

Alastair Crooke: Iran Smashed the US Military Model – China Is Watching

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#Nima

Hi, everybody. Today's Wednesday, May 13th, 2026, and our dear friend Alastair Crooke is here with us. Welcome back, Alastair.

#Alastair

Thank you. Always a pleasure, Nima.

#Nima

It's a great pleasure, Alastair, to have you on. And please, go right below Alastair's name. You can find conflictsforum.substack.com. If you go there and subscribe to this Substack account, he's going to give you a lot of deep, deep analysis of what's going on in today's world — not only about the Middle East, but about Ukraine, everything about the foreign policy of the United States. And Alastair, let me start with what's going on right now. Moments ago, we've learned that Donald Trump has arrived in China, and he's going to talk with Xi Jinping. And before getting to what would be the main objectives of this trip, this visit, when it comes to the two conflicts in Ukraine and in the Middle East, how do you find the United States' situation in the Middle East?

It seems so critical, so important in terms of how it influences the global economy. That's why this issue is so important. And recently we had Operation or Project Freedom, which after 24 hours Donald Trump announced was concluded because it seems that Iran has some sort of leverage in the Persian Gulf, in the Strait of Hormuz. That's why they decided to conclude the operation or the project after 24 hours. In the Middle East, with the case of the blockade — two blockades, the Iranian blockade and the United States blockading the Iranian blockade — and the consequences of that for the region and the situation that Donald Trump is facing while he's in China talking with Xi.

#Alastair

Well, of course, the epicenter of it has been the war on Iran. That's obvious. However, the emanations and the consequences of it are rippling out far beyond Iran. They're rippling out across the whole world. Iran is essentially — we might go into it a bit later — but it is essentially a huge geopolitical event. It is going to transform almost certainly the Gulf, but it is also going to have its impact. I can tell you already, the lessons from Iran, the lessons of its asymmetrical war, are very apparent in China. I mean, it would be unbelievable to think that the Chinese, looking at Taiwan surrounded by big, heavy American vessels, haven't taken notice of the Iranian small speedboats and the anti-ship missiles and the swarm-like process that has been used by Iran against the naval blockade of Hormuz.

And when it comes to Taiwan, obviously the Chinese will be thinking about how to manage any form of American naval blockade or blockade of China as a whole, because, you know, they've been slowly fortifying the first-line islands off China, possibly preparatory to making a blockade there. And, of course, Russia too has noted how Iran's powerful military—hmm—graduated use of sophisticated missiles on Israel has created a deterrence, that it has carefully made a deterrence without necessarily having to go to all-out war. But it has caused extensive damage to Israel, but also has created for Iran a deterrence, which is important.

And so, as Russia faces Europe, with missiles of European origin flying over NATO airspace to attack near St. Petersburg and the refineries deep in Russia, Russia, of course, will have noticed this in the context of what it is going to do about the Europeans and their facilitation of these attacks on mainland, homeland Russia. This has got nothing to do with Ukraine per se. This is basically provocations against Russia. So the effects are rippling up. But you ask, what is the state of things at the moment? It's at an impasse. It's an impasse in that the United States has put its terms to Iran, which were rejected by Iran.

The terms that they produced in the Istanbul conference bore no relation to the 12-point plan that Iran had proposed, and which Trump had agreed was a reasonable basis for discussion beforehand. What happened at Istanbul was an extraordinary affair in that, throughout it, Vice President Vance, who was sort of leading the American delegation, was on the phone being called or calling the White House 11 times during that one-day conference, with the White House telling him, as we know pretty well from various reports, American as well as others, that he was continually being told, "Well, refer this to Netanyahu. Please keep Netanyahu in the picture and check it out."

I mean, whether it was Netanyahu or whoever, chief of defense staff, but all of us, it was, you know, under the vigilant eye of Whitcoff and Kushner in the room, with Netanyahu at the end of a telephone line, repeatedly consulted, apparently. So the question, what is happening is that since then, the United States, I mean, very briefly, has said they don't like it. So Trump has said he doesn't like it. He won't accept, you know, the new proposal that Iran has put on the table. "Unacceptable," he writes in capitals. "We're not going to have that." And so we are at that impasse, pending this visit to China. But the consequences of this are, I think, about to hit.

