

Larry Johnson: War Imminent? Israel, The US, and Iran's Final Ultimatum

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#Nima

You know, what Reuters reported—we know that yesterday Donald Trump, last night, by the way, announced Project Freedom. And he said that he's going to escort the ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz. And today we've learned from Reuters that Iran fired two anti-ballistic missiles as a warning at the USS Canberra, LCS-30, in the Persian Gulf. It was this morning. What is happening in the Strait of Hormuz, Larry?

#Larry

Hey, Iran's got it shut down, and the United States is trying to figure out if it can get it open, which it can't, but that's what it's saying. I'm looking up a picture of the USS Canberra. Hmm. Yeah, so it's listed as a heavy cruiser or guided missile cruiser.

#Nima

It's some kind of destroyer?

#Larry

Yeah, it's a little smaller than a destroyer, but it is this guided missile ship. Normally these are attached to a carrier strike group. Now, we've got to look at the deck configuration that has these vertical launch systems. So it's like tubes that are in the deck of the ship. Those have to be preloaded. Before that ship sailed out of—came out of Norfolk or wherever—they loaded the missiles in, and they had at that point to make a choice: do we load offensive missiles or defensive missiles? Do we load missiles like a Tomahawk?

Or do we load something like a PAC-3? It uses a different kind, but a missile for air defense. So it's not like they got to sea and yesterday decided, hey, we're going to load you up with offensive missiles. No, this has to be done in advance. So that's what I mean when you consider that if they're putting these kinds of ships into the Strait of Hormuz—equipped with rockets or missiles that are

offensive in nature—this was planned in advance. This is not a last-minute thing. This wasn't that they just decided to do this. They've been planning to do this. I think that's an important distinction.

#Nima

Yeah, the other incident today was the attack. It's some sort of attack on a South Korean ship. I don't know where it was. It seems that it was at one of these ports in the UAE, and they wanted to do something there.

#Larry

Are you referring to the oil tanker? Was it called ANCO or something like that?

#Nima

Yeah, it's from a company, a South Korean company, HMM. HMM. It's called HMM. And the company itself put out a note saying a fire broke out on a cargo ship belonging to a Korean shipping company. They're saying that it's not yet clear whether the fire was caused by an attack or an internal fire. But the other reports show it was some sort of attack by drones or maybe missiles.

#Larry

Mm-hmm.

#Nima

And here is the reality. Here is what the IRGC put out today. They're basically talking about the blockade, this zone, that the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz is happening. You know, the regime, the new mechanism defined by the Iranians. It goes all the way—look at the right side, the line, that yellow line on the right side. It goes to Fujairah, one of the important ports of the UAE to export oil. Not only Fujairah, it's Khor Fakkan as well—two important points when it comes to the exports of the UAE. It seems that Iran is controlling the whole area. And that South Korean ship was in this area, close to the UAE, and that's why they got hit, because they were somehow crossing the red lines defined by the new mechanism in the Strait of Hormuz.

#Larry

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, no, this is... Iran is definitely challenging the United States back. And the United States, they don't have a plan. Or whatever plan they have, I would question that it can—there is no successful plan. Let me put it that way. Because to fully—what do we mean when we say open the Strait of Hormuz? That a ship can transit that strait without fear of getting blown up or hit by a missile. Okay? So you have to eliminate the ability of Iran to put any mines out there, to have any

underwater drones, to have any mini submarines with torpedoes, to have any maritime drones that are on top of the water, to have any fast boats with a crew which can launch missiles against the ship, to have aerial drones, to have coastal defense cruise missiles, and to have ballistic missiles—both short-range and intermediate-range ballistic missiles.

Boy, that's what you call a multi-layered system for defending that strait. And to take that out, to ensure that they couldn't fire a missile at you, would mean that you'd have to penetrate 150 miles into Iran at least, to caves and underground cities where they could launch those missiles from. So, yeah, there is no simple way to do this. And so that's why, you know, when Trump's talking about, "We're going to send in the Navy to open it up," what's the Navy going to do other than provide a big, fat target for the Iranians to hit?

#Nima

Yeah. You know, following the escalations today, Larry, the United States is saying right now the rules of engagement for U.S. forces in the region are being changed to strike immediate threats against ships that cross the strait, like IRGC fast boats and Iranian missile positions. And this is the new—do you consider it a new escalation, and are we somehow gradually getting there?

