

Scott Ritter: Iran vs. US/Israel: 2026 War

Map

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#Nima

What has happened in the last 48 hours? It was something similar to what happened before the ceasefire. We had the operation in the southern part of Isfahan, then Donald Trump coming out and suddenly saying two weeks of ceasefire. And we had Operation Freedom. And then later on, Donald Trump was talking about a new framework published by Axios, which was somehow the Iranian part saying that they don't agree with this document that Axios has published. What is happening right now? What is your understanding? On one hand, many people in Iran believe that the war is coming and they're preparing for a major war. On the other hand, you see these sorts of negotiation talks that Donald Trump is trying to point out. Your understanding—what's going on? What are we going to see?

#Scott

Well, I mean, first of all, it's only prudent to prepare for war when the United States has been, you know, reinforcing its depleted position. I think people need to understand that. There's a reason why we're not at war right now. I mean, you know the reason. Iran won. It was the United States that was compelled to seek a ceasefire after the humiliation it suffered outside Isfahan, the recognition that we had no recourse. We were done. We had shot our bolt. There was nothing left. We were unable to prevent Iran from continuing to launch ballistic missiles that were having great effect against the United States and its regional allies.

The regime was stronger than ever. We had no ability to impact the Strait of Hormuz. Iran had solid control of this. And we had depleted our arsenal. The long-range strike weapons that we used, the standoff weapons, were gone. In order to continue to sustain, you know, militarily viable pressure on Iran, we had to put our aircraft back in harm's way. And, uh, contrary to the overly optimistic pronouncements of Pete Hegseth and others, uh, the Iranian air defense wasn't destroyed. It was alive and well, and it, uh, shot down American aircraft and damaged others. And, uh, you know, Trump was compelled to acknowledge reality.

Uh, now he acknowledges reality in a way that only Donald Trump can—by being unrealistic. Um, but that's why we saw the ceasefire. Um, for whatever reason, Donald Trump opted not to declare victory and walk away at that time. Instead, he undertook a posture that was designed to create the impression that Iran had lost the war. But Iran hadn't lost the war. And the fact of the matter is that today, if the United States were to resume kinetic operations, as Pete Hegseth and company like to say, I—again, I can't speak on behalf of the Iranian government, and I'd be loath to even try—but reading what they've said...

And the implication is that the United Arab Emirates will cease to exist as a modern nation-state, that the totality of its energy production capacity will be destroyed. Whether or not Iran goes for the true kill and takes out desalination plants and causes Abu Dhabi and Dubai to depopulate along with the rest of the United Arab Emirates, uh, who knows. Um, that's what I would do. But, um, then again, I'm a bloodthirsty warmonger. So, um, you know, in comparison to the Iranians, who have actually been very responsible in their application of force—too responsible, uh, in some minds, given what has been done to them—I think we should remind your audience that they were subjected to perfidy, a surprise attack.

At a time when the United States was claiming to be seeking a diplomatic solution, Israel and the United States carried out a surprise attack—not designed to take away military capacity, but to destroy a nation-state, to eliminate a regime, murdering people. There's no reason for Iran to ever trust the United States again, nor should it. And that's why Iran must prepare for the worst possible outcomes. But if we're realistic about this, the same conditions that compelled Donald Trump to seek a ceasefire 39 days into his regime change operation exist today. The United States has proven that it has zero capacity to impact the Strait of Hormuz. Operation Freedom is a humiliation to the United States.

You know, unspoken in this is, you know, the strange war that the United States had with itself and civilian fishing boats in the United Arab Emirates, you know, where we unleashed lethality against innocents, thinking that they were Iranian speedboats when they weren't. We launched missiles that apparently struck Iran, UAE oil facilities, doing damage. The UAE was engaged in an intramural firefight with phantoms, firing their air defense systems off, shooting down nothing, when the Iranians are sitting there going, what's going on? And then the United States retreated. So, you know, we lost a battle we fought against ourselves. I think everybody should understand that. Now, Iran made the point very clear that it has the ability to lethally intervene in the Gulf.

