

Richard Wolff & Michael Hudson: Trump Is FUMING After Iran, China & Russia's MASSIVE Move

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#Nima

Hi, everybody. Today is Thursday, May 21st, 2026, and our dear friends Richard Wolff and Michael Hudson are here with us. Welcome back, Richard and Mike.

#Richard

Thanks for having us. Nice to be here.

#Nima

And let me start with the conflicts. Two conflicts right now. One is in Ukraine, the other one in the Middle East. In Ukraine, we had some sort of escalation — new drone attacks on Russia. It seems that Russia will respond to those drone attacks, and there is a lot of pressure on Russian President Vladimir Putin right now to respond to that. And they're gonna attack — you know, maybe the targets would be in Latvia or some other countries. They didn't mention that, but they're gonna respond to it. In the Middle East, the war between Iran and the United States — it seems that the Iranian assessment is that the United States is preparing for a new round of war.

So the response — the IRGC and the Army of Iran have announced an official statement. They said the war is not gonna stay regional; it's going to go beyond the region. It means that they're going to hit American bases in Romania, Germany, and other countries — Diego Garcia and Greece as well. This is the current situation. On the other hand, we had two meetings, or rather two summits — one between Xi and Donald Trump, and the other one between Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump. And here is what Xi said, you know, in the final sort of statement after the meeting he had with Vladimir Putin. Here is what he said.

#Speaker 03

The world today is far from peaceful, with unilateralism and hegemonism posing profound dangers. The world faces the risk of regressing to the law of the jungle. My proposal to build a community with a shared future for mankind and the four global initiatives has received widespread support from the international community, including Russia.

#Nima

Richard, go ahead, you start. How do you see the situation, I don't know, both in Ukraine and in the Middle East — both of these regions? Situations are fragile. We could have something happening in the next 24 hours. But your understanding of the Chinese position, your understanding of what has happened so far politically, geopolitically, and economically.

#Richard

Okay, let me respond by doing a little thought experiment with everyone. Here it is. I am going to try very briefly to give you a sense of the peaking and declining of the American empire as it is seen through the eyes of Iran, and tell you that I think it encapsulates what is going on here. Okay, very briefly, I promise. So, number one, it's 1953. An elected and popular government in Iran is committed to utilizing the vast oil resources that have been discovered there for the benefit of Iranian national development. Their government is overthrown by the CIA and MI6 in England, and other local supporters that they have lined up.

They overthrow this government, and the United States' dominance is so complete that they literally pick an obscure Shah family, Pahlavi, and install in Iran a dictatorship that runs from 1953 to the end of the 1970s. An entire generation of Iranian history is subordinated to the interests of international oil, controlled and shaped by the United States government on behalf of and in coordination with the oil companies. I want to stress, although I don't have the numbers in front of me, that the 25 years, '53 to '78, let's say, just for lack of anything else, that's a generation.

That's the generation I was going to school in the United States, in American universities, where I suddenly discovered Iranian students and Iranian teachers. Why? Because during that generation, you had a dictatorial Iranian government that went to work to resist and smash the Tudeh Party and the communist movement and the left inside Iran, trying to make sure that Iran would be a loyal American ally against the Soviet Union. And in the process, literally created the modern Iranian diaspora. And obviously, Nima, if I make a mistake here, please correct me. I am no expert on Iranian history.

But it produced huge Iranian communities that I have encountered in Los Angeles, in Paris, in London, and I'm sure elsewhere that I'm not personally familiar with. When the Shah finally collapsed under the weight of all the opposition and all the people who left Iran, many of them never to return, or at least not yet, you had an uprising. But by then, the coordinated smashing of the left inside Iran made the eruption of the people against a generation of dictatorship from the

United States and from the Shah turn to the right, turn to the religious community instead of the left, which we see happening in many parts of the world, not just Iran, and particularly in Islamic areas, but that's another conversation.

All right, then from '79 on, the United States is deeply frustrated, and the oil community worried, because the kind of control and dictatorship that could be operated on the Shah, who was a willing client, reflected the dominance of the American empire—the absolute authority with which it was reorganizing the world, the kind of behavior and experience that would allow people after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s to really think that the United States was now going to control the world.

