

John Helmer: TRUMP'S IRAN DEAL FAILS – Russia's Oreshnik Delivers Final Blow

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#Nima

Hi, everybody. It's Tuesday, May 26, 2026, and our dear friend, our brother John Helmer, is here with us. Welcome back, John.

#John

Thank you for having me, Nima. Good to be back.

#Nima

John, let's start with the escalations between Ukraine and Russia. Finally, we've seen, we've heard about the rationing for such a long time, talking about the reaction if Russia uses again the Iskander missile. So the other important point is the phone call between Lavrov and Blinken. It seems Lavrov was warning the United States. What do we know about that?

#John

What we know is what's been published on the Russian side. Again, the Russian side has published a full communique by Sergei Lavrov at 9 o'clock Moscow time yesterday. Earlier in the day, the Foreign Ministry issued a general statement on the attack on Starobelsk, the children's dormitory, and the retaliation. And I've published the full texts and the links for those who want to read on johnhelmer.net. Let me emphasize, first of all, that the two words that are important in the communique from Sergei Lavrov, and I'll just read them out.

The communique says Vladimir Putin and S.V. Lavrov officially brought to the American side information that, in response to the ongoing—that's a present tense—terrorist attacks of the Kiev regime against the civilian population and civilian objects on Russian territory, the armed forces of the Russian Federation begin—that's a verb that's in present tense—systemic and consistent strikes on the facilities located in Kiev, used for the needs of the armed forces of Ukraine, and on the relevant decision-making centers. Now, what's important about that are the tenses. Lavrov is talking

about ongoing and present tense. He's talking about attacks against terrorists—terrorists. Yes, terrorists.

That means Zelensky and the entire Ukrainian government. And he's characterized this as a new level of warfare—systemic and consistent. So immediately we have the question: what did the airstrikes hit, together with all the other missiles, because it was a uniquely heavy missile attack? Zircon, Kinzhal, and the KH-101 and others, including drones, were all used. The questions then have arisen, which the Russian military bloggers are asking, which the mainstream media are asking: has President Putin lifted his restrictions on the general staff attacking the Kiev regime if, as we now clearly see from the attack on Starobelsk, that regime is terrorist? Therefore, is regime decapitation now a general staff target?

Now, if that's not decided and it's not clear—and I'll come on to another statement just made by Sergei Shoigu, the ex-Defense Minister and Secretary of the Security Council earlier today in Moscow—I'll come back to that in a minute, so please remind me. What we have are a series of questions and not enough evidence to give an answer. I understand that our audience is expecting the tags on this podcast to determine, to decide, to discuss, to understand: was this a Russian strike, the beginning of several? Was this the beginning of a final chapter or stage in the military operations? Here's what my sources say. Here's what I see in the evidence. Let's start with the evidence, because it's poor. What we see is that the principal Russian target was Bila Tserkva, which means in Russian “white church.” There's no white church left there.

It's an airbase. On the surface, from the videos I've seen—and you've got other colleagues who are more military experts than I am, who watch more videos than I do—I don't have time to watch too many videos. The ground-level damage does not disclose bunker damage, underground damage. So if the airbase was in fact the site and setting for a significant command-and-control bunker of the Ukrainian Air Force, of the drone operations, of the Ukrainian military intelligence, or of the civilian leadership basically hiding or in air raid protection shelters—if that was the target—there's no evidence that anyone was struck or hurt. But then Ukrainian censorship is very tight. We expect the American press, the mainstream U.S. press, the anti-Russian press in Europe to keep whatever happens secret. But there's no sign yet of significant senior-level casualties.

Those signs would be the sudden appearance of medical evacuation planes coming from Germany through Poland and lifting people, wounded people, out of Kiev to hospitals in Germany, Poland, and the United States. We see no significant increase in medical evacuations. Therefore, I have to conclude that on the basis of what we can see—surface damage—and on the basis of what we can't see—no medical evacuation, no... I've seen rumors. We've all heard rumors that General Syrskyi, the commander of Ukrainian forces, was hurt or killed. There's no evidence to substantiate any of this. So what did the Russians strike at? What we know from much more visible evidence in Kiev is that apartment buildings housing an apartment of Timur Mindich, the corrupt financier of Vladimir Zelensky, who's fled to Israel.