It hit a number of ships and made it clear that it would continue to do so. It has total control of the Gulf. I don't know what fictional escort activity the United States undertook, but I would imagine that it's as imaginary as the war that we fought against ourselves. I mean, it's embarrassing to be an American today when we talk about where we are. You know, the United States should never allow

itself to be in this position. We're led by literal madmen. I mean, the president is certifiably insane. He is a man who suffers from narcissistic personality disorder of the most malignant nature ever. We don't have a constitutional republic.

We have a cult of personality in Washington, D.C., and we are surrounded by people who don't have an oath to the Constitution or to the nation, but to an individual. Um, and Pete Hegseth is, um, is emblematic of this. He is, he's the epitome of this. He sat there yesterday with a straight face and said that the Strait of Hormuz is covered by a red, white, and blue umbrella. How's that looking today, Pete? Um, it's nonexistent. Marco Rubio had to admit, hey, we sort of just sunk a bunch of civilian ships because we really didn't know what we were doing. What does that mean? It means the United States Navy was panicked, was scared, frightened of phantoms.

This is not—we're supposed to be a superpower. I mean, if we send our force in, we go indecisively. I don't know what we're doing. We live in this imaginary world right now, and that's what's happening. So I don't believe we're going to attack Iran because we can't. We don't have anything to attack them with. I mean, look at the hype that's going on. We're sending Dark Eagle, as if the Iranians instantly pooped their Depends diapers they've been wearing since this war began because, you know, they're so scared and they pee themselves with fear. And now the United States says we're going to send in the Dark Eagle.

And the Iranians obviously are ready to surrender now, and they're ready to sign a one-page document that doesn't exist. The Dark Eagle is a fantasy. I mean, yeah, did we produce eight missiles we call Dark Eagle? Yeah, we did. They're \$41 million each, and they don't work. We don't know how lethal they are. We know they can take off, and we know that they can land, but we don't know what they do when they land because we've never really tested against a hardened target. We don't know what the lethality of these things is. And yet, by deploying this, we're sending a signal to the Iranians that we can reach out and touch their ballistic missile capability.

Well, what does that mean? Well, it means that the Iranians, according to us, withdrew their ballistic missile capability beyond the range of the existing precision strike munitions that we have, which we've used all of, and we don't have any more left. And so we have to bring in Dark Eagle, eight missiles that don't work. That sort of captures the totality of the American reality today. We have a military that's very expensive, that looks good on paper, but doesn't work. The Iranians, on the other hand, have a military that does work. And they've let it be known that if you strike us, we're striking back decisively. Now, some nations take this seriously.

Bahrain declared a state of emergency. Kuwait is in a panic because they know that if Iran decides to hit the off switch, they're dead. They're done. The Qataris are sitting there going, we're trying to be friends with Iran. Please don't strike us. But gosh, you let that American base happen, and we still don't know where you stand with the United States. And you're signing your name to stupidity in

the Security Council. It's time for the Gulf Arab states to recognize there are good guys and bad guys in this fight, and they're on the side of the bad guys. That's just the way it is. They sided with Israel. They sided with Israel. I'll say that one more time. They sided with Israel.

The Gulf Arab states sided with Israel, a nation that has committed genocide against the Palestinians and is currently attacking a fellow Islamic nation. Now, I know the Iranians are Shia, and the Gulf Arab states are predominantly Sunni, and there's history there, but they're literally lining up with greater Zionists who believe in Greater Israel. And the term that is often being used in Israel when they speak of Greater Israel is "living room." You know what the Germanification of "living room" is? Lebensraum. Lebensraum. And you know why that matters? Because Lebensraum was a Nazi policy linked to Plan Ost, Plan East, which was actually implemented in Belarus.

Millions of people were killed. It was designed to commit genocide against Slavic peoples to create living room for the Aryan race. Fortunately, the war ended, the Nazis lost, but millions of Slavs lost their lives—more than the Nazis killed Jews, by the way. You know, people don't talk about the Holocaust of the Slavs that took place. This is why Victory Day is such a big parade that's going to happen, maybe, on May 8th. It's a big deal because the Soviet Union, the Slavic people, were marked for extermination by Nazi Germany. And they single-handedly, almost all by themselves, defeated the scourge because they had no other choice. But this is what Israel is.