They've been somewhat abstract. We've all heard about, you know, the energy crisis. It's going to be one of the worst energy shocks since 1973. So we've all heard this, but it hasn't been, except in a very few places, it hasn't been felt. I mean, in Ireland, it is felt, where there have been protests on the street because gasoline, or petrol as it's called in Ireland, is just unavailable, and people can't take their children to school, can't get to work. And so there's a lot of angst there about the situation. Australia has almost run out. But by and large, you know, the effects of this have yet to sort of hit. But I think this is really the 11th hour, and that they are going to hit very quickly and rather shockingly for most Europeans and Americans. Already the inflation is evident. The price rises in the shops are clear in Europe.

That is the beginning of the anger in Europe. It's already... They're already noting the increase in prices and talking about price gouging by shopkeepers. You go to one shop and something is priced at one level and three times as much in another shop. You know what happens when inflation takes hold. You know, I was in South America for a period when it was a thousand percent inflation. You know, you turn away for half an hour and the price has gone up, and probably far more than is justified. So that's present, that's affecting Europe already, and flights are shortly going to be either cancelled or impossibly expensive. I mean, by impossibly expensive, maybe tripling in price. I mean, you know, putting it out of the range of nearly everybody except the elites and the oligarchy.

So this, I think, is on the brink because it's some time now since the last tankers reached Europe. I think we are probably within a week of the crisis suddenly becoming real and no longer abstract, but concrete and tangible and hurting people. And that is going to produce a political crisis in many places, depending on how long it goes on for, but it will produce a crisis. So this is, I mean, it is, and it's going to be much deeper than many people fear. First of all, inventories are really, you know, there have been some commercial inventories, strategic reserves and so on. They're down to days, one or two days.

And, you know, this is basically Trump's fault, if I may put it clearly, because certainly there are those in America who understood that when it hit, it would have a profound effect on the world economy. I think Trump hubristically imagined that Iran was going to capitulate quickly, quicker than would be necessary to worry about the inventories going so low. But it hasn't. And in fact, Iran has now strengthened in terms, as you, I'm sure, are aware, that the Supreme Leader has just issued five preconditions, which are tougher but quite reasonable in geopolitical terms for there to be any discussions or any negotiations in the future.

So I think the other thing, of course, which we haven't seen any notice of, is it's all the supply lines. The supply lines have been sort of vibrating and shaking, but I think they're about to snap. Some of the supply lines will snap. And that will, you know, I mean, some of them may be petty—people won't be able to get aluminum foil for their kitchens—but some of them may be related to food and things like that. So that's basically where we are as Trump heads off with a gang of oligarchs on his plane to China.

#Nima

Donald Trump was frustrated with the Iranian response. After four days, he said that they could have responded in 10 minutes with that paper. He called it garbage, the paper, the document. It was garbage because they didn't, as you mentioned, they didn't capitulate. They're putting their own terms, their own point of view, which basically is based on a 10-point plan that Iran presented to the United States before. And right now they're calling it a 14-point plan. And when you look at the plan that Iran has sent to the United States, one of the first points is ending the war on all fronts. I think this is one of the most difficult points in this plan because we know that the United States somehow wouldn't be able to stop Israel from attacking Lebanon, for example.

#Alastair

It's not just—sorry to intervene—but it's not. You know, actually, you can't leave Israel out of it, but let's come back to that. But just in respect to the United States, is Trump capable of providing what Iran wants, which is a guarantee of no further war now or in the future, and to include Lebanon and Iraq and other parts of the region? How would he do this? First of all, no one trusts his word. He has twice hoodwinked Iran into taking part in negotiations while at the same time he was planning a sneak attack to kill its leadership. So how could you be expected—how would anyone be expected—to take his word? "Oh, there won't be further attacks."

