

Col. Larry Wilkerson: US Fighter Jets Target Iranian Speedboats

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#Nima

Hi, everybody. Today's Tuesday, May 26th, 2026, and our dear friend Col. Larry Wilkerson is here with us. Welcome back.

#Lawrence

Good to be with you, Nima. That's a mouthful, isn't it? Mouthful. 2026, May 26th. Yeah, exactly. So, 2026. Yeah.

#Nima

It's going to be better. Yeah, we hope.

#Nima

Yeah. Let me start, Larry, with what happened last night and the night before — the confrontation between Iran and the United States firing at each other. It was started by U.S. fighter jets attacking speedboats in the Persian Gulf. Four of those sailors were killed. And then we had an Iranian response with anti-ship missiles. And then the escalation coming back and forth, and you see finally Iran hitting one of the MQ-9 drones, which was hit by the Iranian air defense system. And then later on, it was so close to hitting one of those F-35s. It seems some of the reports show that one F-35, together with another drone, got hit by the air defense system. We are not talking about a war; we are talking about two countries right now negotiating, talking to each other, and at the same time fighting. What is that? What kind of norm is that, and what do you make of it?

#Lawrence

Well, it's the Trump method of diplomacy. It's a method that I think is pretty obvious to the world now, particularly with the case of Iran and the United States, that we get into diplomacy and we feel like that part of the diplomacy — this is the only way we can operate anymore, Nima — is sanctions

and military force, military force and sanctions. And we get in the middle of diplomacy, such as it is. It isn't real diplomacy. And if they're not adhering to our points the way we want them to adhere, or we want to move them a certain direction, we start the bombing over again. We start the kinetic action over again. That's the only way we know how to negotiate, the only way we know how to deal.

And we're teaching the world, in many respects, this sort of technique, so we can expect it back at us — if not soon, more so than not. And it's a terrible precedent we're setting. First of all, if you look at this very closely, there has been no contact between an Iranian diplomat or an Iranian government representative, or both, and an American of equivalent stature. There simply hasn't, because we've put no diplomats forward. There are no diplomats dealing with this. There are only people like Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff. And I don't even include Marco Rubio in what I would call a diplomat. He's made it clear that he's not a diplomat. He's an advocate of bombs, bullets, bayonets, and sanctions.

Just typical of the empire. So this is the strangest diplomacy. At no point in time since we commenced this, quote, diplomacy, unquote, have we actually talked with Iranians. Nor are they with us. Probably at their behest on their side, or their decision on their side, because they don't trust us worth a crap. And certainly because Trump won't let anybody talk directly with Iranians. So what are we doing? We're doing diplomacy through good offices, or at least a reasonable facsimile thereof. And good offices are being offered by disparate entities like the UAE, Pakistan, Oman — the usual one — and others, Riyadh. So there's no diplomacy going on, Nima, period. There is no diplomacy going on.

There's only a pronouncement here and a pronouncement here, and then a Bibi in the center saying, I don't like that, I'll start the bombing again in Lebanon, or I'll do something else on toward. One of the things—open parentheses here, let's take an aside—one of the things I'm really watching what Bibi's doing for is if I'm right that Epstein's files, so to speak, really are being used to influence Donald Trump, principally because of Melania's exposure in those files. I don't know if it's Trump himself at all, but it's certainly Melania. If they're being used, why is Bibi not wielding them now a little more adroitly? And my conclusion can only be, it ain't Bibi that has them. It's Mossad. And Mossad is growing increasingly tired of Bibi Netanyahu.

So maybe now we have a different situation with regard to the most powerful tool that Bibi has to use against Trump, because Bibi's in trouble politically and otherwise within his own coalition, and certainly within the state of Israel, particularly with the Knesset. So is Mossad now withholding that blackmail evidence, so to speak, and not letting Bibi threaten with it? Why didn't he come to the United States like he normally does and address the Congress, and essentially from the Congress tell Trump to go to hell or try to modify his behavior? Because Trump seems to have found something with which he's using it to make Netanyahu do more of what he wants him to do. Part of that is Miriam Adelson, I'm told, has said she doesn't like Bibi anymore, and she would like someone else in charge in Israel, and so she's not bringing the pressure to bear on him.

