

# Larry Johnson & Col. Wilkerson: How China, Russia & GCC States Are Redrawing Middle East

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## #Nima

Right now, what we've learned from Iran, it seems that two teams are in Iran. One of them is a Pakistani team; they went there together, and the other team is from Qatar. Both of them are trying to talk with the Iranians. I don't know what they have as their agenda in these talks. It seems to me that the Qatari part is somehow representing the Arab states, the GCC countries, and the Pakistani part is representing the United States. But somehow the main issues right now are still the same — the Strait of Hormuz and the Iranian nuclear program. And what would be the outcome in terms of how long it takes to negotiate on the nuclear program of Iran, and that enriched uranium that is still in Iran? We learned yesterday that the Iranian supreme leader said there is no way that this enriched uranium is going to get outside of Iran. And here is what Donald Trump said yesterday.

## #Guest

Control of the Strait of Hormuz, as you know, with our blockade. The blockade's been 100% effective. Nobody's been able to get through. It's like a steel wall. It's our Navy. We have the greatest military anywhere in the world. We wiped out their Navy. We wiped out their airport. I think you're down to about, I would say, we knocked out 85 percent of their missile capacity. It's very hard for them now to build missiles, to build drones. We have great drone technology, anti-drone technology now that, frankly, we didn't have even two months ago. We have unbelievable drone technology, both for making them and also for knocking them down. But look, we're going to either make sure they don't have a nuclear weapon, or we're going to have to do something very drastic. And the people of the country, I believe when it's put to the people of our country, they will all agree that we cannot let Iran have a nuclear weapon.

## #Nima

Larry, go ahead.

## **#Lawrence**

Who's the pregnant gentleman to his left?

## **#Larry**

He ate a basketball.

## **#Nima**

Larry, go ahead. Your understanding of what's going on?

## **#Larry**

Again, the whole nuclear issue is just an excuse. It's not the real issue because the United States' desire to destroy and eliminate the Islamic Republic predated any active nuclear program on the part of Iran. So there are talks underway. As you noted before we came on air, the Qataris are probably in town, but the more important one is Pakistan. So Pakistan's got the full backing of China, and they are, you know, what I'm told by—I've got one source with access into the Pakistani delegation—and they're saying, hey, there's an agreement that's close. Now, I went back to my source and said, I don't see it. How is that possible? Because Iran's demand is, you know, you lift all the sanctions and you return the frozen assets, and we're going to continue to run the Strait of Hormuz.

You know, forget about the nuclear stuff. Those are Iran's core demands right now, and I don't see Donald Trump willing to accept that. I mean, it would be great if he did. The world would be better off, and we'd be on the road to recovery. But I don't see him doing that. Now, that said, you know, Trump once again is lying. According to the IRGC, in the past 24 hours—and this was as of about an hour ago—35 vessels, including tankers, container ships, and other commercial vessels, have passed through the Strait of Hormuz under the coordination of the IRGC with a security escort. So it's not business as usual, but it sure looks like the Strait of Hormuz is starting to operate under the Persian Gulf Strait Authority, the PGSA, that Iran has put into place.

## **#Nima**

Yeah.

## **#Lawrence**

Carl, jump in.

## **#Nima**

And your understanding of that?

## **#Lawrence**

I agree with what Larry said. And let me heighten the remark he made, or you made, or both of you made, that anything Pakistan is doing is very much in coordination with China. Guarantee you that. So we're looking at possibly two parties providing good offices, one of them the most powerful state in the world now. I keep saying that—they are. And the other, it's an ally, if you will, while at the same time pretending still to be somewhat of an ally of the United States. So it puts them in a good offices position of some power. All that said, I can't make anything out of what's going on between the two parties. I see Trump still being bound to a certain extent to Netanyahu, no matter what people are reporting about animosity between them or whatever. I see him bound in that embrace and unable to escape it. So I don't see any way he's going to get out of doing what is Bibi's wet dream.

And that is to finish off Iran, to make it a Bantustan-populated entity or whatever. And that's still the predominant factor here, I think, no matter how much Trump tries to obscure it and goes through these vacillations, which are ultimately going to lead to nothing but a resumption of hostilities, if I'm reading it right. And I'm reading the force deployments and other things right, too. Looking more grim and more grim day by day, should we try to do something with military force, be it a limited action to secure uranium, as it were, or be it a more broad action to finish off Iran, including massive air power, which is really the only thing we have in our arsenal. I don't know. I can't say anymore where this guy's going. I think he desperately wants out. That's the only reality I can detect. But he's also caught.

## **#Larry**

Yeah. You know, and the other dimension here is the Hajj. So, people I've been in contact with said it's just been, in terms of the, you know, the crisis action teams, the CATs that are up operating to, you know, run the war, said that it's been real, real quiet. Well, why is it quiet? You've got two to three million Muslims, Sunni and Shia, converging on Mecca, and the commemoration of the Hajj starts on Sunday, the 24th, and it extends really through the 31st, so for another seven days. Eid, I guess, is like next Wednesday, next Thursday, one of those days. So, you know, this is a time of great importance within Islam.