And so the Islamic world doesn't understand that they have no choice but to eradicate Israel. Israel is a scourge on humanity. It's the most evil nation in existence today. A close second is the United States. And yet they're siding—the Gulf Arab states are siding with Israel, siding with the United States—as we carried out a war of aggression with no legitimacy whatsoever. And we lost. And that's the final answer. We lost, and we can't win. Donald Trump can say what he wants about it. We're going to resume with even greater lethality. With what, Donnie? With what? What weapons are you going to bring to bear that you haven't brought to bear? You don't have any weapons left. They're all gone.

All the precision-stacked munitions—gone. Yes, you've stripped the world dry of your missile interceptors, but Iran will drain those in two or three days of missile launch activity. And Iran has a lot of missiles, a lot more missiles than you have missile interceptors. At the end of the day, you're going to run back into the same equation. You have no defenses against some of the most sophisticated offensive strike capacity in the world today—Iran's ballistic missile program—and the Iranians will destroy everything. And the notion that the United States is going to do lethal harm to Iran, that's not a guarantee. You know, we don't know the precise details, but based upon what I'm seeing out of Iran, we blew up a bunch of empty buildings.

And the Iranians are in the process of rebuilding these empty buildings. That's what they do. But the stuff that was in the empty buildings wasn't there when they were destroyed. And they still exist. The notion that we've done lethal harm to Iran is absurd in the extreme. You know, ballistic missile production capacity, by the way, I think has increased dramatically during this period of time

compared to the lead-up, because Iran took all the stuff that was outside in Parchin and put it underground. It's sort of like what we did to the Germans when we tried to take out their Messerschmitt fighter capacity by bombing ball-bearing plants and other things. All we did was drive production underground. In 1944, at the height of the bombing, the Germans were producing more Messerschmitt fighters than at any time.

Iran today is producing more missiles than at any time. We haven't interdicted anything. We haven't stopped anything. This is a reality. So, you know, Trump can sit there and throw words around. Pete Hegseth can sit there and throw words around. But the reality is known to Iran, which is the most important party to know, because they know it's all BS. They know that everything in the United States is just absurd. And that empowers them to be aggressive. If there was any hesitancy on the part of Iran, that would mean that maybe the United States is on to something. But there's no hesitancy. They're not. Now, would they like to see—you know, the pressure Iran's getting isn't from the United States. It's from Russia, from China, especially China. China's paying a big, big, big economic price.

But China also recognizes the absolute necessity not to yield to American pressure. So the Chinese and the Russians are looking for compromises that will not weaken Iran. I think the big Russian compromise that would be part of a plan is to remove the 60% enriched uranium from Iran. I know a lot of Iranians said that will never happen. I say it will happen because it has to happen. It's the logical thing to happen. It keeps it out of American hands, which is a defeat when the United States says we will have it. We won't. I think they're talking about, you know, freezing enrichment for a period of time. That only makes sense because it's going to take Iran some time to rebuild infrastructure, and the Russians will step in and provide the fuel for Iran's nuclear program and build it up.

And it also will create the opportunity for the United States to undergo 12 to 15 years of internal domestic transformation away from the aggressive, hyper, stupid nation that we are into maybe a more realistic nation. Donald Trump will be dead and in the ground when the enrichment freezes over. He's not going to live that much longer, and all the people that are around him will be old, toothless, and irrelevant. There will be a new group of people that have to deal with a multipolar reality, and I think at that point in time, people will say it only makes sense for Iran to have what is permitted under Article 4 of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. And so I think this is a path that Iran can accept.

I mean, again, I can't speak for the Iranians, but I think that's the solution. Strait of Hormuz, I think there's a solution there between Iran and Oman. You know, we keep calling it an international waterway, but I guess actually, if you look at international law strictly, it's not an international waterway. It's a waterway that Iran and Oman control. You know, whether Iran is going to be charging tolls or not, this is negotiable. But what isn't negotiable is Iran's de facto control over the Strait of Hormuz. So there will be an exchange there. The weak part of this deal, of course, is what America is obligated to do. Iran wants instant lifting of sanctions. The United States is talking about

a very gradual process. The second you hear the word "gradual" out of the United States' mouth, it means we're not going to do it.