Mindich's apartment was hit, possibly Zelensky's apartment was hit, and they appear to have been hit by drones. Nothing like missile damage can I see on the exterior of those buildings. I've also read, as our audience has, as your colleagues have, as you have, Dima, that some of the targets were the GUR, the Ukrainian Military Intelligence Agency. So on the evidence, we don't see that the airstrike did final significant damage to the leadership. We don't see that, and we don't see it yet. On the other hand, our Lavrov is saying we've just begun. This is systemic. We're going after the system of command and control. Yeah. And it's continuing, and it'll be consistent. Well, what we have to do, as disappointing to our audience and you and me as it is, we have to wait. We have to be patient.

But we can, in fact, say that from the Russian point of view, from the military bloggers' point of view, from public opinion's point of view, there is now, especially since Starobelsk, a rising demand that Putin lift his foot off the pedal, that the restrictions placed by the Kremlin on the general staff be lifted, and that the Russian side is now committed to finishing them off. But you began, appropriately, Nima, with the Rubio telephone call. And what we can say about that is that it immediately follows Rubio's statement, and it's a very important statement, so I'll read a couple of words from it — in Sweden, on his way out of a NATO meeting to India, before the Lavrov call. What Rubio said, in short, was that the negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, mediated by the United States, have failed and they're over.

I'll just read what he says. Peace negotiations on Ukraine under American leadership. Let me just say, we got involved because we were told we were the only ones who could do it. We were the only ones the Russians and Ukrainians would talk to, so we got involved. Now, listen to this. They were not fruitful, unfortunately. Rubio talking: we stand ready to continue to play the role. Despite leaks that are not true, despite stories out there about us forcing the Ukrainians to take this position or that position, which are not true, if we see an opportunity to pull together talks that are productive, that have a chance to be fruitful, we're prepared to play that role. There are no such talks occurring at this time. We hope that will change.

Last line: it will not end with a military victory by one side or the other, at least from a traditional viewpoint of how military victories are defined. Now, that's Rubio flashing a green light, as my Russian sources in Moscow interpret it, for the Russian side to finish them off — in other words, to achieve the military victory that President Putin has referred to as the alternative to diplomatic negotiations. That's what was said. Now, I think I'll stop now with one little extra, because it's just been said in Beijing. A few hours ago, at the Chinese Foreign Ministry daily briefing, this time by Mao Ning, she was asked by the Ukrainians, by the Ukrainian news agency, basically trying to amplify: what does China think of Lavrov's statement on systemic...? The question was, the Russian side explicitly threatens foreign diplomats in Kiev with these attacks.

I'd like to ask how China comments on Moscow's threats to escalate the war in Ukraine and whether China will evacuate its diplomats from Kiev. Mao Ning quotes: China's position on the Ukraine crisis is consistent and clear. Dialogue and negotiation are the only viable way out. We call on the parties concerned to work together for de-escalation as soon as possible and accumulate conditions for

restarting dialogue and negotiation. Now, does that sound as if last week President Putin told President Xi that he was going to escalate, that he was going to use massive Ereshnik-type force to take out the Ukrainian leadership because they will never negotiate an end? Does that sound like a Chinese endorsement of a conversation the two of them had last week? It doesn't sound like that to me.

#Nima

John, you didn't mention what Shoigu said.

#John

Ah, right. This I interpret in the old-fashioned Russian way of reading between the lines. Speaking to a group of, how to say, senior Security Council, security advisor-level officials from the CSTO, he says—and I'll just read it out, it's in TASS if folks want to check his exact words—he says, "The successful testing of the Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missile will temper the ardor of Western strategists, making them take a sober look at the potential consequences of their reckless Russia policy," Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu said at a meeting of the Collective Security Treaty Organization of Security Council Secretaries. That's how to say, how to interpret that.

First of all, Sergei Shoigu was sacked as defense minister because he had allowed a level of corruption that was unique in the history of Russian generalship. Now he's the Secretary of the Security Council. He remains protected by the President, and he's saying nothing about the Ereshnik, nothing about terrorism, nothing about the attacks over the weekend. Instead, he's referring to the Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missile test, which was a ceremony that President Putin participated in last week. And if he thinks that that test deters NATO or the United States from any of the wars they're currently engaged in, including the Ukraine battlefield, including the Iran battlefield, including Cuba and China—if Shoigu thinks that, he's kidding himself.