Is Mossad not bringing the pressure to bear or allowing Netanyahu to bring the pressure to bear from the Epstein blackmail files? What is going on? Because it looks as if there is at least a prima facie breach between what Bibi wants and what Trump wants, most notably signified now by his going on the march in Lebanon. He's going north very fast, or trying to, and he's taking on Lebanese citizens and civilians. He's not caring about whether it's Hezbollah or it's Lebanese civilians—he's just killing everything in his path, destroying it. The IDF is, in some ways—I don't think, if you read Haaretz's headlines today, I'm not sure the IDF is all that happy with what they're doing. So this is the most important ingredient in this relationship that I can't parse right now accurately.

I just can't. What is happening in the relationship between Bibi and Trump, and Trump and Bibi? Because my, you know, my estimate was that we were going back to war, and we were going to do as we've done before. We're in the third diplomatic window, if you will, that we've been in. Every window before—all of them, two of them—we attacked in the middle of them. My opinion was we were going to attack again, ruthlessly, Israel at our flank, in the middle of these negotiations, at the most propitious point to do so, where Hegseth, Kane, Trump feel like the Iranians are, you know, convinced that this is moving diplomatically and that the military force will only be ancillary to it, if at all. Now we're going to hit them again—that's what I said—we're going to hit them hard. To no purpose, no effect.

But I can't figure it out now. I just don't know what we're doing. I think I'm looking at Admiral Bradley Cooper's testimony before the House of Representatives, particularly his responses to Seth Moulton, and I think it was Jason Crow, maybe a couple of other people, where Cooper made an ass of himself—an absolute ass of himself. I would have taken him aside if he was at Newport, Rhode Island, at the Naval War College, performing on the game floor with me, and he said what he said back to Seth Moulton. He said, "Things are going according to plan." Wrong, Admiral. That's not the comment you want to give. "Things going according to plan" means nothing. No plan outlasts contact with the enemy. What you want to answer is, are you accomplishing your mission? And oh, by the way, Admiral, what is your mission? And see what he says.

See what he says, because Kane comes in later with Hegseth and gets asked similar questions and can't tell them what the mission is. So what is the mission, Donald Trump? Mr. President, what is the mission you gave to your military through Pete Hegseth and General Kane to accomplish? I bet you Trump can't answer that question. What is the mission? To bring the Iranians to their knees? Failed. To destroy Iran? Failed. To destroy their ballistic missiles? Failed. To stop the nuclear program? Failed. Nothing that could be articulated as a mission right now has been accomplished by the vaunted, finest, best military on the face of the earth, according to Donald Trump. So where are we in this, Mr. President? I know one thing we're at. We're at a point where you are mentally distraught because you can't find a way out.

And is that what you're doing now? And what is that going to produce? There was a wonderful episode chronicled in an article this morning in War on the Rocks by an old friend of mine, Jason

Dempsey, who was a lieutenant in Colin Powell's office from West Point on their fellowship program, and then later a White House fellow, worked for Obama's wife, Michelle, worked on veterans' issues for her, got out of the military. And another gentleman who was a soldier or Marine, spent a lot of time in combat. And they wrote an article this morning. They wrote it in, let's see, War on the Rocks. And the title of it was, "How does canceling a command-initiated review support a culture of accountability?"

Now that's very important, in the sense that when Representative George Whitesides asked Hegseth, who immediately couldn't answer the question, he shifted it to General Kane, the chairman who was sitting beside him. What is happening with this situation? The situation is that two Apache helicopters, armed to the teeth, flew beside the No Kings event in Nashville. Message there, right? A message there. They weren't supposed to be there. Then they flew over to this guy—what's his name? The guy who does the MAGA stuff all the time—Kid Rock. They flew over to Kid Rock's house, and they, you know, said hello to Kid Rock. Two Apache helicopters out of Fort Campbell, I suppose. So what did the Army do? They did the right thing.