Fukuyama could write a book about—sorry about the mispronunciation—could write a book about the end of history. Francis Fukuyama could write that book, you know, because he was so excited about this wonderful moment that he made really stupid inferences. But all right, it's the sign of a powerful empire. It's why Secretary of Defense Cheney could talk about how the whole world is now our unipolar moment and all the rest of that. They were serious. They had had in Iran a perfect example of how all this was supposed to work. And then the mullah, the ayatollah, the eruption in Iran, and what? It turned out there were limits to what the United States could do.

They could have a guy who would provoke something that was clearly less desirable to the United States as a dictator than the Shah had been. They didn't want a religious one. They didn't want a strongly Islamist one. That's not what they wanted. That's not their idea. Okay, so they went to work right away to destabilize, to undo, trying to find someone better. They always had to be careful. You didn't want to give a new birth to the Tudeh movement and all that it had represented, so you had to be careful. But you weakened, you tried to limit, you tried to disqualify. And slowly, what you do is you convince the leaders in the Islamic movement that they need to shift their game. They need to do two things. They need to find allies against the domination of the United States.

That would mean getting closer to Iran and China, which they went to work to do. And it would mean, in the end, that they would have to come up with some way of undercutting the military superiority of the United States, because they knew, in the last analysis from 1953 onward, that violent military repression— I won't go into the Shah and how he used American police forces and CIA forces to train the SAVAK and all the rest of that story. But here we are in the last step. The empire is now in decline. And that's what we're seeing. Whether you're looking at the defense of the Iranians against military activity, or you're seeing the crucial role being played, I'm sure, by Russia and China, from every evidence I see, supporting the Iranians, allying with them, funding them, weaponizing them, and all the rest of it—there it is.

The empire, as it declines, provokes alternative anti-empire forces that now feel strong enough to make a stand. If I'm right, then these two items that you talked about, that you are correct, Nima, in putting them together, even though they are geographically far apart, they are statements by the Chinese, Russian, Iranian part of the world that the old empire game is over. And if you push them,

they will have to make that statement more strongly than they already have. They clearly don't want to. And that's not out of fear. It's out of a rational calculus that when you have a declining empire, you must be careful because it can do a great deal of damage as it declines. Europe's decline is obvious to everyone who isn't crazy.

Economically, they are in decline. Politically, they are in decline. Ideologically, they are so far from the center of the world they once were that you have the kind of leaders we now have who are ridiculous, all of them. Merz, you know, he's just silly. These are the weakest, poorest, least appreciated leaders the Europeans have ever had. And their military is a joke because they have been protected for 50 years by the Americans. So they have no military, and they're going to challenge Russia? Really, they're going to? You know, the lunacy of it. Europe is the place where, when it was peaking, Napoleon couldn't do it over Russia, and Hitler couldn't do it. And they couldn't do it anywhere in between those two either. They constantly underestimated. And now they are weaker than they've been in three or four centuries, on the way down.

And they're going to make threats against Russia. They believe they can cow the Russians into submission. And the United States believes exactly the same thing everywhere else. That's the issue. And I can't predict the future any better than anyone else. But if you understand these two things in their historical context, then you must understand that there is a poetic sadness in those remarks of Xi Jinping. We tried to develop a community, and we've been frustrated by people who want to go back to the law of the jungle, because in the community we've all been trying to erect — you know, the community that started with the League of Nations after World War I and the attempt to develop a community that continued with the United Nations after World War II. Well, now is the time to do it.

And these declining empires don't want to go there. They really want the law of the jungle because they think they're going to prevail. And if we don't—you know, I've been talking wrongly, in my own judgment, about how, you know, time is on their side and that the Americans are in danger of doing something. I now think time is actually more ambiguous for the United States. The empire is declining. The empire is declining with each passing time. We're getting weaker, which is true. But the irony is, for Russia and China, it's also that time is against them, because time is bringing the West to a series of decisions that are catastrophically counterproductive, with the attack on Iran being the key moment to establish that.

#Nima

Yeah.

