

Mark Sleboda: HORMUZ TRAP: Is the US Checkmated?

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#Nima

We know what is happening somehow in the last 72 hours in the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf. The two sides are fighting basically because of the blockade by the United States, which is totally, you know, going against the ceasefire. There is no ceasefire. Some sort of pause is happening right now as we talk. And the two sides know that they may have it in one hour, in one day, two days, a week. Nobody knows when all of this situation is going to break out into a new major war, a new round of war. But what has been happening in the last 48 hours was some sort of confrontation between Iran and the United States, because the United States attacked two of these tankers that were supposed to get to the Iranian ports.

And what we've learned from the Iranian side, they said they hit two of the three destroyers in the region close to the Persian Gulf. On the part of the United States, they said nothing of that sort has happened. Donald Trump himself didn't mention that. He said nothing has happened to destroyers. But they argued that they have hit seven speedboats in the Strait of Hormuz, which today I talked with Professor Miranda. He said, no, they didn't hit any of these speedboats. They hit some of the civilian boats, because when you hit the speedboats, you kill the military personnel. And it's so difficult in Iran when they get killed — they're martyrs — and you cannot hide it.

It's not easy to hide the guy who was killed in an operation in this sort of fight. And moments ago, we've seen this video coming out. And as you see, one of these speedboats is following the American destroyer getting out. And the guy who's talking in this video, he says, yeah, go ahead and flee. Here is the cradle of the earth and the land of Iranians. Here is the peace of Islam. This is the reality of what's going on. The two sides are fighting each other. They have their own rhetoric. They decided, I want to, but it seems that in a—how do you see this blockade in the long run? We definitely are headed towards some sort of escalation. Your understanding, your take, what do you make of it?

#Mark

Okay, so, I mean, first, let's go back, big picture, to get some context and understand what's going on. So, largely, at least compared to the conflict before, until two days of naval skirmishes this week, the ceasefire, at least between the U.S. and Israel and Iran, has largely held, right? Certainly in comparison to the scale and intensity of the conflict before. Now, that says nothing about what's been going on in Lebanon, where Israel continues its genocidal war and ethnic cleansing of the Lebanese people of South Lebanon — the South Lebanon of the Shia population of South Lebanon — literally and quite openly. And this has even been admitted on the pages of The New York Times, razing all of the cities, towns, and villages of southern Lebanon to the ground.

There's nothing left. What The New York Times refers to as the Gaza solution, which is, yeah, genocide. So that continues in Lebanon. The so-called ceasefire that was agreed in Lebanon has nothing actually to do with Hezbollah. It is between the quisling government of Joseph Aoun and the Israelis. And right now the Americans are doing everything they can, along with the Israelis, to push the Lebanese army, which is, shall we say, not up to the task of confronting Hezbollah directly, and essentially trying to re-provoke civil conflict, civil war in Lebanon. Meanwhile, Hezbollah is, you know, fighting a guerrilla, essentially war of attrition in South Lebanon against Israel. And they're making very good, very improved tactical use of drones, of FPV drones in particular.

And even more particularly, they've been using fiber optic FPV drones, which are immune to electronic warfare and have been pioneered and used extensively by Russia in the conflict in Ukraine. And how has Hezbollah acquired them? You know, we don't have any evidence to say, but certainly the Russians have been providing drone assistance to the Iranians. And have the Iranians provided some drone assistance, something that can actually be used on the tactical battlefield on the ground, to Hezbollah? That seems a likely scenario to me, without just speculating. But the Telegram channels are full of hits on Merkava tanks and so forth, and the Israeli press is whining about it. There was a lovely photo that I put in my own week-in-review video on my own channel yesterday.

It is the last moment, the last sight of an Israeli bulldozer driver, an excavator, who was busy at work leveling one of the Shia settlements in South Lebanon. And he happened to look up, and there's this look of surprise and horror on his face that was taken by the kamikaze drone that was about to end his life. And when you are literally committing, you know, the material act of genocide, which is what leveling, you know, all of the buildings, you know, the homes, the houses, and everything of the people of that land—yeah, no sympathy. No, not a bit. So that goes on, right? That situation hasn't changed in Lebanon. But by and large, the greater ceasefire has held. And so we entered a new phase of the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran.

#Nima

Right.

#Mark

The war isn't over, but the kinetic aspect of it, at least as far as Iran was concerned, was put on hold, and we entered a geoeconomic phase. And people have termed it "dueling blockades." Okay, that is true. I prefer to think of it as a geoeconomic game of chicken. Are you familiar with chicken? Yeah, this is an Americana thing, right? So imagine Iran and the U.S. as two testosterone-driven, amped-up teenagers, right? They're both in their sports cars, their speedsters, right? And at the drop of a flag or whatever, they both race forward toward a cliff overlooking the sea. And the game here is to see which of the two blinks and swerves his car to avoid hurtling off the cliff first. Right. And that's essentially what's going on.