They opened an immediate investigation. What are these two helicopters doing, straying into civilian airspace and really looking threatening toward this No Kings event in Nashville? What are they doing doing that? And then what are they doing going over to Kid Rock's house, who is a very, very strong supporter of MAGA and of Donald Trump? And what is Pete Hegseth doing later? Inviting them to Washington all to have a kind of little party. So the Army opens what's called a 15-6 investigation into this, and they're trying to figure out what's going on here because this shouldn't be happening with lethal equipment like Apache helicopters. Indeed, it shouldn't be happening with any Army equipment. What happens when he's asked about this?

Hegseth is asked about this. He doesn't answer. It shifts quickly. The congressman, Whitesides, Representative Whitesides, shifts it to Kane, and Kane answers like this: "What you are alluding to is a partisan question." Well, Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for telling me the truth. What you're talking about is doing something because it's political. That's not what the Army is supposed to be doing. That's why they opened the investigation. So return to the fundamental question: what do you mean by stopping a command-ordered investigation in an incident that, on the surface, looks like it was not too good and outside the UCMJ? What are you doing ordering that investigation stopped? Because that's what Hegseth did. That's where we are. That's where we are.

Especially in the Defense Department. And I talked to Jason this morning, one of the authors, emailed back and forth. What's going on here? Why are we in a situation now where the Eisenhower Media Network, for example, I told Jason, we're debating things like what's happening to our military? What is being done to the military? How is it being shaped by Hegseth, by these prayer meetings, by these National Mall ceremonies that the Speaker of the House, Marco Rubio, Hegseth go to? They're all about Jesus and all about Christianity, per Hegseth's version of Christianity. What are we doing? Are we shaping the military to be a part of, a willing part of, or at least a stand-aside part of, a coming coup?

Is that what we're doing? This is not good. It's not good, and it's part of the warp and woof of what's happening domestically inside the United States now. But this is a reflection of what's happening overseas, because how can you expect a military that is so convoluted in its allegiance, if you will, and then has not got a real mission or a real operational mission environment in which it can do anything other than bomb and bomb again? How do you do that? How do you get to any objective? How do you accomplish any mission? And by the way, Admiral, by the way, all you people, what is your mission? Just tell me what your mission is.

Is your mission to drop bombs on Iran whenever the President of the United States tells you to? What kind of mission is that? Missions usually have, if they're smartly done, two parts. First of all, what's the kinetic thing you're asking me to do? In this case, it's drop bombs. And what's the purpose? You don't have a mission unless you have both of those components. What's the purpose of dropping the bombs? To bring the Iranian regime to its knees. Well, you're not doing that. In fact, you're making it more resolute, as indicated every day by what they're doing and what they're capable of doing. Look at what they've said now about Lebanon. You go ahead, Mr. Netanyahu.

Every attack you do in Lebanon will be responded to by us attacking the UAE. We will go after the UAE until there's no UAE left, as long as you're in Lebanon attacking. Because they're the most closely allied state with you that's close to us. So that's the deal we're giving you. What are you doing, American military? What's your purpose for being there other than dropping bombs, other than going around and killing, destroying the Iranian Navy, destroying the Iranian Air Force? For what freaking purpose? Well, we want to go in and get the uranium. Well, you failed at that. You haven't done it. Are you preparing to do it again? Tell me a new mission statement then. I could go on and on, but from a military professional's point of view, this is a freaking disaster.

#Nima

Larry, Israel is going beyond that yellow line that they have defined in the southern part of Lebanon. They're going beyond it.

#Lawrence

They're going beyond it in Gaza too. They're killing people every day. You cross the yellow line, you're dead. What were you crossing the yellow line for? Well, you moved it. Yesterday it was over there. We moved it so we could get you today. Great technique for killing Palestinians. No, I'm sorry. Go ahead, you were talking about Lebanon.

#Nima

You know, the yellow line is somehow ridiculous. The whole concept of the yellow line is ridiculous.

