a solution to the problem that he made. And I feel that this Big Three meeting at APEC is the beginning. Remember, Yalta didn't happen in a vacuum. You had Tehran, you had other meetings take place. I view this as early on in the process, but I think between the APEC meeting and the end of Donald Trump's term, we're going to be looking at the world's problems gravitating to these three players.

You know, India will have to make a decision about where they want to be on this one. But remember, India, sitting on the fence, always follows the United States. India may realize that its best bet is to use its membership in BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to put pressure on Russia and China, maybe get an invitation to the table, you know, like de Gaulle after the fact. But I'm as optimistic as I can be about this. Remember, our alternative was a president who just went apeshit and declared emergencies, declared martial law, and refused to convene Congress. Trump doesn't seem to be going that way. Trump seems to have accepted the fact that he got beat.

And now the question is, how is he going to deal with this? Do I trust him? Do I believe everything? No, absolutely not. But I also take a look at the situation and realize there really aren't any other options, because having been humiliated at the polls, more of the same isn't the solution. It's the problem. So he's going to have to do something different. And that's why I think this plays to his ego. This puts him up there. This makes him one of the historic figures of all time. You know, the man sitting next to the two big boys. He's now with the big boys. I'm going to watch with great interest. I'm not going to predict outcomes, but I'm going to watch with great interest.

#Danny

Well, yeah, we'll have to see what happens. I mean, it wouldn't be the first time that a U.S. administration got into deep shit during foreign policy adventures and had to go out.

#Scott Ritter

I've got to run now. I've got a thing going on. But thanks for bringing that up. I just want to point out that I leave tomorrow for Russia. Yeah, that's what I wanted to ask you. And I've got some good things planned out. There are other potential opportunities, but they require donations. We're short on donations. So if you support what I do in Russia, please go to the Substack. There's a donation button. Do that. I'll be able to give you a full report when I return. And that's that. And support Danny Haiphong, too.

#Danny

I appreciate that, Scott. Well, we'll be in touch. Safe travels, and hopefully I'll get in touch with you while you're out there. Take care. Okay, thanks. Bye-bye. All right, everybody. I'll close out with you all. I just want to say thanks to Sophie Henry de Frahan. Sorry if I butchered your name, but I really appreciate you becoming a new member here. And that's one way you can support this channel: become a new member. Yeah, well, you know, we're in a particular moment with this war. I think a lot of people are bracing themselves for the worst in an escalation. I think a lot of people are bracing for escalation by the United States and perhaps Israel against Iran, while others, as we just heard, are looking at possibly a retreat by the United States.

And, you know, to be quite honest, I wouldn't be surprised by that if it were to happen. I think we are in a moment of extremes, and it's either going to be a retreat or it's going to be a major escalation. And there just is no way that this holding pattern can continue. Actually, I think Mustafa Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran, just told his Supreme National Security Council and the President of Iran that this holding pattern actually has to stop. There is no such thing as having neither a peace agreement nor a war, and that is the reality. That is 100% true. So we're going to have to see what happens. Tomorrow, November 10th, at 10 a.m. Eastern Time, Pepe Escobar will join me. He is currently in China. I believe he's in Shanghai.

So he will talk from Shanghai, China, to go over developments. He just wrote a really incredible new piece that we will go over, along with the latest developments of the day. Thank you so much to Kevin Jacob Dubai for your super chat. Well, hit the like button, everyone. That helps boost the channel. One other thing I want to ask you to do is hit the subscribe button if you have not, and check your subscription to this show. If YouTube's very aggressive AI detectors for nefarious activity and bot activity took you off and you're a real person, then you'll want to resubscribe. But everyone, subscribe if you can. I really appreciate all of your support. I will see you all tomorrow, November 10th, at 10 a.m. Eastern Time. Until next time, everyone, take care and good night.