Right. Iran, of course, is driving their own economy. Trump is driving the global energy markets and the global economy because of Iran's strategic use of their control of the Strait of Hormuz and the economic damage against the Gulf U.S. client states with U.S. military bases. And it is... Iran has limited ability to hit the U.S. back directly, other than those military bases, of course, that even the Western media has now admitted are thrashed all over the Middle East. So asymmetrically, they're hitting the global economy, right? By going after this, you know, the Strait of Hormuz, through which so much of the energy traffic, but also the fertilizer, the helium, the aluminum, all these things flow through the Strait of Hormuz, or did, and are now selectively blockaded by Iran.

They let through who they want, and they have established rules and tolls now and so forth. And it is important to know that the Strait of Hormuz is not international waters, right? Under the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea, it's too narrow between Iran and Oman—Oman on one side, Iran on the other—but still, there's no international water. So any statements by Rubio about international passage are kind of blurring words, because under the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea—admittedly, neither the U.S. nor Iran are actual signatories of the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea—but both of them have, by and large, abided by it so far.

But under international law and the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea, Iran argues that they are under attack, and they therefore have the right to take that initiative—a waterway which is, you know, within their own territorial boundaries, under their control, for their own security, while they're under attack. And that actually seems pretty legally plausible to me, but I'm not an international lawyer, so anyway, that's the argument they make. So you've got these two speedsters hurtling towards the cliff, and the guess is which one suffers the most damage, or who can endure damage, also due to the economic consequences of these blockades. Again, the Strait of Hormuz versus the U.S. attempt. Their blockade, or counter-blockade, is nominally a blockade of Iranian ports, but it's not being done from Iran's coast.

They're at least 350 kilometers, just outside anti-ship missile range off the Iranian coast for the most part. And they're conducting their blockade from out in the Sea of Oman or even further out in the Indian Ocean, the Strait of Malacca, you know, and so forth. And so, with Iran, the consideration primarily is because they've got so many countries that they trade with by land, right? Russia, the

north-south corridor through the Caspian Sea. Pakistan has opened up multiple transit routes through Pakistan that then go on to China. And actually, there are already Chinese-Iranian railroads in existence. Right. So it's not like they're going to starve to death. It's not that they can't get supplies. The big question is getting oil out, right? Because that is still a significant part of the Iranian economy, particularly the Iranian government budget.

And up until now in the conflict, because Iran was getting their own oil out and the Trump administration was desperate for any oil to get to the global market, they've actually been doing pretty well, right? They've been making hay while the Arab countries and Iraq, which is just a victim of this, caught in the middle—their economies have suffered greatly. So, the question is, how much oil is Iran getting out through the U.S. blockade, right? How much are they domestically using, right? And Western analysts initially said all kinds of ridiculous things like, oh, Trump promising that in three days the Iranian economy would shut down, they wouldn't have any place to put their oil, they'd have to shut down all their oil wells, and they'd all blow up, because that's exactly what happens.

Right. Yeah, all right. So two weeks later, here we are. And now finally, the Western mainstream media is starting to change their tune, which, to be fair, not just me but pretty much everyone in the alt media was saying from the beginning—that Iran can last a lot longer than the Western media was talking about. And Reuters put out an article just yesterday that cites U.S. intelligence anonymously saying the Iranians can last for months. They can outlast the U.S. blockade. I don't know that we need any greater proof. So whatever Trump says, right, we know—we just really look at that for the entertainment value.

U.S. intelligence is saying that the U.S. blockade is useless. And then as far as ships getting through, according to independent tanker trackers and so forth—TankerTrackers, right—Iran has gotten quite a number, dozens of vessels, through the so-called blockade. You know, a porous U.S. blockade, far more than have been intercepted. Far more. Right. Maybe 10 percent have been intercepted, and that's of ships going in and out. So Iran's economy—yeah, I mean, they might be under a little more stress, but they've been under maximum pressure, sanctions, everything, for years. Right. They can take this stress. This is an existential fight for them.

Trump has promised to destroy Iranian civilization. He has demanded regime change, unconditional surrender, bombing them back to the Stone Age so that they can never come back, right? This is all this genocidal rhetoric that he has been using. They have every interest in enduring, you know, a little bit of economic damage in order to survive. Meanwhile, the global economy is not looking so good, and Asia and U.S. allies in Asia like Japan and South Korea have already begun gasoline rationing. There's a jet fuel crisis around the world. Lufthansa, a European airline, canceled 20,000 flights the last I saw. Spirit Airlines went out of business.

And all of this is actually only expected to start hitting Europe as seriously as it has Asia, which is a little more reliant on oil coming out of the Strait of Hormuz—oil and LNG. Europe is supposed to start

getting hit in the next couple of weeks really bad, and they're talking about it. Yeah, they're kind of afraid of it now. So that all said, we're at the point where the status quo of this geo-economic game of chicken, racing towards the precipice of this dueling blockade, is unsustainable for the U.S. They know they're going to lose that fight. So they've got to do something. And that was, at the beginning of the week, Operation Freedom! Exclamation mark, trademark, trademark symbol, right? Freedom. And this was an attempt by the... Project Freedom.