And the Saudis have made it pretty clear to the United States that they're not going to allow Saudi Arabia to be used as a launching pad for any kind of U.S. military operations. In fact, I was told by someone who I think is in a position to know that the United States has moved all of its air refueling activities over to Iraq. They're not taking place over Saudi airspace. So if the Saudis persist, you know, in preventing the United States from conducting air operations from Saudi Arabia, then Trump's options militarily shrink dramatically. They're forced into a very narrow corridor then through Iraq, which actually will create some more vulnerabilities.

And it's important for people to understand that the F-35s are not based in Saudi Arabia, is my understanding. They're based in Jordan at the Muwaffaq al-Salti Air Base or in Israel. So the distance from there to, say, Riyadh, because the Prince Sultan Air Base is just outside of Riyadh, that's about 820 miles. And the distance, if they go to Kuwait, say Kuwait City, that's 720 miles. Well, those aircraft only have legs for 550 miles. So they have to be refueled even before they get to eastern Saudi Arabia or eastern Kuwait. And then they're limited in how much farther they can fly. They certainly don't have the legs to fly deep into Iran.

So this whole—and this makes the refueling mission critical because, you know, these air refuelers are not dealing with just one plane. They're going to have to deal with dozens. So if the Saudis—you know, the Saudis pulled the plug on Project Freedom three weeks ago and told Trump, no, you're not going to use our territory to, quote, open the strait. And Trump had to, you know, oh, we're pausing Operation Freedom. They weren't pausing; they got the plug pulled. So it remains to be seen going forward now that if the Saudis, with the support of Qatar and Kuwait, tell the United States, you know what? It's been fun, nice knowing you, but we're going to take the Russians and Chinese up on their offers of a security umbrella because we're less likely to get blown up.

## **#Lawrence**

Now that I thought about it—stupid me—I hadn't thought about it, but the Pakistanis were very instrumental in imposing security in the past when the Saudis had a big problem at Mecca. That might explain, more so than other matters, why there are so many Pakistani forces in Saudi Arabia now. But it doesn't explain the fighters necessarily. But the Paks have been very instrumental in helping the Saudis with problems in that regard. I mean, not connected to the situation that we're looking at in the war, but connected to security in Mecca.

## **#Nima**

Colonel, there is a report by CNN and other outlets that says Iran is exceeding all timelines in reproducing those weapons they used during the war, in 40 days of war. And Donald Trump, in the clip that I played for you, says that we've destroyed everything.

## **#Lawrence**

Which, you know, is absolute hogwash. I mean, even the minor things he said about the Air Force and the Navy, it's hogwash. I mean, if you consider the ones that are destroyed and the ones they've actually destroyed in the Navy, for example, and then you consider the number that they have—because these are small boats, these aren't destroyers and cruisers—then his idea that he's wiped out the Iranian Navy is peacock. But the idea that the Iranian Navy is powerful in a way that we would say a navy was powerful is not a true description. It's a coastal navy. It's a navy that's able to, with missiles, medium-range missiles, do some damage perhaps. But it's not a formidable military force when put up against the United States Navy and what it can do. So those are just

preposterous. And he keeps repeating them. It's almost like he's got a spool in his brain and it just rolls out. And every time it rolls out, it gets more and more ridiculous.

## **#Nima**

Because the concept of the Iranian Navy, Larry—I did my military service in the Navy in Iran, that's why—you know, the whole concept is defensive. It's not offensive. That's why they're behaving this way. I don't see that much, you know.

## **#Lawrence**

Ahmadinejad told me that in New York. Basically, a coastal defense navy with a little reach, given missiles—a little reach outside the coastal area—but basically a coastal defense navy.

## **#Larry**

I'll tell you offline my Navy joke. It's probably not appropriate for your show.

## **#Lawrence**

I think my Navy joke today would be Admiral Bradley Cooper testifying in Congress. That deer-in-the-headlights look. He proves what we used to say in Newport at the Naval War College—that surface warriors have no brains.

## **#Larry**

Yeah, that was pathetic because, you know, instead of answering the question, he went for obfuscation. You know, people don't know what I'm talking about. He was one of the congressmen who is a former—I think he was Army—was asking him about, you know, please define the difference between obliteration and degradation. And he kept saying, well, I can't talk about the nuclear program. I've been asking about the nuclear program. Please explain to me, in your use of the English language, the difference between obliterate and degrade. Well, I can't talk about the nuclear program. And it's like, oh, for...

## **#Lawrence**

When you think of it, one of the guys just ripping him up was Seth Moulton from Massachusetts. Yeah, that's who I was talking about. He's a Marine. Oh, was he a Marine? Okay. Yeah, he was a Harvard graduate at the time of 9/11, and he gained some notoriety, as well he probably should have. He left Harvard and enlisted in the Marine Corps because of 9/11. Yeah.

## **#Larry**

Yeah.