Secondly, the only way you could feasibly think that this would be more watertight would be if it was put to Congress and it became a treaty between Iran and the United States. But that is not going to happen, simply because the institutional structures and frameworks in the U.S. Congress are not going to allow that to pass. It is structurally blockaded against allowing that to happen. And then, of course, finally, it could go to the Security Council, but that would be vetoed by the United States almost certainly. So how will it go ahead? Well, of course, the main veto power over this process of ending the war is Netanyahu, who in these recent days has said, no, the war must go on.

It's not over and must continue. And Trump needs to get back and start the war again. And Netanyahu, in many ways, for reasons which are not entirely clear, calls the shots, and it seems that Trump has little real agency in this process. Because, let us be clear, if this continues for a period of time, then it will be hugely damaging to the global economy and to the American economy, and it will be hugely damaging to other states as well—to Europeans and others—and it will affect him politically, internally, in the United States. Nonetheless, he seems adamant that he may well attack Iran again. He says, you know, he is going to, you know, let hell loose on Iran—or, I mean, a variation on that.

We've had various variations over time. But in practice, you know, it's not effective. And I think that's increasingly understood around the world—that this way of war that the Americans have used really since the Cold War, of trying, first of all, to outspend the Soviet Union by pushing them to become overstretched financially, trying to match American expenditure and high-end weapons—just

hasn't worked against Iranian asymmetrical warfare. It hasn't worked at all. And so he hasn't got many alternatives. His alternatives really at this time, if he returns to this, would be either to try and seize something—Karg Island, Hashem, or parts of Iran, who knows—to try and take back the enriched uranium.

But first of all, that was a failure before—I mean, a much bigger failure than has been publicly admitted. Many aircraft were involved, many people, personnel, special forces of America were involved, and they were ambushed by Iran near Isfahan, on an airfield that the Iranians were surveilling. And Joe Kent said very publicly—the man who was the head of the counterintelligence unit in the United States, a former military officer, highly decorated, et cetera—he resigned in protest over the war in Iran. But Joe Kent said loudly that if America tried to go on the ground in Iran, they would be taken hostage. They risked being taken hostage, or they risked a catastrophe, a debacle.

And he said, "You, Mr. Trump, you will suffer the same fate as Carter in '79 after the failed attempt to rescue the hostages in Tehran." And I think that really hurt. I mean, he didn't like the comparison to Carter or remembering what happened to Carter as a consequence. Of course, he lost the presidency. So I'm not sure that that's a real option for him. He said it would be dangerous, risky, I think he said. Or the alternative, which is always open to the United States and Israel, is just to blanket bomb civilian areas, mainly because they've expended their target bank long ago. They don't have a whole range of new targets to attack. They've been bombing these mountains, which have got missile cities underneath them, continuously during that time.

And the mountains are looking a little bit darker and blacker from the consequences, but they haven't impacted Iran's missile armories or its production capacities. It's failed to really severely affect either of those. So what are you going to do? Well, I was in Lebanon, in South Lebanon in 2006 during the war. And then when Israel attacked, they said, oh, it'll be over in a week, this attack on Hezbollah in Lebanon will be over in a week, will be very quick. Don't worry. Their target bank ran out in about five days. And so they did what is obvious. They started bombing civilian properties, hospitals, and schools—the same thing that has been happening in Tehran.

And because, you know, they can't go back to the boss and say, sorry, you know, I think you'll have to cancel this because we can't think what to bomb next. So they find something to bomb next, however implausible. So it's not going to be effective. It's not going to change the situation. It's going to kill a lot more people, cause more suffering and sacrifice. They don't seem to care about that. There's no sort of empathy for the people that would suffer, perhaps because they're so used to Israel now creating that sort of affair in Beirut or so on that they just don't care. So I'm not sure. And there is another aspect of it which is coming into play quietly, in an unseen way, that when he's proposed this, or proposed even using harsher methods against Iran, most of his team—Pete Hegseth, Secretary of War Hegseth.