#Larry

Yeah, I mean, this is a bit of a ruse by Trump. You know, he declared on Friday that, oh, the end of hostilities, we've won the war, and claimed that this is not just a pause, but that they've won the war. That was Operation Epic Fury—that's over. But now we've got this Operation Project Freedom—that's new. So just changing the name of it doesn't necessarily change what all your military forces are there to do. Think through the practicality of, unless the United States pre-coordinates the movement of ships that are stuck there in the Persian Gulf right now, it's going to be difficult for it to get on scene in a timely manner. So let's say they're sitting there at Al Dhafra Air Force Base south of Dubai, and a call comes in that Iran is boarding a ship, a tanker, just north of the Strait of Hormuz.

So you've got to scramble the jets, fly out there, get the location. And then what do they do? If they boarded a ship, you know, you're not going to bomb the ship because you're doing the Iranians' work for them, if you will. In fact, Iran's not trying to destroy the ship. They're trying to just take control of it and its cargo or its crew. So this is going to be very difficult in practice for the United States to actually be effective in even taking on Iranian gunboats, unless they've got sort of a permanent drone loitering above. But my understanding is Iran now has some pretty good countermeasures to that, could shoot it down. So this is, you know, operating just 12 miles, 12 to 30 miles off Iran's coast doesn't give the United States a very good cushion.

#Nima

The other reports, Larry, show multiple U.S. Air Force refuelers. They're seen above the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman refueling U.S. fighter jets to enforce the new engagement rules, as was mentioned. What is that, Larry, and how far can they go when it comes to this? I would say if they go above these GCC countries, because it's part of the war, then again, we're going to get to the back and they're going to hit the targets in these countries because they're using the airspace of GCC countries. If they go above the Persian Gulf, close to the Strait of Hormuz, they're going to get to an area that is more dangerous for these fighters. How is that going to work for them?

#Larry

Well, I mean, that's what they got to keep in mind. Are they trying to escalate this now immediately to hot? I think what I've heard is they're going to wait probably till later this week. The smart move for Trump, in order not to affect the markets adversely, is to wait until Friday afternoon, you know, at 4:30, which would be, let's see, 4:30, so that'd be about one o'clock in the morning in Tehran, to start launching new attacks. I think this is ultimately going to culminate in new airstrikes, even though Admiral Brad Cooper reportedly, in private, has advised against it. I think that's where Trump's going to wind up doing that. So I think the odds are high this will go kinetic again. Now, my friend Ray McGovern, he was hopeful that Putin's warning to both Israel and the United States last week would have an effect in keeping them from reengaging. But, you know, I don't think Trump and Bibi are going to listen. And so I think this has the potential really to escalate again.

#Nima

There are two things, Larry. One of them is the communication that you've mentioned between Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump. And the other thing is that Donald Trump wants to go to China. He wants to show some sort of power when he gets there. He has some cards in his hand to play with Xi Jinping. But the problem is that Xi Jinping — I don't know if you saw the latest move on the part of China — when it comes to the refineries that are working with Iran, the government in China said, "We're supporting you. Go ahead and do your work. Sanctions are not going to influence you because we're backing you." This is new, you know. It's important, it's bold, and nobody's talking about it. Yeah, no, it was — China's made it very clear. They told the United States, "Screw off, you know, you're not going to tell us what to do."

#Larry

We're not paying attention to you. I doubt that Trump is going to make that trip to China. In fact, Xi Jinping as well. I couldn't believe this when I heard it, but they're reportedly saying that China is banning any receipt of shipments that go through the Panama Canal because the United States has booted the Chinese companies that were managing that. Now, the reason I—when I heard that, I—and again, I want to see if I can confirm it. But a lot of the goods that are sold out of the Colón Free Trade Zone come from China. So the question is, how are those goods going to get into the Colón

Free Trade Zone? And a lot of those goods are sold in Central, South America, and the Caribbean. So from that standpoint, that's why I question that report.

#Nima

No, no. It seems, Larry, the other tanker was attacked close to the UAE. It was reported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates. It says that the tanker belonging to the Emirati company ADNOC, near the Strait of Hormuz, was attacked by two drones.

#Larry

They said it was empty.

#Nima

Yeah, yeah. Because in this report that I'm reading, they didn't mention that. And maybe you know better because it wasn't mentioned in this. The other thing, Larry, you look at the surface — that tanker which was seized by the United States, under the control of the United States, they're getting it back to Iran. The crew is back in Iran. And the United States sent that tanker to Pakistan, then it went to Iran.