We're never going to do it because we hold them to artificial standards and we never comply. You know, our goal is to drag this thing out and give the Iranians just enough to make them say we don't want to go back to war. I think at this point in time, Iran's like, bring it on. Bring it on. We're not playing your stupid game. And the United States is going to have to make some concessions there. You know, Trump has a meeting with Xi Jinping coming up, maybe. We may see some movement there. A lot of conversations taking place between Russia and the United States. Earlier, we had talked about the potential of a grand bargain. That's what we're seeing right now — the United States and Russia working out some sort of grand bargain that brings Ukraine and Iranian conflict resolution to a head.

You know, we can talk about Ukraine later if you want to. I think Ukraine's about to die a very violent death — a well-deserved violent death. I pray that Ukraine does fire drones against Russia on May 9th. I pray they do, because that will compel Russia to do what needed to be done more than a year ago — to physically terminate the Zelensky regime and everything about it, to destroy Ukraine as a modern nation-state. Screw that country. They've had opportunities for peace. And also, I do think at the same time to strike Europe. I think Europe's going to be hit by Russian forces. I think Europe deserves to be hit. I think when you provide a corridor, it's no longer debatable. One of those Ukrainian drones hit a Latvian apartment building or an Estonian apartment building, blowing a hole in it — fired.

Everybody's supposed to be, don't talk about this. Why? It's a Ukrainian drone flying over your territory, striking your strategic targets in the vicinity of St. Petersburg. This isn't going to last, you know. In less than a month, the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum is assembling — the largest forum of its type in the world. And you think Russia is going to sit there and say, yeah, we're inviting everybody in the world to come in so Ukraine can hit us with drones? It ain't going to happen. This is coming to a head. Everything's coming to a head. And, you know, it's going to be violent, but Europe's got nothing. Europe's like the United States — all words, no substance. Or as they say in Texas, all hat, no cattle.

#Nima

Scott, you mentioned the Strait of Hormuz and the Iranian nuclear program, I think. But the first step on the part of the Iranians is to end war permanently on all fronts. Right after that, they're talking about the Strait of Hormuz.

#Scott

Never going to happen.

#Nima

How is that going to play out for the whole region, do you think? Because Israel is somehow attacking the southern part of Lebanon. The attacks are happening as we speak. Yeah.

#Scott

I just think that it's wishful thinking for the United States to say that we're going to get total control of the Iranian nuclear program. It's wishful thinking for Iran to think that a peace plan is going to involve the region. It's not. The Israeli-Hezbollah problem is a unique problem to Israel and Hezbollah that requires Israel to physically withdraw from Lebanon. This means that Hezbollah is going to have to continue to kick their ass. You know, people forget that Hezbollah beat the Israelis once, straight up, caused them to leave Lebanon. And then they fought them to a standstill in 2006, I think. And right now they're beating Israel. You know, Hezbollah is supposed to be defeated, nonexistent, not there. The Israeli troops on their own are getting slaughtered every day.

They can't advance anymore, and there's no solution to this. So, you know, while there may be some sort of quasi-ceasefire in place, I think if the Iranians insist on resolving the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict, it's just a non-starter. It's the equivalent of the United States asking for Iran to give up all of its nuclear— it isn't. You have to physically destroy Israel to make that happen. I don't know if Iran's ready to go to that level right now. The Iranians are strategic thinkers. I mean, they've proven that. They've shown great foresight in not pursuing a nuclear weapon. I just want to remind all the people who are out there saying, this proves Iran needs a nuclear weapon— no, it doesn't. It proves the exact opposite. Iran, without nuclear weapons, defeated two nuclear-armed powers, the United States and Israel.

And Iran knows that if it acquired a nuclear weapon, that would change the dynamic 100%. The first thing it would do is legitimize everything that's been said about Iran. And then you lose all the political support that Iran's been gaining, because right now Iran is identified as the victim. If Iran decides to have a nuclear weapon, Iran will no longer be the victim but the perpetrator. It doesn't matter how you can justify it. I'm just telling you what the facts are. But Iran doesn't want it. I heard it straight from the president's mouth. I heard it from the foreign minister's mouth. They didn't get killed. They're alive today, and they still don't want it. And I don't think the son is going to contradict the father when it comes to the Supreme Leader.