#Michael

Michael, go ahead. Well, I want to add some dimensions to the long view. The Shah wasn't from an obscure family. His father had been installed by the British right after Iran had drawn up a popular

constitution to get rid of the ruling clan that had governed it for a century. And that Shah, the father, was a military leader, and Britain had installed him instead of any domestic Iranian leaders. So the Shah, the father, wasn't anywhere near as oppressive as the son. So there actually was the election, which Richard has talked about, in 1953, that was duly overthrown once again by the British with American help. Well, the Shah then imposed one of the most brutal military dictatorships in the world.

And a friend of mine, a reporter for the BBC, Gavin MacFadyen, did a whole show on national character as reflected in police torture methods. Every country has its own method of police torture and terrorism, and the Shah's secret police methods were to put people on a frying pan. You'd tie them down to a bed, but the bed was metal, and then you'd turn up the heat and fry them like bacon. That became the typical response. There was such terrorism against the people, wholesale assassinations guided by the CIA and MI6, that the only place the population could gather together and talk without being arrested—they couldn't have a civilian secular meeting place because that would all be infiltrated and the people would be arrested and tortured—the only place they could meet was within the mosques.

And so Khomeini was, at the time—I was reading his statements every week—he played it absolutely wonderfully, explaining why the Shia leadership had to take the stand it had taken in the reforms of the late 19th century against British investment and the British government's takeover of Iranian railroads, Iranian tobacco, and other key industries. Well, the result is that the Shia clergy once again led the revolution against the Shah successfully. And as I think Richard pointed out, the clergy was religious, not secular.

And there wasn't all that room for a secular movement. There were all of the hijab laws, the laws of how women could dress in public, etc. Well, what the incoming Shia administration realized was the United States and Britain were going to attack again. From the very beginning, they wanted to prepare themselves for the next attack, and they've been doing that ever since 1979. That's almost 50 years. And they've put together by themselves an enormously effective missile force and other weaponry, so effective that they've been able to repel the American attempt to take them over and prevent Donald Trump from doing what he said he wanted to do—appoint his own leader, a new leader of Iran, to take over the oil, to take all Iranian oil, put it under the leadership of American banks so that all of Iran's oil export proceeds would be paid into a U.S. bank account, just as Venezuela's oil export proceeds are paid into a Miami bank account under Donald Trump's personal control and that of his appointees.

Well, so for Iran, this is a life-or-death struggle. They've so far depended entirely on themselves, but now we bring in Russia and China. And they realize that the attempt by the United States to conquer Iran isn't simply a war against Iran. It's to take control of the entire West Asian oil trade so that once again, as we've discussed repeatedly on your show, the United States wants to use the oil

trade as a choke point to be able to cut off other countries from access to oil if they don't surrender to America's foreign policy. Well, Iran's response is saying, well, if we're going to be attacked and taken over, then we're going to take out the oil export proceeds of the Arab OPEC countries itself.

And the effect is going to be on the rest of your countries, that it's the same as America weaponizing the oil trade—to use against China, to use against the Global South, to use against the rest of Asia to control. And the response, certainly of China and Russia, realizes this. And they've already said that in the event of an American attack, they are going to alert Iran where the airplanes are coming from and where the attack will be, and that they will actually ally to some extent with Iran. China is very sly on this, but the Americans have an interesting complication for all this. And that's, Dave, as you pointed out at the beginning—can I get off topic and talk about Russia and the—go ahead, today's situation?

#Richard

Yes. Go ahead. Yes.

#Michael

The U.S. has stepped up Baltic attacks on Russia. For a while, Estonia was threatening to actually seize Russian tankers and block Russia's oil trade through the Baltic. Well, then Ukraine has been sending drone teams into Latvia, into Estonia. And Latvia is very close to St. Petersburg, and they've been putting the drone teams where they can much more easily send missiles and drones to destroy Russia, concentrating on Russia's oil facilities, especially its refinery facilities. The U.S. wants to prevent Russia from exporting oil so that this will leave the United States once again in control of the whole world's oil trade, just as it's hoping to wipe out Iran's ability to trade and is willing to see Iran knock out the Arab OPEC oil trade, which will leave the United States in a wonderful position of achieving its long-term goal of controlling the oil trade as a weapon.