#Lawrence

Please, thank you. It is. It's ridiculous. It's a tool for killing people. That's all it is. We're going to paint a line on the ground tonight at 2 a.m., and tomorrow morning, if we catch anybody on this side of the line, we're going to kill them. Then tomorrow night at 3 a.m., we're going to paint the line about 50 meters further north, and if we catch anybody on the south side, we're going to kill them. And meanwhile, we're going to walk our way all the way to Beirut.

#Nima

I think the main reason they're doing this, Larry, right now, every time they feel that the United States is about to do something to get out of the Middle East, they're doing something in Lebanon to intensify the situation, to worsen the situation. And that's why the United States may be, you know, they're trying to force them into some sort of position. But

#Lawrence

Meanwhile, Erdogan is parading his ballistic missiles outside Ankara and looking down south and saying, "Ooh, this is not good. I think I might get involved in this sooner or later. Keep coming, Israel. Keep coming."

#Nima

I think that's true. Many people are arguing that Erdogan is sending oil and sending things to Israel. But after all, we know the sort of public opinion in Turkey, how they hate Israel and what they're doing in Gaza and Lebanon. It's not something that can change. The government in Turkey can't change it. That's the reality. That's why when you see the reports that Benjamin Netanyahu went to the UAE during the war, the UAE is coming out and denying that because they know how people are feeling about Israel. That's the reality.

#Lawrence

You bet. You bet. Now they've been singled out by Iran. They've been made a quid pro quo: you attack in Lebanon, we attack the UAE. And frankly, even though Lebanon's been pounded by Israel mercilessly, there's probably more targets left in Lebanon than in the UAE. So it wouldn't be too hard to finish the UAE off.

#Nima

But they're so desperate with this case of FPV drones, Larry. They have no solution for that. That's why, you know, we had Smotrich talking about, for every drone, we're going to bring down 10 buildings in Beirut.

#Lawrence

That's Israeli strategy or tactics. That's the way they operate. If you kill one Israeli, we kill 100 Palestinians. If you kill one Israeli, we kill 50 Hezbollah. And by the way, as we're killing them, we'll tear down 100 Lebanese homes. That's the way they operate.

#Nima

Then they have to get out of Lebanon. What are they doing in Lebanon?

#Lawrence

That's the reason I think maybe we might be seeing some action by Erdogan that heretofore has not been in the cards. Because this is becoming almost an affront to him and to Turkey in general, that all of this is going on just a slight distance away to the south, and he's doing nothing about it. And like you said, instead—and this is known to most Turks—like you said, he's still doing things that make Netanyahu's life easier, like selling him oil.

#Nima

Iran, Larry, getting back to the case of Iran. We had the Iranian foreign minister together with the head of the parliament and the head of the Iranian central bank going to Qatar. The main objective, it seems, was the negotiations between Iran and the Qatari government, because they are prepared to release part of, or half of, Iran's frozen assets in Qatar, which is, if I'm not... yeah, it is 12 billion dollars. Yeah.

#Lawrence

And most of it would be Saudi and Qatari or other GCC country money. And ostensibly that would be our money, but it's really their money. And they're trying to cover us, and they're trying to do the deed in order to get Iran to accept that particular part of the negotiating tactics. Okay. I mean, it's pretty transparent that they're doing the paying and we're doing the benefiting. Will we pay them back? Out of what? I wouldn't trust us for a loan.

#Nima

But how... you mean that Qatar and other GCC countries, they're paying Iran on behalf of the United States? That's the way I see it. Then the United States is going to pay them, and nobody knows.

#Lawrence

Supposedly, but I wouldn't trust us following up. I wouldn't. But, you know, it wouldn't be the first time we'd worked a deal like that. We'll pay you in kind. We'll pay you in old World War II destroyers. How many would you like? Yeah. We're taking our plane back. We're searching for every possible way to do what the Iranians want us to do with a kind of "this or nothing" attitude about it, which I don't blame them for. And we're trying to do it in ways that don't really reflect adversely on us, whether it's turning over frozen assets, paying reparations, letting them run the Strait, or whatever. We want to mask it in something that looks like we didn't give anything up. And it's becoming increasingly difficult.