He's a fool. If he thinks anyone believes what he's just said, he's deluding himself. This is simply an odd and unconvincing display of Russian muscle applied to thin air. It's punching at thin air. Now, if you're Secretary of the Security Council at this time, following the Starobelsk attack, following the counterattack on Kiev, following Lavrov's clear indication our Russian side is going to proceed with systemic and consistent strikes—if that's what Shoigu says, doesn't it lead to doubt that the Russian side, in particular the one man who stands behind Shoigu and keeps his back, that's President Putin—doesn't it tell you President Putin hasn't really changed his mind? I raise that as a question. I don't yet know the answer.

#Nima

John, just moments ago, Dmitry Peskov said the Kremlin has not yet received any response to Russia's warning of planned sequential strikes on Kyiv's military-industrial complex. They didn't

receive any response from the United States. What sort of response do they expect from the United States, in your opinion?

#John

There are two parts to the answer to your question. Nobody is going to evacuate their embassies in Kiev, because if they were intending to, they wouldn't be saying so. The evidence would be obvious on buses, trains, and planes. So nobody's taking that threat seriously. Second, why does the spokesman for the president also punch into thin air? I don't understand a lot of what Mr. Peskov says. I don't understand whether he believes what he says is being listened to as seriously as he intends. Does he understand that punching in thin air like that adds to your non-credibility, your non-believability? And then what happens is worse from a Russian point of view.

It encourages the adversary to say, look, the Russians aren't going to maintain systemic, consistent strikes against the Ukrainian leadership. Look, they are not to be taken seriously. And worse, because you've seen the propaganda, our audience has seen the propaganda—Russia's failing on the battlefield. Well, that's not true, although there are serious problems along the front, on the ground. There are serious problems in the war at sea. None of these things attract credible Russian counterattack or belief that Russia has achieved from the United States a green light of the Rubio kind to step up its war, to finish the other side off to the degree necessary to end the war on military terms.

If there are no negotiations, if they fail, if the Anchorage understandings can only be understood now as a series of bribes the Russian side offered Trump, that if the diplomatic negotiations fail, Russia would settle on military terms, that's been said very clearly multiple times by Sergei Lavrov. If that's where Russia is, then what Shoigu is saying today and what Peskov is saying today undercuts the credibility of what happened when Yermak landed and what's promised to happen by Sergei Lavrov. That's, at the very least, from a Russian point of view, from Russian public opinion point of view, disappointing. And if it's disappointing in election time, in an economy that's in recession, public opinion asks for answers, just like you're asking the questions.

#Nima

I think when it comes, John, to the negotiations between the United States and Russia, we have to consider what is the priority for the United States right now. And how do you see the war in Ukraine in the eyes of the Trump administration? Because the way they were negotiating for more than a year—we're getting to two years of the Trump administration—you don't see that much seriousness in negotiations. And even with the escalation, they don't care, as you just mentioned. What can Russia do to force the United States into a serious sort of communication? Is that possible, or does Russia have to do it all on the battlefield?

#John

I'm hesitating because I'm inclined to say it must be done on the battlefield first. Achieve the battlefield objectives, and that will inherently be more persuasive for the United States. But what Rubio is saying is also, and Trump is saying it both explicitly and implicitly, and by what he's not tweeting about. He's not tweeting about the Ukraine and Russian war any longer. He's not tweeting about the Europe war any longer, for the time being, let's say. His attention is clearly on the Iran battlefield, and he's just launched a series through CENTCOM of attacks on small boats, magnified—okay, but magnified at the very same time that Mr. Ghalibaf and Mr. Araqchi are in Qatar negotiating on the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding.

We can come back to that in a minute, but it's quite clear that if you look at what the constants are driving—the political constants driving Trump—if you look at what the economic fears in the United States are as the driving season starts now, then here are the constants that I think preoccupy Trump. Voter approval is going down. Voter disapproval overall for Trump is going up. So he comes back from a presidential triumph, let's say, to give him his credit as he claims it, in Beijing. You can't get more of the kind of imperial display he likes, that he thinks generates public voter approval. But it doesn't make any difference. What makes a difference is disapproval of his Iran war conduct.

So what we now see is that his job approval, the gap between disapproval and approval, is now almost 20 percentage points, and it's getting worse. Warmaking in Iran is hurting Trump no matter what he does. So he needs to—the other constant in his—let's, to answer your question, what is driving him is that he believes he has to maintain escalation control. Warfare power comes out of his gun, no one else's. Okay, he can show it by shooting up two or three small boats and some shore installations at Bandar Abbas, as if that's going to make a significant difference to the negotiations or a significant difference to voters at home. Well, it doesn't. While his job disapproval gap is almost 20%, the gap for inflation is almost 40%. Forty percent. Presidents don't win elections with that degree of public disapproval.