But bar him, I think maybe one other. But bar him, they've all said, you know, that cannot be done because it would be a war crime. And I think there is an increasing fear amongst officials, maybe not those in the cabinet so much, but lesser officials, that simply to bomb civilians or deprive them of electricity or water supply is a war crime. Now, the United States will not probably implement any of that, but under existing law, officials could find themselves extradited by other countries. I think this is beginning to create a certain resistance within the Pentagon—not a resistance that he cannot finally countermand and overturn—but nonetheless, people are questioning orders that are clearly those of a criminal nature.

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The assessment, by the way, by the New York Times, shows that Iran has something like 70% of what they had before this war started in terms of missiles. And the new assessment, the new report in the New York Times, shows that the intelligence assessment revealed Iran has regained access to around 90% of its underground missile storage and launch facilities nationwide. And this is the new—how do you see, Alastair—when you see the United States, you've mentioned the United States didn't expect that this war was gonna last more than four days, for example. And we are right now, as you've just mentioned, Benjamin Netanyahu in his recent interview on 60 Minutes said we are months away from the end of the war in Iran. It means that when he talks about months, you may imagine it's gonna be years for Iran. And the war—Donald Trump, the rhetoric on the part of Donald Trump was it's going to be a few weeks, we're going to put an end to the war.

And with the current situation with the stockpile of missiles together with interceptors, the situation with the radar systems in GCC countries together with Israel, do you think that Donald Trump, if he starts a new war—let's assume he's going to get back to the United States, he's going to get back on Friday—and let's assume at the end of this week, on the weekend, he's going to attack on Saturday or Sunday, he's going to do something against Iran—what would be the long-term strategy on the report? It doesn't seem so, because as I've mentioned, Project Freedom failed, because Iran has the leverage right now in the Persian Gulf. And nobody, none of these GCC countries, is able to change the game, you know, in the case of this. There is no strategy.

#Alastair

I mean, it's a mistake, and it's not something that you can discuss really rationally and say, would he do this or would he do that? It depends how he feels when he wakes up next Saturday, what he's going to do. It's completely arbitrary. It is determined by his mental state, which is not very good. You've only got to see some of his statements to realize that. You know, it is delusional. And what is more, I mean, he believes these delusions himself and is persuaded by them, even though everyone can see that they bear no relation to reality. So, I mean, it's not going to be, you know, a strategy. The only thing that is there is his concern to get out of this appearing a winner. That's all.

I mean, there's no strategy about Iran or about the Middle East or about anything else. He wants a win, and he wants to come out with a win so that he can turn his attention to the midterm elections later on. It's, you know, there's no point looking at what The New York Times says. The CIA claim is that they get it wrong nearly always for elections, for various reasons, but they get these things wrong. They are guided as much by the fact that so many people—how many generals have been dismissed now from the Pentagon? If you don't say, "Yes, it's great, we're on the team for this war," or whatever it is. So, I mean, there would be no strategy beyond Trump wanting not to be seen to be a loser and not to be seen.

And this is why he's very anxious about actually doing a nuclear negotiation. He'd much prefer if Iran would just hand over the enriched uranium, and then he could sort of parade it around and say, I've got it. Now Iran can never have a weapon. We've succeeded. Great win. But the nuclear one is much more complicated for him because one of the deepest things he feels is his resentment of Obama, his jealousy of Obama. And so he'd have to have a nuclear agreement which was so obviously better than that of the JCPOA, as it was from Obama's day, that only that would sort of satisfy his ego. And that's not going to be available. I don't think anyone in America either thinks that a better JCPOA would come.

And finally, I mean, look, I'm not trying to sort of second-guess what the Iranian leadership will do. I can't imagine for a second, personally, having followed the JCPOA's twists and turns for 20 years now, you know, in both areas, both in Iran and outside of it. I mean, I can't see for a minute why Iran would choose to go back into prison—the prison of the, you know, of the sanctions—and, oh, they'll be lifted, you know, incrementally. Oh, yes. Where has that ever happened? Come on. Sanctions will never be lifted incrementally on Iran. I'm afraid to say it has to be broken. The paradigm has to be broken completely. And the way to break it is the Strait of Hormuz, because it actually destroys the framework of sanctions.