And it's particularly difficult with this business of their ultimatum about Bibi Netanyahu stopping what he's doing in Lebanon. And the idea that Iran is going to give on that particular issue. And I wouldn't be surprised if it didn't slip from there to the West Bank or Gaza or both. And I wouldn't blame them a bit. So as long as you're in for a penny, why not be in for a pound? Let's get these Israelis to stop all their slaughtering. And let's use the United States in these negotiations. I mean, they're not stupid. In fact, they're a hell of a lot smarter than we are. So I'd get everything I could possibly get out of these negotiations, even if I did fear that the bombs are going to start dropping again because I know what kind of pain I'm going to bring on the region if they do.

And I think increasingly the West knows that. And the advice coming in to Trump is, if you start this business of a global depression, we're going to be on your ass like shit on a stick, you know. Although, you know, when Europe or anybody threatens that sort of thing these days, you look at them and say, right, you've got all the power in the world to do what you say you're threatening to do. They're not going to do it. Neither are the Japanese, the Koreans, or anyone else. Now, the Chinese and Russians are a different matter altogether. But we both know Xi and Putin to an extent. Putin's got his hands full now trying to do what Lavrov said he was going to do to Kyiv — put the fear of God in them and catch Zelensky and kill him — and at the same time, support Iran.

So it's a little bit more difficult for him, but it ain't difficult for Xi, except that their philosophy is don't do anything to prevent the suicide, but don't do anything to let the suicide disturb your own progress. That's a delicate march for China right now. But I think increasingly you're going to be deciding on the side of the Iranian equation, if you will, rather than the side of not doing anything to impede their success. And that's a real danger because combine that with Ukraine and with what China sees happening in West Asia, and you have all the ingredients you need for a really much bigger war with a lot more participants.

It would be interesting to see in that, were it to evolve that way, where Erdoğan would go with Turkey. The largest, probably most powerful land army in NATO — where would it go? Which way would it go? It's not going to be possible for him to stand on the sidelines anymore if this thing gets going in a big, regional, and then potentially threatening global way. So we're going to drag lots of

countries into this that are probably very reluctant to get dragged into it right now, and not the least of which is ultimately China. Trump has no idea of this. He has no idea of this, no conception of this whatsoever, nor does Eggset. I'm not even sure General Keane does after listening to him.

I'm not even sure he does. But there's got to be someone in the Pentagon. There's got to be a Doug McGregor in the Pentagon, for example, an old crusty colonel or something, who understands the nature of what we're doing. It doesn't look like it on the surface, but there's just got to be somebody. And what's he saying, and who's he saying it to? That's my big question. Or she. It could be a she. One of the most brilliant students I had at William & Mary was an Army colonel, female, who had come from the fellowship program. They had stopped sending them all to Harvard or to the war colleges. They were sending some to William & Mary.

And I got her, and she went right over to work for H.R. McMaster at TRADOC afterwards. And, boy, she's told me some horror stories about that, about working for them. She said, can you imagine going to a morning meeting with a four-star general like H.R. McMaster, sitting in the room with 30 colonels, and you're looking around the room, and every other colonel is a man? You're the only female there. I said, I can't put myself in your shoes because I'm not a female, but I can understand what you're talking about. Yeah. You know, she left very shortly thereafter, got out of the Army. Where are these people? She was a very smart woman. Where are these people who will tell the emperor that he has no clothes on?

#Nima

I don't think there is any sort of patience for those people in the Trump administration.

#Lawrence

I think you're right. I think you're right. I think they get rid of them as soon as they raise their hands.

#Nima

Even J.D. Vance has somehow disappeared from the scene. Have you heard anything about J.D. Vance?

#Lawrence

No, a picture every now and then in the New York Times of him doing this or doing that, but nothing of consequence. And, of course, Tulsi, the only other person in the administration I had still some hope and faith that she might one day do something that was consequential. She's left—a husband that's ill being the main reason. I got to think that she probably looked around and said, my husband's ill, I'm here, I'm treated like horse shit, I think I'll leave.