#Nima

John, this is disapproval of the president's. You see Donald Trump here? Yes, 63%. It goes back to the Nixon era. Yes.

#John

And while that's a historical comparison, voters climbing in their cars and then driving to the gas pump think immediately. Their concern: significant disapproval of inflation. That's their first priority. Second, disapproval of the economy. The gap there is nearly 26%. That's the gap between disapprovers and approvers. That's why his total level of disapproval that you saw—the red bar there—is so high. So I think you asked me, what drives him? And that's what's driving him: shortage of gas and inflation at the petrol pump and everywhere else, shortages, logistic disruptions—all concerning American voters. And in that context, it's perfectly clear, the Ukraine-Russia war is of no

importance. Political cost to Trump right now, no political gain. So he can say to, through Rubio, do what you have to do to the Russian side.

And by the way, it's not the first time. Remember that Trump has more than once said, well, we've tried to negotiate. This was a hard one, blah, blah, blah. I really chew on my own tongue if I have to quote Trump, but he has said they can fight it out between themselves. Now, when they do that, a reasonable question—our colleagues have added information. For our audience, I'm not sure I can add more. How much does the U.S. continue to assist the Ukrainians? We know that the British reconnaissance electronic targeting machinery that flies across the Black Sea has been intercepted recently, that they were frightened off, but they'll come back. The U.S. are not exposing their drones the way they have in the past to set up Ukrainian drone operations against Russia.

They don't have to, because the Baltic states, Germany, and Poland are all assisting in that operation. The U.S. is encouraging that, not discouraging that. So while, on the one hand, Trump is saying, let them fight it out, on the other hand, Rubio is saying negotiations have failed. Behind the scenes, the U.S. and the NATO allies believe that they will continue to assist the escalation of attacks on Russia and the Russian side. Well, I'm now repeating myself. Does anyone out there think, after what I've described Sergei Shoigu as having said, what you've described Dmitry Peskov as having said—does anyone out there think the Russians are deterring all of this backing for Ukrainian escalation? Me? I'm just one. I think no. The answer is no.

#Nima

John, before getting to the conflict, the war between Iran and the United States, I want to play a clip of Sikorski talking about negotiating with Putin. Here is what Sikorski said.

#Speaker 03

I'm skeptical about negotiating with Putin on two grounds. Number one, when you've been a dictator for over 20 years, these dictators always drop some of their maximalist demands too late because they don't know the true position they are in. And secondly, Vladimir Putin is a man whose word and whose signature cannot be trusted. He lied to us repeatedly. So I think the war will be ended by someone else. Would you like to expand on that? Isn't it clear?

#Nima

I don't know what this guy's talking about, John.

#John

Look, I've followed Mr. Sikorski's career for a long time. I've looked into the level of corruption that he and his wife, Anne Applebaum, have put in their pockets, both when they were in office and

when they were out of office. There's nothing new about what he said, except that a man with a career of changing nationalities as often as Sikorski has had, changing loyalties as often as Sikorski has had, accusing someone else of being a liar is an obvious case, and not a very clear one. He speaks beautiful English, with a better accent than I've got. It's simply a case of the pot calling the kettle black.

#Nima

John, as you've mentioned, the priority right now for the United States is the case of Iran. And there are somehow messages going back and forth between the two parties. And as you've mentioned, we had an escalation last night, and two of these speedboats were hit by American forces. Fighter jets hit Iran, and four sailors were martyred, were killed in this attack. And we had an Iranian response to that on American drones. One F-35 was targeted. We don't know, we have no confirmation that it was hit or not, but it seems that they forced the fighter jet out of the region. So what is that? Because you are negotiating, you are trying at least—whatever—Donald Trump, you mentioned Marco Rubio and Donald Trump.

Look at Donald Trump, you know, look at his posts on Truth Social. It's all about negotiation. It's all about "I'm getting this, getting that." Yesterday he wrote something as big as a book on his Truth Social. And, you know, it's a lot about what's going on. But at the same time, the two sides are fighting. And we have to remember this is the time of Hajj in Saudi Arabia, and many people are there, and there could—I would say there is no possibility of having some sort of escalation because of the Hajj in Saudi Arabia, because it would bring a lot of backlash, a lot of repercussions to the whole region. What is your understanding of the way the two sides are somehow negotiating? They're not negotiating; they're sending messages back and forth.