And it also begins to undermine the framework of the overriding economic sphere, which is Iran's neighborhood. And I'm talking about the, I don't know what's the best word to call it, the arbitrage, manipulative, financialized workings of the Wall Street economy compared with the real economy. But that is what Gulf states were built for. I mean, from '73, they were to sort of be a piggy bank in which all the receipts of the oil trade were deposited and then transferred to Wall Street to finance this financialized economy—an economy of derivatives, options, alternatives—where you make money in a trade on a day, but you don't make money by making things or doing business or providing a real service. I mean, it's all, you know, insider trading and manipulation of prices and markets in many ways.

So the economy has tipped towards that, and this is the Gulf economy. And as Iran thinks about its future and about the young people of Iran, they must be aware of the continual, if you like, apparent appeal of this sort of Bloomberg economy for young Iranians as they try and decide what is to be the future for Iran. How will young Iranians, 18- to 20-year-olds, see themselves as Iranian—what it means to be Iranian in the future? You have to find a way of sort of translating that to the

modern world, because those young Iranians, just like young people here in Europe, they want to wear designer shoes and to have smart jackets and things like that with the right name tags on them. But they are also now revolutionary.

They're becoming quite popular, radical in their thinking. And there seems to be a second wind to the revolution that has been created by this war. And I think it's fair to say that the Iran of, you know, whatever it is, five weeks ago is not the same Iran as today. The Iran of today is quite different, much more, if you like, the spirit, the ethos, the values of the revolution have come back and animated people and animated politics. So, you know, it's at the popular level, if you like, amongst the young people that are out every night on the street waving flags and taking part in parades, but it's also at the leadership level. The leadership level, too, has been affected by the atmosphere, the sentiments on the streets.

They can read the ground. So that's partly, I think, why we have a much more defiant—shall I call it—defiant tone in the prerequisites for negotiation. Negotiation isn't written off, but the prerequisites are the end of the war, the end of sanctions, return of financial assets, et cetera. And those have to be complied with. And Trump cannot do that because he cannot promise an end to war. He cannot lift the sanctions. He cannot and won't lift the sanctions. And he won't do anything that runs against what Israelis see to be their interest, and their interest is not a negotiated settlement with America, but the defeat and the destruction of Iran as a functioning state and its breakup into small ethno-sectarian statelets.

That's it. And so how can you have a negotiation? I don't believe in negotiation myself, personally, but I don't think a negotiation is possible. One will come to terms with the United States, with Trump at this point or in any foreseeable future. So that's where we are. What will happen? Will he come back and, you know, blast Iran again? It's not going to achieve much. It's not going to change his situation. It might make his situation worse because sentiment in America is moving very strongly against the war in Iran. So it may make his situation worse, may make his approval rating worse. It won't change anything. So we see, I think his hopes at the moment are pinned that he'll go to China now. He's in China now.

He'll say to the Chinese, he'll be saying in Beijing, listen, listen, you know, this can't go on any longer. The damage is too great. You must tell Tehran clearly and informally they've got to capitulate to the United States. And I don't think that's going to happen. I don't think China is going to do that. I think China has been very supportive and even enthusiastic about Iran's attempt to reclaim sovereignty. They see that as something to be admired. And I think also they are not really—I mean, I wouldn't be surprised, because we see that in the press quite often—the American view is that China is being squeezed by the Hormuz affair and that China, therefore, will gladly sort of side with America to tell Tehran to open the straits. I don't believe it.

I mean, first of all, China is not squeezed by what's been happening in Hormuz. The figures for April last month show that in April, the imports of oil for China were 90% of what they've been all along.

And we know tankers have been passing through Hormuz laden with oil for China and passing through, I mean, through the protocols that were established by Iran. So they don't seem to have had much problem with the protocols or the methodology because they've been using it during this time. So I don't see that it's likely that they will oblige. So, you know, and Trump really has few points of leverage over the Chinese. In fact, the reverse. I mean, he goes there not having a sort of succession of wins in his pocket. He goes there wanting to tell the Chinese what they need to do for America.