#Larry

That I don't know. I don't know if they take it to Pakistan or to Diego Garcia or wherever. You know, again, the whole thing about the blockade has been a bit of a myth because if you're going to stop a vessel, board it, basically seize it, then the standard operating procedure for the U.S. Navy is to put a prize crew on there — a crew that will run that ship — and then you put a vessel, an accompanying U.S. ship, to go with that vessel. All right, so how many ships have come out of the Persian Gulf since April 15th? At least 150 from Iran. Okay, do the math. Does the United States have 150 ships deployed in the Persian Gulf or in the Arabian Sea or the Gulf of Oman to interdict? No, they don't. They've only got a fraction of that.

So there's no way they can do an actual blockade, what they've been talking about. What they've been doing is just, I'll call it a symbolic blockade. It exists on paper. They can stop a couple of ships, but they can't even put a dent in it because the United States simply does not have enough ships. And if they, you know, you're going to use either a destroyer or a cruiser to come up alongside to stop a vessel. Well, those destroyers, they are attached to the carrier strike groups for air defense. You pull them off, then the carrier no longer has air defense. So this has not been thought through very well. Or they haven't provided the resources to implement such a plan.

#Nima

Yeah, I think the other evidence that somehow shows that you're right is the new report about the sanctioned Iranian LPG tanker passing through the U.S. Navy blockade. And it's going from the... Do you remember that South Pars oil facility that was targeted during the war? Close to that facility, there is a new tanker going there and just passing through the Strait of Hormuz and getting out of Oman and getting to... I don't know what the destination of this tanker is, but it seems that they could pass through the blockade. I don't know if they're doing this deliberately, the United States, because the market is doing this, or they just simply don't know what to do, or they don't have the ability to control all of this.

#Larry

No, they don't have the ability to control it because, look, that ship, when it came out of the Iranian port, I'm sure it sailed, say, 12 miles offshore. And as it sailed along, it just stayed 12 miles offshore until it got to the Indian Ocean or maybe the other side of the Gulf of Oman. But I think they're headed toward the Indian Ocean. The U.S. ships are not going to come within 200 miles of the Iranian coast. If they get in like 180, 150 miles, they are then in range of Iranian ballistic and cruise missiles and drones. So they're not going to do that. It's too risky, which is the point about all this — that the United States, you know, they're not willing to incur the risk of losing so many ships. But it's not like we've got a lot to lose in the first place.

#Nima

The point that Iran—and Larry, you look at the Iranian media—the points that they're bringing up are that there is no ceasefire. They don't see any sort of ceasefire. They see that the United States, it's some sort of pause. As they mentioned, it's a pause. It's not a ceasefire, because since then, we didn't have a ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel. We didn't have a ceasefire between Iran and the United States with the blockade. And the attacks—we had some sort of American attack on Iranian ships and Iran responding to that. What is this situation we're in, if you were to define it?

#Larry

Well, we're in a... it's like the eye of a hurricane, okay? The hurricane—the winds, the high winds, the heavy rain—but the eye passes over. You've got a momentary peace. But it's not going to last because you've got the backside of that hurricane coming, which is worse.

#Nima

And that's what's getting ready to happen.

#Larry

You know, Israel is struggling to figure out what it's wanting to accomplish in Lebanon. And the Zionist government is just out of control. And so if they now try to expand the war and go back to bombing Iran, Iran's going to turn around and bomb the daylight out of Israel. And it will be bad. And the Israelis will be back to living in bomb shelters like they were for five weeks. Israel has been very careful to cover up the amount of damage that was done during those five weeks. But you've got to be convinced it was far worse than anything they experienced during the 12-day war. And during the 12-day war, there was significant damage done to a variety of facilities and installations—military, industrial, scientific, etc. So, no, I think this is going to heat up again.

And it's not going to. Perhaps the only thing that will stop it will be a global economic collapse, because I think that is coming. You know, February 28th essentially lit the fuse on a bomb. And the fuse burns and burns and burns, and then finally, when it finishes its course, it explodes. And it comes relatively suddenly. And I think that's exactly what we're going to see. We're starting to see that with the oil market. The oil market is now tightening again, despite Trump's best efforts to claim we've got peace. And, you know, I was looking—Brent was up now to \$111, \$112. So, you know, this starts having a cascading effect because it raises the prices on everything.