#John

Well, I think we've got lots of messages that can be interpreted in different ways. The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman has in fact confirmed that there are a lot of points which have been agreed. And I read—and you correct me if I'm wrong—I read the Foreign Ministry spokesman, so he's speaking for Mr. Araqchi, Abbas Araqchi. He's saying, look, we've got a good number of terms agreed. And I think we can infer from the Iranian publications and from the variety of American ones, including Trump's tweet, which I'll come to in a minute, there is an agreement between the two sides on staging a de-escalation, staging. From the Iranian side, you've said it, Nima, and I'm glad you've said it. We've said it before.

The Iranian side clearly cannot trust the Americans or the Israelis, neither their word nor their signatures, and therefore it's Iran's objective to achieve a permanent peace, not a pause for resupply and resumption later on. Therefore, the staging has to produce goodwill and trust. And in the first stage, the terms are not yet clear, but they seem to involve some extension of the ceasefire. And the U.S. broke it last night, and the Israelis are escalating in Lebanon. So in a 60-day extension

of the ceasefire, which is what is leaking out of both sides and from the so-called mediators, in a 60-day extension, one would expect to see terms on Lebanon, which the Israelis are resisting, terms on lifting the blockade, which CENTCOM may be resisting because they acted last night in spite of Trump's claims that the deal is getting closer.

That in the first stage, there might be terms such as ceasefire and confidence-building. The second or third stage—and we've spelled out staging before from the Iranian point of view, American point of view—in the second or third stage, there might be the completion of the nuclear issues, the question of how much enriched uranium will be retained and where. Let me read you Trump's tweet on this matter, because unlike most of the tweets that are supervised by Stephen Miller or spring out of Trump's brain when he's upstairs in the White House with his friends, here's what he said. There are some alternatives here. Listen to this—Trump talking in a tweet, May 26th.

The enriched uranium, which he explains in parentheses as nuclear dust—exclamation mark—will either be immediately turned over to the United States to be brought home and destroyed, or preferably, in conjunction and coordination with the Islamic Republic of Iran—he doesn't usually use the full official title of the state—destroyed in place or at another acceptable location with the Atomic Energy Commission. He means the International Atomic Energy Commission, or its equivalent, being witness to this process and event. Now, look at all the alternatives there. That's a man who hasn't finished negotiating. Therefore, I think it's fair to say the nuclear issues are being left to later, at a later stage. And both sides now agree that that will be the case.

It's awkward for Trump because he keeps saying his principal war aim is that Iran must never have a nuclear weapon. Of course, as we've already indicated, that doesn't matter a fig to American voters, nor should it. They don't believe that's the war aim. They believe what they can see when they have to pay for the gas in their car. So Trump is actually confirming in that tweet—and I'm shuffling papers to get to the point here—that there are negotiations going on that are nowhere near finished. That allows spoilers, spoilers inside the U.S. administration who don't want a negotiated 60-day ceasefire. They don't want, quote, a Trump retreat.

They want to annihilate Iran. They are also obviously supported by Israel, which wants Iranian destruction, genocide of Iran and Lebanon. Now, at the same time as that's going on, we see that the Iranian side has allowed the supertanker carrying Iraqi oil. I'm looking down at the U.S. maritime media. Look, if you want to understand how the new regime, Hamar's regime, is working, look at the international London or U.S., or Singapore, or Cyprus, or Paris maritime media, and they'll tell you how many tankers are moving in which direction. Now, the Iraqi crew that's just been released by Iran is headed for China.

So we can see that the Chinese and the Iraqis are working with Iran, the IRGC, and with the new Hormuz authority to develop a plan. And the tankers are moving, and they're not being blocked by the Central Command blockade. So I would say this isn't confusion; it's multiple interests working to achieve short-term interests—shipping oil, disrupting negotiations, achieving negotiations in stage

one while deferring stage two and stage three. Is that confusion? No. We've just tried to explain how so much can be going on, which has apparent contradictions, with bits and pieces clashing with one another. But that's politics. That's what these chaps get paid for. This is what people die for.

#Nima

John, Donald Trump was insisting that Iran has to send enriched uranium to the United States before it. Yes, he's just softening his position.