Well, what's happened in the Baltics is that Russia has threatened to retaliate against Europe. It realizes, as we've said before, Russia is not fighting a war against Ukraine. The war is by NATO. Ukraine is simply the battlefield, the arena. And the Ukrainian missiles are going through Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia on their way to Russia. They're using that airspace for the drone territory. Well, Estonia, just a few days ago, shot down a Ukrainian drone that was aimed toward Russia so as to prevent Russia from retaliating and wiping out Estonia's electric power ports and whatever other objectives Russia wants to pursue to stop Estonia.

One missile that was shot down over Latvia ended up hitting a Latvian refinery. Apparently, Russia was able to take over the electronic control of these Ukrainian drones being sent via Latvia and also Estonia, and direct them against Latvian and Estonian refineries instead of the Russian refineries. The result is that the Latvian president resigned because of all this. Latvia is afraid of the Russian response. Estonians are afraid of the Russian response. But it looks like, even

though you'd think that the military logic is to prevent a war on two fronts, what Trump is trying to do, and the U.S. military behind him is trying to do, is to fight a war on two fronts at the same time.

And it's likely that if there's a war in Iran, as I think you pointed out, Nima, Russia will finally respond to the enormous rise in domestic political reform pressure for Putin to retaliate against NATO countries. And Estonia very obviously believes that if Russia attacks an attack on it, that's not attacking NATO. NATO is supposed to be an offense organization. It never was a defense organization. It was always for offense. And the belief, correctly, I think, is that Trump is not going to come to the aid of the Baltic states or Germany.

Maybe not even... if Russia retaliates against the centers that are guiding the Ukrainian drones, guiding the Ukrainian missiles to hit specific Russian targets. All of this is done by the Americans, largely out of Wiesbaden, where they have a center, and elsewhere in Germany, where there are centers. So you're seeing sort of a simultaneous attack on Russia via Western Europe—I'm sorry, Eastern Europe—on the one hand, and also the fact that Russia is just north of Iran. And if the United States can conquer Iran, then it can attack Russia's southern border, just as there was a fight between Iran and Russia early in the 19th century. That's sort of the long picture.

Well, the reason I think there's going to be a war this weekend, probably Friday or Saturday, is that Trump has made an impossible red herring that prevents any kind of agreement from being made with Iran. The pretense is the same thing that George W. Bush said to start the Iraq War—weapons of mass destruction—as if Iran has an atom bomb. Well, all the U.S. intelligence agencies have said it has not been working on an atom bomb at all. There's no move toward an atom bomb. It's quite a bit away, even to develop an atom bomb and then create a missile to carry it and detonate it or something else. So it's just as if Trump is saying Iran has captured a flying saucer and there are aliens in it.

We will have to attack Iran if it doesn't give us the UFO that it has and the aliens that were in the flying saucer. Well, how on earth can you prove that you don't have a flying saucer? Well, how do you prove that you don't have an atomic bomb except to point out what every U.S. intelligence agency unanimously has reported, according to Tulsi Gabbard, that there's no work being done on the atom bomb at all. So what Trump is doing is making an impossible claim as the cover story, the red herring to attack Iran. And there's been such a rapid buildup of troops, not only of ships for air attacks, but even of troops in a climate of increasingly hot weather. It looks like the United States realizes that this is the final showdown.

And Richard pointed out, as we've been saying, that the U.S. empire is in decline. Well, if you're declining, then any time you fight is going to be less bad than the next day. I think the Russian cynicism had a joke that I heard years ago: you know, how are you feeling today? Oh, a little worse than yesterday, but a little better than tomorrow. Well, that's the motto for the American empire. This is the last chance before the American empire gets even worse. You even have England a few days ago begging Russia for airplane fuel. Won't you send us airplane kerosene to fly our airplanes

and diesel? Well, Russia has no interest in selling this kerosene and diesel to England because there are other countries that are its allies, not its attackers, that have it.

So it looks like the Americans realize that it's about to lose Europe as allies in this Cold War about Russia. It's trying to cut its own costs. And the belief is that Trump's statements and those of Rubio are that, well, you know, we think we're going to just withdraw from NATO. This means that America is not going to be obliged under NATO Article 5 to support NATO's attack on Russia when it comes. And that leaves NATO, the European countries, holding the bag. So it looks like the gun is all loaded and it's only a question of timing right now, and the expense of keeping a whole navy and a whole air force and troops all set seems to indicate that, well, America is going to follow the pretense and pretend to try to recapture the uranium that is under the sites that Trump bombed a year ago.