But on the other hand, take a look from the other side. There's nothing really China wants from America now. Perhaps a few aircraft, maybe they will. I think more as a gesture, not of economic necessity, but of political expediency, they might buy some soybeans. Because I think, you know, in Brazil, I think they've been buying them mostly from Brazil during this period. I don't know if I'm correct, but I think they've been buying them from Brazil. So, I mean, you know, it's not that they haven't got a source of soybeans and depend on the United States. So I think, I don't think much will come out of it, but no doubt there will be—I mean, he's taken this phalanx of businessmen and oligarchs with him on the plane to China. And the point of that must be clearly for him to say, oh, we've done billions.

I mean, billions are pouring into the United States. I think that actually China will be quite niggardly towards Trump. They're actually pretty pissed off at him, and particularly resentful for putting sanctions on their teapot refineries, the five refineries, and for other restrictions. Even in the last days before going to China, there'll be new sanctions announced. And I think they're really quite fed up with these. So I don't think it's going to be a sort of—yeah, I mean, you know, the Chinese are endlessly polite and courteous, and so they will, you know, treat him in a very wholesome manner. And they will, you know, give him all, you know, the sort of state accoutrements. Will there be something strategic that comes out of it? I can't tell, but I rather doubt it.

#Nima

You know, since the war in Ukraine started, there were many red lines being crossed by the United States. One of them is the two superpowers fighting each other in Ukraine, which before the war started, nobody had ever imagined was going to happen. But we have it. We are more than four years into the conflict in Ukraine. Then came the war in the Middle East. But we haven't seen in that war in Ukraine that Russia attacked any American bases in Europe, for example. And then the war in the Middle East somehow forced Iran to attack American bases in GCC countries because they cannot attack the United States far away from Iran. They have to attack GCC countries and Israel. That's why they attacked them in Israel. The reality of the American bases somehow is coming to the surface.

And what is the main objective of these American bases? And if they're not capable of defending themselves, how are they going to be able to defend the host or other countries? And how do you see the way that the United States—many people see what's going on right now as we are walking,

you know, somehow into a new world war, or everything is escalating somehow. Or, on the other hand, you can argue these wars somehow show the limitations of the United States militarily and geopolitically, that would be helpful for a better future for the world, for peace. Where do you stand when it comes to these two concepts—having a new world war, or we're going to have a better future when the United States understands its limitations?

#Alastair

Well, I wrote a paper about the lessons of the Iran war just recently. It's on Substack, if anyone's interested. And I'm writing another one now, which will be up later today, probably.

#Nima

On conflictsforum.substack.com, right below your name and picture, you can find it.

#Alastair

Thank you. Yes, that's right, because it's not in my name. It's in Conflicts Forum. It's under Conflicts Forum, which is the organization with which we do this. And I pointed out, you know, that really what has been shown in this last period is that the American way of war is as dead as a dodo. It was conceived during the Cold War against the Soviet Union. It was about outspending Russia, driving them to overextend themselves, and very expensive aircraft, with the aim of creating air war and, if you like, air dominance as its predominant way of war. And it seemed to be justified because the USSR did implode. However, I think everyone pretty well now agrees that it wasn't simply because of the American weapons effort. It was also because of internal sort of deterioration within the Soviet system.

But so they have stuck with it, and they have not realized the tectonic shift that has occurred since that period. They've ignored it and haven't paid attention. And that tectonic shift was that, whereas they had based everything on, you know, this expensive war model, the very costly war model, suddenly electronic components were freely available and very cheap. The rest of the world, and there were a lot of bright young people who had been to engineering universities and technical universities around the world who knew how to use them. And so suddenly we have the beginnings of the possibility for asymmetrical war. You could have an intercept made by Iran costing a few hundred dollars, as opposed to a Patriot missile costing 17 million dollars.

And it changed the whole balance of war. Did America adjust? No. Did it even realize this was happening? No. Because so much of the system was built around large sums going into the military-industrial complex in America and then sort of being circulated around the American system, and monopolies coming into being, it suited everyone just to go on and not change anything. But now that paradigm has been shown to be bust. In Iran, it is incidentally the same paradigm that was given to Israel. Israel didn't always have that paradigm, by the way. Ben-Gurion had a very different

one. Ben-Gurion said very clearly, Israel is geographically a small country. It has a small population, relatively, and a small economy.