#John

Yes, he certainly has. Yes. And there's no sign that they're sticking to a 3% enrichment level. There's no sign of that any longer, and this was the objective of the so-called abortive Isfahan operation — that they wanted to throw a cordon around Iran's nuclear facilities. And there's no sign that they want to limit civilian nuclear capacity construction in Iran. In other words, yes, it would appear that Trump is retreating on all the major nuclear issues. At the same time, he's being encouraged to do that by Ghalibaf and Araghchi, who are making concessions which are not yet clear.

But the two sides seem to be coming together on a position that leaves Iran better off than at any time during the American claims against their nuclear facilities since before the June attack. So there's progress for the Iranian side. There's retreat, indubitably, on the U.S. side. But we're not, as the foreign ministry spokesman—pardon me for not recalling his name, Araghchi's spokesman—were not yet in a firm agreement. And a firm agreement is going to be only a firm agreement on stages in which everybody's got to comply with each stage. And the Iranian side is not going to tolerate what Hamas has suffered—that is, a staged agreement in which the Israelis break each stage of their ceasefire and of their peace agreement. Yes, it's not going to be like the Gaza outcome.

#Nima

And the reason we have Iranian officials in Qatar—we had the head of the Iranian parliament, Ghalibaf, the foreign minister of Iran, and the head of the Central Bank of Iran—is because they're demanding the release of \$24 billion in frozen assets.

#John

Yes. Yeah.

#Nima

It seems that they're asking for half of that upon signing the document, and later on, they're going to receive another \$12 billion in 60 days.

#John

I'm glad you mentioned that. I think that's emphatically clear now. And let's do the arithmetic. If the Iranian side is saying, we're going to stick on this in staged form, money released stage by stage, then it's clear why, in the 60-day period, the Persian Gulf Strait Authority, the PGSA, which is the new Iranian IRGC authority for regulating the Hormuz Strait, the PGSA can, as it were, drop the toll. What the toll was for was to demonstrate political demonstration, maritime demonstration of control. Second, as we've said and emphasized, the toll had to raise money as partial reparation for the level of damage Iran has faced.

In a compromise between the sides, if the U.S. agrees to release multibillions of Iranian assets and cash, including reserves seized and held in London, then you can see the money is coming back home, and therefore the issue of reparations can be adjusted over time. I'm not saying given up, but I'm glad you mentioned it. This is a very important element. It's not getting much coverage in the Western press. And one would have to then look at, are the Europeans, like the British who've been holding Iranian bank assets and sovereign assets, ready to go along?

Well, they're not ready to go along with Russian-sanctioned assets, but they do seem—Starmer, Prime Minister Starmer does seem—to be ready to go along with the release of Iranian assets in return for the dropping of the toll and the accelerated movement of oil out. And if Iran says, let's try that for 60 days, the whole world will give a sigh of relief, and everybody will give them their own money back. That sounds like a deal that's far cleverer, as deal-making goes, for the Iranian side, and it teaches the so-called master of the deal, President Trump, a thing or two.

#Nima

Yeah, about the toll, John, yesterday we learned from the Iranian Foreign Ministry that they said there are no tolls and there will be no tolls in the Strait of Hormuz. But ships will have to pay an environmental protection fee in a joint system.

#John

This is perfectly reasonable. That's what the Turks impose on passage through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles Straits. It's called a maintenance environmental protection fee, protection against spills. I mean, I could read the text of the Montreux Treaty that doesn't allow Turkey to control those straits. But there are charges, and the Danes have done that historically. And it's a good outcome. It's a sensible outcome. Okay, we don't call it a toll. Fine. We don't call it reparations. We'll come back to that later. The relief that we can do arithmetic in concert is so great that everybody's likely to agree, and perhaps they will. But there are obvious Iran haters. They're in Israel. They're in the Jewish lobby in Washington. They're in the Congress. They're in Trump's family—Kushner,

Witkoff maybe, Gruenbaum maybe—and others. They're there, and they have an interest in annihilating. That's their war aim. So are they ready to sabotage the negotiations? Maybe. That's why we're seeing multiple signals.

#Nima

I think Donald Trump has two options right now. One of them is the continuation of the war with Iran, which would be the end of his presidency. And the other one would be, you know, making some sort of deal with Iran, which we know, as you've mentioned, there are many people in the United States and in Israel who are not happy about what's going on because they see what Israel was before this war started and what Israel is today. We know that Israel is attacking Lebanon. And yesterday Smotrich said, for each drone that comes to Israel and hits some targets in Israel or hits some targets in the southern part of Lebanon against Israeli equipment, tanks, and everything—air defense systems—we're going to bring down ten buildings.