This is crazy, but it seems likely. And the one advantage that's occurred over the last six weeks, especially with Putin's travel to China, is it looks like they've all allied themselves in what they're going to do to prevent America from conquering NATO, if possible, to prevent or deter Iran from wiping out the oil trade that's going to push the world into an even deeper depression than it already has to enter this year as a result of the interruption of oil trade that has already blocked a resumption of normal trade until November or December.

#Richard

Can I add a couple of things? Go ahead. I think there's additional to what Michael has said. Let us put in Israel and where it fits into all of this, and the European governments, because in each case the United States is, in a way, stuck with a historic deal it made that it doesn't want to honor anymore. The United States, people have to remember, is not threatened by Iran in any ongoing realistic way. Israel is. And Israel is because its whole paranoia — the paranoia that lies behind the genocide it commits. Genocides are often mobilized paranoias in a society. And you can ask, and you should, where does the paranoia come from? Why does it arise in a society? But if you do that, you will go most of the distance to explain the horror of the genocide, which is the other side of the paranoia that has arisen.

Israel is paranoid. Can it control the vastly larger Islamic environment into which it was inserted? You try to set up a non-Islamic settler colonialism in the middle of an Islamic ocean. And of course, especially given the mentality of those who came to Israel, this has been a conflict from the beginning. You know, a land without people is the mentality of a people without land. There are the roots of your paranoia. It's like the peculiar militarism of the American people. Well, it's a kind of paranoia. The Americans, and I'm one, are constantly worried that they're surrounded by savages who hate them. Well, you know to whom that applies? To the settler colonial people from Britain who first came here, and Holland and France, slaughtering the local people left and right, and then referring to them as savages.

No, no, no, they weren't the savages. You were. And you're paranoid because you know it. And you know that they want to do to you, or you project what you've been doing to them. For two centuries, the United States was a savage, paranoid destroyer of another people, from the Pacific to the Atlantic, from Mexico to Canada. And so there's an affinity here. Iran is something Israel has to conquer, but it's not a little Gulf state. It's a thousand-year-old tradition of Persian everything — culture, religion. So it's a much bigger, more dangerous enemy. And there is no way the 8 million people, if the numbers are right, of Israel can in the end defeat the 92 million people of Iran.

It's not going to happen. Unless they can enlist the United States and join the two paranoias together so that together they can do in Iran what Israel did alone in Gaza. Meanwhile, the Europeans are completely flummoxed. They put all their bets on the United States. They came out of World War II, and they needed to turn to the United States for the money to rebuild, for the equipment to rebuild. They took the loans of the Marshall Plan to buy from the United States the equipment. That was the first example of massive military Keynesianism, in which the Europeans were simply the stopping point for the dollar that came from Washington and returned to the United States in purchases from Europe.

And so it also relied on the United States, and this is less well known, although it should be, not just to rebuild the physical realities, but to rebuild the financial infrastructure of all of Europe, and most important, to rebuild their political culture. And that meant, very importantly, smashing the communist parties and the socialist parties, especially the communist parties, because they were linked to Russia, and that was the enemy of the United States, to whom they had sold their souls. So they became willing slaves to the United States. All those politicians — Starmer, Merz, Macron — they grew up in all of that. They can't think outside of "bad Russia, good United States." Now, Mr. Trump kicks them in the face.

What are they going to do? They do not have the courage, and they have no political base to say to the Americans, "You can't do that," to confront the Americans and fight back. So what are they going to do? They're going to go and try to scapegoat Russia as if that's their problem. Russia was never their problem. Russia, they said so. They grew up that way to placate the power that they really confronted, and that was the United States. But now the American empire either cannot or will not continue kicking them to the curb, and all they can do is saber-rattle against Russia as if they were begging the United States to find value in Europe as an anti-Russian force, because Europe otherwise has no value. Now, this is a very shaky basis for an alliance.