We can't afford big professional standing armies. We're not big enough for that. So we have to have a small professional standing army and rely on reservists. And he also said, and made very clear, that actually in the Clausewitz way of thinking, war was not an end in itself, but war was just an element of politics — that you had a political aim, and war could be, or need not be, a component, as Clausewitz had suggested and which Ben-Gurion repeated. So it was very different. And then from the 7th of October, Israel changed this 180 degrees and went for what they call permanent security. Permanent security sort of came out of the idea from 7/10 that Hamas had inflicted a Holocaust — a new Holocaust — on Israel.

And that this meant that the Holocaust was not a past event, an event lying back in time, but that Israel was always on the threshold of a new Holocaust. And that what it must do is preempt any new Holocaust by killing, genocide, and expulsion of anyone involved who could be seen. It was, if you like, a legitimization of the ideas of Amalek and of that messianic way of thinking. So you had, if you like, the military aspect of thinking amongst more secular Israelis, more secular Israelis.

And on the other side, the more messianic way of thinking, predominantly amongst the right, that came in with the new government and which coincides with this security doctrine, sees the idea of taking the whole of Greater Israel by military force, military occupation, and military victory as creating redemption — as, in fact, implementing redemption on the ground. Now, the messianic may see it in one way, and the more secular may see redemption in a slightly more globalist fashion. But both are on the same page with this fusion of permanent security and with this idea of, if you like, the messianic move towards seizing all of the Middle East, including Iran, to complete redemption and to take it forward.

Now, this is going to fail too, because just as America has discovered the shortcomings of this way of war, so Israel is finding the shortcomings of it too, because the military people there, the military experts, are saying, you know, we can't sustain this. You know, just as Ben-Gurion predicted, we can't sustain this. We're too small. We need six or seven IDFs in addition to the one we have to sustain a war across the whole Middle East and to prevent any threats of any sort that are coming to us. It's just, if we follow this course, we are going to collapse, implode. The chief of staff said no to the cabinet not so long ago. He warned that the IDF was on the verge of implosion. "Because I put ten red lights before you," he said.

We're going to implode if we go on like we are going. We don't have men for the tasks that are required of us. And so it's already a crisis and a really important divide in doctrine in Israel, which I don't think is noticed so much, widely. And this is really significant, but it has huge significance for America and the greater world too, because Trump is being told by Netanyahu, no, you must continue the war. The war, of course, is Israel's war for precisely the ends I've just described — of either a messianic or a military establishment of redemption, in whatever terms or language you

want to call it — to establish that, and saying that Trump must do it and finish the job by destroying Iran, who threatens that whole concept of a redemptive Greater Israel.

But in doing this, Trump also destroys much of the world economy and the American economy, and destroys America's reputation, because the rest of the world has seen this collapse — permanent security doctrine implemented — and doesn't like it, is disgusted by it. You know, they see the children, and it's quite clear. The security doctrine is clear: you cannot allow children to end up growing up to be terrorists. You have to preempt any security threat. So they put this out there. So who's going to pay the price for this war? Well, Iran is, of course, and Iranian civilians, but also the whole of the United States, if only reputationally and economically, are going to be devastated by this.

And it's going to change the world, basically. And however long, if it goes on for some time, we may see governments change in Europe and in many places as a consequence of, you know, the implosion of the United States, in a sense. You know, if it becomes a real problem, an economic catastrophe, it's like one of those nova stars in our cosmos suddenly exploding. And, you know, you get a whole lot of particles and energy released. But all of that energy is damaging energy, it's dangerous energy, and the particles are dangerous too. And so we will have a sort of very unstable situation as a consequence of this in the greater world sphere.