This means that they're suffering a lot from the drone attacks of Hezbollah. That's why they're attacking. Just moments ago, we've seen a lot of footage coming out of Lebanon. They're bringing down the buildings in Lebanon. They're destroying everything. Yes. This is the basic problem for Donald Trump. I don't see any sort of progress between Israel and Lebanon. I don't know how much leverage Donald Trump has to force Benjamin Netanyahu into some sort of new positions on their policy against Hezbollah or Lebanon.

#John

I don't know either on the issue of leverage. But where's Vice President Vance in all of this? You ask yourself from a U.S. White House political campaign point of view, right? We've got Trump, who might, but is unlikely—the man's too ill and is getting more and more debilitated—try to succeed himself in '28 by some extra-constitutional measure. That looks less and less likely, more and more likely he's designated his son Eric Trump, not Donald Trump. He wouldn't even go to Donald Trump's wedding. If Donald Trump was a candidate to succeed his father, his father would have gone to his wedding the other day. Why didn't he? It's a family matter. It had nothing to do with the war plans that they were cooking up in Washington. I don't know what the family thinks about each other, but I can say, politically speaking, Donald Trump Jr. is no longer a presidential succession candidate, whereas Eric Trump is.

He was taken to Beijing with his wife and shown to President Xi. That's a presidential succession signal. The other two candidates... Everybody at home could go to [RealClearPolitics.com](https://www.RealClearPolitics.com) and look at the polls for the Republican Party. You'll see that Vance is still out front, followed by Rubio, with Eric Trump rising. Don't bother with the numbers now. They don't mean very much. But those are the three. So let's read your question about what power, what leverage does Trump have over Israel or Israel over Trump. If we talk presidential succession politics, if we talk congressional midterm politics, that's where it counts. Israel risks losing power, a chunk of the Republican Party. If it's the

case, and you see the reporting just like I do, and I don't know, I'm far, far away. I'm sitting in Russia, in politics.

So Vance looks as if he's walked away from the big war liability, which is Iran. He's clearly walked away from the Russia-Ukraine battlefield. What's Vance doing as Trump's successor? He's saying nothing, which means he's pointing at Trump and saying, you're to blame. Fine. That's what he's doing. Rubio, on the other hand, is doing the right thing. He's making himself very visible all the time. That's a good idea. People will think that you're a presidential candidate if they see you more often. He's also having trouble with some of his constituents. The Cuban-Americans in Miami aren't that keen on the kind of deal Rubio might make as a secretary of state or a national security advisor. All of these things are the way I would interpret it.

If I were back in Washington and I was either running for office or my boss was running for office or trying to keep power so that I could keep my job, this is the way they think in the White House. So I would have to say Vance sees war as a liability, and his chance of becoming President of the United States depends on accelerated peace. Rubio is trying to ride a wave and look as if he's a peacemaker and pitch war in Ukraine on Putin's head, war in the Middle East on Israel's head. These chaps are getting ready to hold Israel as to blame if they start running for the succession, and American voters want, quote, peace, cheap gas, and so forth and so on. Israel has to worry now.

You've got two Catholics, two Catholics running for president who are capable of resisting the evangelical Christians and the Chabadniki people, the fanatical Jewish expansionists like Kushner, Miller, and others. So, has that answered your question? I think we have to see the answer to your question in terms of U.S. politics, and I think we have to say, you've got a lot of folks who are closer to the United States' core than I am. But speaking as ex-White House a long time ago, I see presidential politicking as the driver here. And Israel is a potential target in a Vance succession race or a Rubio succession race. But Israel isn't a target if the Democrats run, is it? Yeah.

#Nima

Yeah. I think you're right, John. Thank you. Thank you so much, John, for being with us today. Great pleasure, as always.

#John

Me too. Me too, Nima. I look forward to next week, and I look forward to some of the hopefulness we've talked about today.

#Nima

Yeah, please go to johnhelmer.net. Right below his name, you can find it — johnhelmer.net. You can find John's pieces. He writes about Russia, Iran, China, everything, but basically through the eyes of

Russian policies. Thank you. Thank you so much, John. Thank you for having me, Nima. See you next week. See you next week.