The United States, if it does what the two of you think it will this weekend, if it does, it is going it alone. Ultimately, it is doing it on its own. The amount of help it will get from Europe is marginal. It knows that. It says that. And it's not going to get help from anybody else. And it's going to get opposition from Iran, from China, and from Russia. But I predict it is going to get massive opposition at home in every one of those European countries and in the United States. You are building — it's not there yet, it's not well organized, although in Europe it's better organized — there is both the right-wing and the left-wing refusal to allow this to be the direction of their society. And those

people are going to be put into a much higher degree of activity if a war begins that has these dimensions.

#Michael

I think that is the dynamic in place. I want to say one thing. Richard talks about paranoia. It's not that. It's that the indigenous population is not a people. To the Jewish settlers, the Palestinians were not a people. They're subhuman. They're not God's people. And remember, Netanyahu is an American after all. So you can see the linkage between the American treatment of the Native American indigenous people as not a people. But I want to get to the other point Richard points out. That's the public relations frame of all of this. The United States and Israel don't want to make it appear as if they've started the war, because this war is going to be so destructive that the initiators of it are really going to be blamed and talked about ending their power. This will make the United States and Israel pariahs in the entire community.

So Israel has been trying to make Iran attack first. You see what it's been doing in trying to save countries to the north — Azerbaijan, yes, Lebanon. In Lebanon, you've seen the American seizure of Iranian tankers going on. That's an act of piracy. And as Iranians have pointed out, under international law, that's an act of war. So the United States and Israel are both committing acts of war, hoping that Iran is going to support Hezbollah in Lebanon and attack an American ship or airplane that has been seizing its tankers. And the same thing has been happening in the Baltics. NATO, and the United States behind it, have been trying to get the Ukrainian drones, and now the Baltic states and Germany and Britain, to keep escalating the attacks against Russia — salami style, it's called.

You don't know when Russia's going to fight back until it actually does. There's no way of knowing. It's given up on one red line after another. Every time Putin has not responded in kind, it has increased the popular insistence that he do something about it, because it's obvious that the United States wants to do to Russia what it wants to do with Iran — destroy its government and carve it up into four or five small countries so that there can never be a single country as powerful as Russia or Iran again, with their big territories and large multi-ethnic populations that can be divided and conquered. So neither Russia nor Iran have given in to these provocations. They realize that, yes, this is going to be an overall war. Under normal conditions, of course, they would have responded.

But because they see that the United States' plan is indeed to make this the war to end all wars, as we used to say, they want to make it very clear who's the initiator and who is the attacked party. And this has frustrated Trump because he doesn't want to — I think, as the military has told him — there's no way that the United States can survive without such heavy losses that it may actually lose, just as it lost in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, just about everywhere except Grenada. So that's the situation. And the fact that Iran and Russia can see all of this and hold back means that they recognize how serious the war will be, and that it will be serious enough to require their participation to prevent America from actually achieving the wipeout of Iran and Russia together.

#Richard

What it is for them, and that's what Americans don't want to see, it is for them, therefore, if Michael is right, an existential crisis. You are not going to get them to keep backing down because they must understand. I mean, Russia must sit there, Mr. Putin, and wonder. The whole of the 20th century was constructed as a war between the United States and the Soviet Union — capitalism and communism, however the language was. And there they make a revolution, they throw out communism, and they become a capitalist country like everybody else. And it still doesn't matter. The West, the Europeans, and the Americans have it in for them. And, you know, there must therefore be a deep sense of endangerment from the West.

You know, even before you remind everybody of Hitler and of Napoleon and of World War I, I could include in there too, which was a savage attack upon Russia that didn't work in the end. And the Chinese have to wonder too. You know, the story I told at the beginning about looking at it through the lens of Iranian history — well, you can look at it through Chinese history. The United States was busily helping Chiang Kai-shek, the nationalists in China, before Mao Zedong and the communists came to power, trying in every which way to help them in a four-year civil war from 1945 to 1949, and have been enemies of the Chinese ever since.