So, you know, he's not going to turn around and say, well, suddenly my father's religious genius, the two fatwas he issued—no, they're bullshit. We're going to have nukes. He's not going to do that. So Iran doesn't want nuclear weapons. I know there are hardliners in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Command that say things. They've always said things. But they're not the decision-makers. They don't make the final decision. And Iran's not going to acquire nuclear weapons. And, you know,

there will be a compromise on the nuclear side of it. So that's the genius of Iran. They think long distance. And right now, I think with the potential, I think Iran has to be prepared to strike back hard. I mean, deterrence doesn't work unless people believe that you're going to do it.

So, you know, if they do strike, Iran needs to eliminate the United Arab Emirates. Totally, 100% gone. And then it's proof that we're a power that can kill nation-states. Who wants to die next? And that's deterrence in its own right. Picking on the United Arab Emirates is pretty good because they're an extension of Israel. We now know that Israeli troops were fighting on UAE soil. Israeli troops brought the Iron Dome to the United Arab Emirates, boots on the ground. Why isn't the Muslim world in an uproar over this? That's what I don't understand. Where's Saudi Arabia? Where's Qatar? Where's Kuwait? Where's Bahrain? Where's everybody telling the United Arab Emirates, you are now the leper? We reject you.

We drive you out. You know, but they're quiet about it. They're silent about it. But it's a humiliation to the Muslim world to have Israel, which despises the Muslim world, despises the Gulf Arab states, is seeking Greater Israel, you know, out there deploying troops on an Arab country's soil. Shocking. But I think the Iranians are capable of understanding that the future solution—and this is where the Chinese, and to a lesser extent the Russians, come in—is economic. That the economic liberation of Iran will be the victory, the ultimate victory. The Strait of Hormuz is essential for this because it is their oil nuclear bomb, meaning if you ever mess with this again, we just do it. We just choke you.

They will retain great connectivity with the Houthis, who can choke the Bab al-Mandeb Strait. So there are dual choke points. It's the end of the West. They've already proven that. And that's the ultimate deterrence because they've proven what they can do, and we've proven we can't do anything about it. So that's what I think deters future conflict. There is no military solution. For the United States to strike Iran would be because of political impetus. And when you're dealing with a mentally ill narcissist—which we have, a mentally ill man in the White House—anything's possible. But hopefully, he's surrounded by enough people to say, we can't win this war, and the consequences will be fatal to our allies in the Gulf Arab region.

And also will cause a global depression, especially for us in the United States. And then you have to think about your political legacy and what your future is going to be. And the fact is, you may not just get impeached, but you might get convicted. And, you know, that's the end of your family. Hopefully, people are saying this, and the addled brain of this insane man recognizes that he's staring, you know, his future before his eyes. He needs to walk away from this war. And Iran has to, without compromising fundamental things, allow him to walk away from this war. And I think that's the message that Russia is sending, that China is sending.

#Nima

Scott, what was the achievement of Benjamin Netanyahu with this war against Iran? Because we've learned from multiple reports recently about the U.S. bases in GCC countries. And just yesterday we

had the Washington Post article about how extensively they were hit by Iranian missiles and Iranian drones. And I would say this is not about the United States, it's about Israel, because what has happened in GCC countries directly influenced the situation with the interceptors, with the air defense system of Israel. And how is Israel today? I would say the achievement of Benjamin Netanyahu's administration, because they wanted this for such a long time. What was the outcome for Israel?

#Scott

Strategic defeat. I mean, what did they accomplish? Nothing. Literally nothing. In fact, it's the exact opposite. Given the fact that Iran's nuclear program—the weaponization of the nuclear program—exists in the minds of the Israelis only. All we've done, all they've done in initiating the conflict designed to terminate forever Iran's nuclear potential, is create the seeds of future fantasies. Because now the Israelis, because they project themselves onto others, they say, well, we went after them. You know, there's that old saying, if you're going to strike the king, kill the king. They struck Iran, but they didn't kill Iran. And now Iran's there.

And this war will end with less than a total eradication of Iran's nuclear program, which means in the fantasy-driven minds of the Israelis, Iran not only retains the capacity to produce a nuclear weapon but now the motivation, the justification because of what Israel did. And so this is going to drive people like Netanyahu insane. It's also going to create a politically unsustainable position because he's going to be exposed. This was his last gambit. This is why the Israelis are holding on, because it's now turned out that he's defeated nobody. You know, it started out with October 7th. They still haven't had that full investigation. When they do, Benjamin Netanyahu's political career is over because it'll become apparent that his failures as a leader helped create the potential for October 7th to happen.