Project Freedom, yeah, Project Freedom. Operation Freedom, whatever. To attempt to force open the Strait of Hormuz. Not so much overtly militarily, but really more psychologically, right? That's what they were attempting to do. First, they announced that they were going to guide ships through the Strait of Hormuz—what they said were innocent, neutral third-party ships stuck in the Strait of Hormuz. They were just going to get them out. And they're sure that's fine with Iran. They're sure Iran's cool with that, even though they're declaring it unilaterally. And just in case, yeah, we're not actually going to send our Navy in to escort you out. We're going to be in the vicinity, right? You know, like this hemisphere, I guess. And you know, we're in the vicinity, so you don't have to be afraid.

We're somewhere. And you know, the tankers and cargo ships in the Strait of Hormuz, what you should do is just try to put the pedal to the metal, put it all the way to the floor, and hug the coast of Oman, and pray you don't hit any sea mines, and you'll probably make it. That's what they told them. So initially they sent some ships in the direction of the Strait of Hormuz. And at the same time, there were two U.S.-flagged transport ships already in the Strait of Hormuz. These were actually ships that, you know, normally conduct business, but they're also part of the U.S. Naval Transport Reserve, which means that they can fall under military orders. Right. So that in case the U.S. needs to move stuff, you know, they have this excess capacity, this reserve.

And so they basically told them, you guys are going to be the guinea pigs. You're going to run this. And so while that was happening, the U.S. was sending a couple of warships, as I understand it, in the direction of the Strait of Hormuz while these two were trying to race, skirting Oman to get out. And Iran started opening up fire on them. And there was this, oh, sunk some speedboats, some fast attack boats. The Iranians say no, they didn't, that it was some civilian ships. OK, I don't know, right? I tend to believe the Iranians in these situations, not with—trust but verify, right? That's the way I look at it. And with the U.S. statements, it's don't believe, don't trust, and verify ten times over. But I look for evidence. I haven't found anything terribly convincing either way. But ultimately, it doesn't make a difference.

Six, seven fast attack boats. How many fast attack boats does Iran have? Something like 2,500 of them? There's a reason why they call these the mosquito fleet, right? Because it's like mosquito season in Siberia, right? It's crazy. So on a strategic level, which is what I'm worried about, it doesn't make a difference. He said, she said about six, seven fast attack boats. They've got plenty of these. They've got plenty of these. They can load them up with anti-ship missiles, with sea mines, with drugs, with anything. They're extremely versatile. They're designed to dominate the Strait of

Hormuz. They're not designed to send ships to the other side of the world and project aircraft at someone's borders, right? They're designed for this fight. They're good.

They're designed for it. And Iran also has G Subs and underwater drones and surface drones and aerial drones and missiles and cruise missiles. I mean, they've got so many options that it doesn't make any difference. So the Americans quickly retreated out. They may have gotten those two transports out, but no one else followed suit. Well, a couple of ships tried to and got hit. Right. And immediately after this, on Monday, Iran responded by hitting the UAE. Right now, there were some comments, right, trying to interpret Iranian officials' events. Iran saying, oh, no, we didn't do that. We don't know who did it. The statements that I saw were the IRGC saying that they had no premeditated plan to attack the UAE, and it is the fault of U.S. adventurism. Right.

Which, as far as I'm concerned, is Iran saying, yeah, we hit them, but we only hit them in retaliation for the U.S. trying this stunt, this Project Freedom to open up the Strait of Hormuz. And that's the way I read it. If someone else wants to read it a different way, that's fine, because I think it's perfectly fine. Right. The UAE has U.S. military bases used to attack Iran. That makes them, you know, under international law, a participant in this conflict and, you know, thus culpable and fine. So Iran, you know, said, damn you, Trump. Bam, UAE. Right. That's what they did because they regarded this attempt to force open the Strait of Hormuz as a violation of the ceasefire, which, you know, seems perfectly legitimate again in my book. Moreover, what they hit in the UAE is the pipeline and the port of Fujairah. Am I pronouncing that correctly?

#Nima

Fujairah. Fujairah.

#Mark

All right. So it is the UAE's bypass, because that is a pipeline that actually goes around the Strait of Hormuz, right? So, where the IRGC has controlled the Strait of Hormuz, that port is outside of it. So the UAE was still able to get a significant amount of their oil out, just like Saudi has been able to, to some extent, through the east-west pipeline across the Saudi desert to Yanbu on the Red Sea, right? Saudi and the UAE have suffered less than the other Gulf Arab states because they had these bypasses around the Strait of Hormuz. So Iran hit the bypass. They hit it several times. And then they declared they were extending their control of the Strait of Hormuz to also include that port of Fujairah. So that is their response to all of this. And then there was a backing down for a few days.