#Richard

You know, when Nixon and Kissinger go to open up China, it's because they had waged unremitting diplomatic, military, and every other kind of warfare against them from the establishment of the new Chinese government in '49 until they arrived there early in the '70s. Holy mackerel. And then ever since, you know... a little hiatus when there was the idea that bringing the Chinese into the World Trade Organization would somehow magically make them behave in a way that the American empire could tolerate. But when it turned out that they had their own ideas about what membership in the WTO should bring them, and when they became the manufacturer for the world, the United States wakes up and says, oh no, we must go back to our ceaseless enmity, you know, playing silly games around Taiwan and all of that.

So Russia, China, Iran have all the evidence one could imagine that their existence is what the Americans want in the end to undo. And they may take a tactical retreat from time to time. They may not be able to do it in this or that circumstance, but then they simply go back and try again in some other way. If they can't get Iran this time, that's the fear of the Iranian leadership. If they can't do it this time, the way they couldn't do it last June, you know, here we are a year later, they're trying again. And what in the world will prevent them a year from now if, as it looks, Israel will be in deep trouble as it tries to reconstruct from being a war economy for five years, you know, now with the heavy damage that it has suffered from the Iranian missiles and drones on top of it?

And the Americans, I mean, you could see an even more stressed-out Israeli leadership a year from now. And then what? If the Democrats in this country are in power, they're more eager to work a deal with Israel than Mr. Trump was. So that's not going to change much. So they face forces that indicate they are facing an existential threat. You know, John Mearsheimer is right. This is a moment when the existential threat clearly felt by the Iranian leadership is put against a kind of existential endangerment that must be felt by Putin and Xi Jinping as well.

And what the West doesn't want to deal with is that this is a much more dangerous enemy than anything you have ever thrown up yourself. Are you really ready for that conflict? And the answer of the United States is that the only people here who feel that way are the people who do not want to ask or answer the question: might we be a declining empire? Because that implies that the answer to the question is, it's too late. If ever you could have fought that battle, it was 20 years ago, not now. You can't do that anymore. And those people cannot face it, will not face it, and they may take us to that war.

#Michael

Well, that's why this has to be a war to end wars, because indeed, if Iran doesn't fight now, the United States is going to regroup, rearm, and fight all over again. So it's an existential war against the coming into existence of an alternative world system to the United States' domination — the kind of world system of multipolarity that both Putin and Xi have been talking about. I'd hoped that we would have had time to talk about the BRICS meeting that happened simultaneously with Putin's meeting, because what's striking is that nothing happened, really. The BRICS are playing no role as such in this whole conflict. Most of them are obviously threatened by the war. They realize that they are going to be the losers from the oil crisis, fertilizer crisis, and chemical crisis that the war is creating.

But because they've let countries in like the Emirates that say, "No, no, we're all for the war, you've got to destroy Iran and let America carve it all up, that's what we believe, we're allies of Israel" — well, as long as you have the Emirates have veto power and paralyze the BRICS, there's nothing that the BRICS can do by itself. The entire leadership of creating an alternative to the U.S.-centered empire order, the national security strategy, is going to be China, Russia, and Iran — those three countries. I don't see India playing a role because it's allied itself with the United States and with Israel. So it's really just these three countries, the RIC, with the I being Iran, not India.

#Nima

Richard, do you want to add something before we wrap up?

#Richard

No, I just, my own, and I have no idea why I'm about to say this, but it is my view. I think it's too high a price to pay. I don't think Mr. Trump and his people want the risk that comes with that. You know, it is about to be the month of June. The election is in early November. Do you really want a war and all that it implies between now and an election? Do you want to give the Democrats, despite the awful failure that they are as a party, do you want to give them the issue that, in addition to a declining economic reality, you are their children spending wild amounts of money on an endless war? This is a very dangerous way. Now, if they have already bought the election in ways I don't know, which is possible, then they may not need to worry about this. But if this is a worry, then going to war is a catastrophic mistake.

#Michael

Well, the war and its backlash could still be going on in November. And there's already talk about Trump trying to cancel the election on grounds of a national war emergency. So there's a lot of concern about how the United States can cope with losing the war but not losing the election through the kind of shenanigans that Trump has been pulling all along.

#Richard

Certainly possible.

#Nima

Thank you so much, Richard and Michael, for being with us today. Great pleasure, as always. See you soon.