Um, as he fought Hamas, uh, as Hamas fought him to a standstill, he had to, you know, expand the war to justify staying in power. And so he went to war against Hezbollah. Um, and, you know, he killed Hassan Nasrallah and, you know, had the Patriots blow up, and he was going to win there. Then he expanded the conflict into Syria. But this wasn't enough because no matter what he did, he didn't solve any of these problems. He still had the same domestic political problems that he faced, totally unpopular with the people of Israel. Remember, this is a guy that even before October 7th had hundreds of thousands of Israelis in the streets demanding his resignation because he was seeking to alter fundamental law in Israel so that he was above the law.

He couldn't be prosecuted for the corruption charges he's currently being prosecuted for right now. And, you know, he's like a Ponzi scheme. In order to stay in power, he had to keep expanding. But it was all a lie because he was never going to achieve any victory. The final straw was, of course, Iran. Now, for Iran to be possible, the United States had to be a part of it. Israel would never have attacked Iran to the scope and scale they did without American involvement. And he just happened to have an insane sucker in Washington, D.C., that listened to his garbage and agreed to this. But it

failed. There's nowhere else Netanyahu can go with this. Nowhere else. So you're looking at the political collapse of Netanyahu, inevitably. He cannot survive this.

You know, the truth will come out about the damage that has been done. Just don't pretend you live in a world where Iran took out the totality of American military infrastructure in the Gulf Arab states and did no damage to the Israelis. The same weapons that took out the American bases did damage, and Israel's hiding this. But significant damage has been done to Israel. The Israeli military knows this. Now they're trapped in a forever war in Lebanon. Hezbollah, who they thought they had defeated, isn't defeated. And Gaza could blow up again. Syria is out of control. You know, and now, you know, what Netanyahu's done is created a new Iranian threat in the form of Turkey, where they're saying, well, we have to expand this.

Turkey's a NATO member. And Israel's talking about the potential of armed conflict against Turkey. It's over. And so from the Iranian perspective, you know, this is one of those situations—just wait, and the problem will resolve itself. Israel's on the fast track to national insolvency. Their economy is trash. That's why they needed the Abraham Accords. And their biggest partner in the Abraham Accords, the United Arab Emirates, is going bankrupt as we speak. Acts of desperation—calling in a \$3.5 billion loan they gave to the Pakistanis, evicting 15,000 Pakistanis and stealing their money in the process. Withdrawing from OPEC so they can flood the market with their oil, but they can't because the Strait of Hormuz is closed to them.

So, you know, Israel is collapsing. The whole scheme of Greater Israel is collapsing. The best thing the Iranians could do is just let it collapse. Sometimes just get out of the way and let things happen. And that's why I think that you're not going to see a comprehensive regional peace plan, because it's impossible. Israel right now is—I mean, look at the Iranians. If we had had this conversation, I don't know, in April of last year, and we said Iran was going to destroy everything and do all this, we'd both be like, maybe escalation management, maybe. But I mean, no, the Iranian government doesn't do decisive stuff like this. Well, they did. Why? Because it's a battle of existential proportions. They have no choice.

They were given no options. Trust me, had they been given options, I believe they would have taken those options. History shows this. But they had no options, so they struck. And Israel's in a similar boat right now. Israel's facing a struggle of existential proportions. And the last thing you want to do is try and back a nation that's facing such a struggle into a corner where they have no options. All right. Let Israel die. Let them die, because that's what's happening. They're dying. Let them die. That would be my advice. But I just don't see—if Iran forces this issue, I don't see Israel yielding, because we're talking about, again, another narcissist, Benjamin Netanyahu, who's looking at his political legacy and looking at dying in jail.

So it's very personal to him. Why force the issue? Why force his hand? Why compel him to do something irrational? Right now he's contained, containable. He's trapped in a war that he can't win in Lebanon, and he has political problems at home. Don't give him an opportunity to become the

martyr. So that's why I think we're not going to be seeing decisive moves against Israel. Israel lost this war. They lost it. It was a big gamble on his part. That's why Israelis are mad at the United States, because they know that if the United States is seeking to withdraw, that's the end of the gambit. They can't win without the United States.