## **#Nima**

Larry, the United States sent two destroyers with laser weapons, and they're talking about firing drones in the region. What would be the main objective? And how capable are these laser weapons, or these destroyers that are capable of using these new sorts of laser weapons? We haven't seen much of that in this war so far.

## **#Larry**

They may be effective at taking out a single drone. But if you get a drone swarm, they're useless. And Iran uses drone swarms, multiple drones being fired at the same time. So this is, again, I was happy to see Admiral Caudle, I think is his name. He was testifying.

## **#Nima**

Darryl Caudle.

## **#Larry**

Yeah, Daryl Caudle. He confirmed everything I've been saying, that, you know, we don't have the military power to send. If we send any ships into the Strait of Hormuz, they're going to be destroyed. And they're not going to be destroyed by one single weapon or one single method, because Iran's got a whole number of instruments to draw upon. I'll call it its orchestra of mayhem. They have many submarines. They have underwater drones. They have surface drones. They have surface ships, the fast boats, the Boghammers, which are equipped with anti-ship missiles. They have coastal defense cruise missiles. They have short-range ballistic missiles. And they have aerial drones. So that's a whole lot of firepower that can be brought to bear on a destroyer or any other ship. And that's why I give the Admiral great credit, man. He understands, nope, we're not walking into that because we'll get waxed.

## **#Nima**

Yeah. Colonel, here's what he said.

## **#Speaker 06**

We have looked into that. That's a very challenging mission in that narrow strait when it's contested. And so when you're in a contested environment, to demine the Strait of Hormuz or to do escort duty

is not something that's easy to do. So we're going to have to get to a place where that strait is open with a generally accepted ceasefire before that can be turned on en masse. So are you saying it's not, in your opinion, you're not able to...

### **#Lawrence**

Yeah, yeah. Keep on going, keep on going. You're not able to do what Trump is saying you're doing already.

### **#Nima**

Yeah. So, Colonel, it means that there is no military solution to what's going on in the Strait of Hormuz. And that's been true since the war started.

### **#Larry**

Yeah. Well, let's say it accurately. There's no military solution that we're willing to pay the cost for. Yeah, there might be a military solution. Oh, nuclear weapons. Yeah. It'd be a Pyrrhic victory at best. Yeah.

### **#Lawrence**

I hate to laugh at that because I'm hearing more and more talk about nuclear weapons. I'm hearing talk like, well, we spent all this time and money, how come we can't use them? Yeah.

### **#Nima**

But, Colonel, when it comes to Israel, we know that there is a report saying that Donald Trump and Netanyahu have their own differences when it comes to the continuation of the war. And Netanyahu really wants to continue this war. He's not fighting the war, by the way. He really wants the United States and Iran to continue the war because he has something else to do in Israel and with the case of Lebanon. And because Lebanon is getting something – they're having a lot of problems with Lebanon. Just like before, they're just hitting Iron Dome batteries.

It's so difficult for Israel to replace these batteries in the long run if time goes by and we see the same thing happening over and over. That's why he wants the United States in the region. That's why I would say they would put a lot of pressure on the Trump administration to stay there. Are you optimistic about this war, this conflict, you know, ending anytime soon? Or do you see the continuation of this conflict in some way or another? I would say not an active war, or something like the blockade that the United States tried to do with the ceasefire.

### **#Lawrence**

If you look at Lebanon and you look back to 1982, when Ariel Sharon was the Minister of Defense and more or less was the architect of that invasion, and you look at their ignominious—and I call it ignominious—and they made it even more ignominious by slaughtering people in the camps on their withdrawal, something they still won't talk about and deny. If you look at that, and then you look at, I think it was July 2006, and the lesson they got taught by Hezbollah at that time, and then you look at today, you understand how intractable the problem is that Netanyahu has created for himself in yet another theater of war. And he hasn't finished Gaza. There's no way he's finished Gaza.

That's the biggest criticism that Tali Bennett and others level at him, because he's got Hamas in the tunnels and he hasn't done anything. And he's so frustrated over that, and the IDF is so frustrated over that, that I saw yesterday their toll of killing people now still in Gaza during this ceasefire. I still wonder what "ceasefire" means in Hebrew during this ceasefire. Their toll of killing people is really staggering when you look at it. And every day they engineer new ways to justify the killing of yet more Gazans. And they do that by manipulating the lines, the corridors, the escape routes all the time, 24/7. And the Palestinians are totally confused. The Gazans are totally confused about where to go and how to go. So they kill them.

When they stray the least bit, they kill them. And the West Bank, I haven't even talked about that, or East Jerusalem—he's got his hands full. Yes, he wants us to finish off the problem in Iran. Would he join us if we were to make a part of that finish, if you will, an air attack unprecedented thus far? Yes, probably he would. He'd put his aircraft into it. We'd have the IAF in there as well. And maybe he'd take a hiatus in Lebanon for that particular time. But we're only talking about 10 or 11 days, I would suspect, of around-the-clock bombing. So he could stand that. But I don't think he's going to back off ultimately in either place. I think he's in for a penny, in for a pound, and I think the pound's going to eat his ass.