#Nima

Alastair, before wrapping up this session, how do you see the region when it comes to the relationship between Iran and the GCC countries? Lavrov, just moments ago before coming to this live, mentioned that one goal of the aggression against Iran was to prevent normalization of relations between Iran and the Arabs. And we had two reports recently, one of them in the Wall Street Journal, which mentioned that the UAE was hitting some targets in Iran secretly. And the second report on Reuters said that Saudi Arabia was doing the same. And we heard a lot about Saudi Arabia — that they were preparing, they were convincing Donald Trump to continue the war and to hit the target, finish the job against Iran — all of this sort of rhetoric. So where are we with the GCC countries and Iran today as an outcome of what has happened in the Middle East?

#Alastair

Well, I think there is, as usual, a Western—can I call it a knee-jerk reaction to these sorts of things—to incite sectarianism. And I think this is fairly obvious in Bahrain, where many of the Shi'i clerics, high clerics, have been arrested and other Shi'i are being detained. In the UAE, I think recently they followed suit. Twenty-one clerics have been detained, stripped of their possessions. The UAE apparently also has evicted some 15,000 or so Pakistani Shia who were working in the UAE, taken all their belongings, their bank accounts, and are now expelling them from the state. Those are the really bad signs. And it's the usual sort of resort.

I've seen it so many times that I've been in the region, from Afghanistan onwards, of the resurrection of hardline Salafism. Even though in the UAE it's not Salafism, it's a sort of radical secularism and antagonism to any form of political Islamism that they see. I think that is a real danger if this war continues. I do think that the solution that is going to be embraced today, the solution that China and Russia are looking at, is that there needs to be a security architecture and a security agreement led by the Gulf states themselves. This has been around. I remember talking about it with people some years ago. And there are sort of vestiges already present — you know, naval exercises involving Iran and Russia, China, and things like that. And Iran has always supported this idea.

But the point of it would be from, I think—and here I'm guessing more than I can actually prove it—but I think from a Russian and Chinese perspective, they would be very happy if it didn't involve the United States in any way. They would like to see the United States out of the Middle East. And I think that ultimately that's where we're probably heading in terms of relations. And I think China will—it already built some relations, an entente, if you like, between Iran and Saudi Arabia some two years ago, something like that. I may have got the dates wrong when they had that first meeting. But they built an entente. Clearly, the UAE—well, I don't—UAE, I'm being too dogmatic, I think, because I'm talking about Abu Dhabi.

I mean, because the UAE is a collection of sheikhdoms and not a sort of single state, although it functions in some respects in that way. But I think Abu Dhabi is clearly going to resist that. But I think it's going to be on its own in its extremism. Bahrain—we all know the circumstances of Bahrain, with its tiny Sunni leadership kingdom sitting on top of a large number of Shias. I think the more interesting question is not that one, actually, because I think that's where it's heading, but it's going to take time. It's not going to happen very quickly. I think the more interesting thing is Iraq. Iraq has a big Shia population.

That population has been energized by what's happening in Iran. You can see that very clearly in the Hashad and in the sentiments, but it is hamstrung. It is completely tied by the fact that all the Iraqi financial resources are held in a bank in New York and that Iraq is only allowed to spend what Washington says it can spend. They sit on it and they treat it like schoolboys, giving them pocket money. How long that will last, how long that will continue, I don't know whether there'll be an upheaval, but that will change, I think, the whole Gulf. I mean, the GCC states as they are now are going to be small fry compared with a sort of Iraq coming closer to Iran.

I mean, that would have real weight in the Middle East context. I mean, two big countries with lots of resources, lots of people. So I think that is... I think actually that will provide a key. And if America starts leaving the bases, because they're now seen by many Gulf states as being not so much a protective element, but more of a vulnerability, because they become a target instead of being a security aspect. If they leave most of the Gulf states in that area, can they stay on in Iraq? They're leaving Syria. You know, I'm just throwing the question open. You know, it's too early to say. But I think that's what will be very interesting in the geopolitical context.

#Nima

Yeah, sure. Thank you so much, Alastair, for being with us today. Please go to complexforum.substack.com and subscribe there. Alastair, again, great pleasure as always.

#Alastair

Oh, thank you. It was a pleasure for me. Thank you.

#Nima

Thank you.