#Nima

Larry, when it comes to the situation with the GCC countries, we've learned Iran is saying—yesterday, the foreign minister of Iran announced that they're not going to have any toll system for the Strait of Hormuz. They're not calling the payment system a toll system or something like that. They're saying it's going to be a fee, something like an environmental fee.

#Lawrence

Even though they're not signatories to UNCLOS, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, I think they're looking at that. They have looked at that. Others in the region have looked at that—those, for example, who are signatories. And they have said, we don't want to violate this regime in a significant way. So they're searching for ways not just to make it more accommodating to any kind of diplomatic agreement that might occur, but also to make it more accommodating of what UNCLOS is all about—you know, leaving the high seas alone, free transit for the world. Anybody that is legal and wants to ply international waters ought to be able to. And it should be a maxim that that's the case. And I think most countries believe that.

#Nima

If you were to mention the most difficult step in the ongoing negotiations between Iran and the United States—calling the first step putting an end to the war on all fronts, the second step the Strait of Hormuz, and the third step the nuclear program—which one is the most difficult, in your opinion?

#Lawrence

I think Trump has made the last one you mentioned the most difficult one. I think his whole process, from the time he walked out of the JCPOA—in my mind, illegally, both domestically in spirit and internationally in law—he violated the law. From that moment on, he made that a very difficult issue because, at best, he is going to get from the Iranians, at best, the same thing. And he's going to have to accept it, if he accepts it at all. And how he's going to make that pig look like a stallion that won the Kentucky Derby is hard to figure out. I mean, Trump is good at that.

He can take an absolutely terrible situation and, with his MAGA followers, spin it into a success. But this is going to be a miracle if he can do it with this, because he's not going to get out of the Iranians anything more than the JCPOA got out of them. And for genuine reasons. They are a signatory to the NPT, and they have a right to do what they're doing. And the JCPOA more or less recognized that and then tried to walk around some things and do some things that needed to be done to make a little more assurance possible. I don't know how you square that circle, Donald.

#Nima

But this time around, they're not willing to have the same sort of mechanism they had in the JCPOA, in the case of snapback sanctions or something of that sort, because right now they know each and every angle.

#Lawrence

They've figured it out.

#Nima

The Trump administration was worse than what they had under the Obama administration.

#Lawrence

And that was bad enough. Biden and Obama were bad enough. I mean... especially Biden. God, I can't believe how much Biden changed from the time he was vice president to the time he was president, except, as Powell used to say, Joe Biden would be an absolute danger and a wreck if he were president. That's almost a direct quote from Colin Powell. And he liked Joe Biden as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and as a ranking member because he knew the issues, and Powell could talk to him about the issues, whereas Dick Lugar, who was his counterpart in the Republican Party, was dumb as mud. But he constantly said, don't ever make him president. The man would be a stumbling, bumbling congressman in the White House, and you don't want that. And he turned out to be even worse than that. And I attribute Blinken and Sullivan to most of those problems because Blinken and Sullivan were bowing to Bibi Netanyahu most of the time.

#Lawrence

I lost you, lost your volume.

#Nima

Have you heard about Marco Rubio being in Armenia? He's talking about signing a new memorandum of understanding on critical minerals like rare earth minerals.

#Lawrence

I think, you know, if that's true, that there are some there and they're willing to give them up or sell them, then that's a minor achievement. But I think he's doing Cuba, he's doing Armenia, he's doing other things because he has nothing to do with the major thing, which is Iran. And so he's trying to find other targets of opportunity, if you will. I found out the other day, Nima, that there are probably enough rare earth and other essential minerals that everyone keeps talking about China cutting off from America that would be absolutely disastrous, particularly for the American military.

I keep hearing from people who know that there's more of these things in other places than you can shake a stick at, including in the United States of America. It's just that we don't have the will right now to go out and displace some people and displace some industry that's on top of these things, so to speak, and to mine them. And to mine them in the way that you would have to mine them would be environmentally degrading, particularly in California. So if a war were to break out and if we were to need these essential elements, as it were, I don't think there'd be any problem in our getting them at all, because we wouldn't let those things stand in the way of eminent domain in time of war.

We'd go get them. Move your house. If you don't, we'll move it. We're going to go after what's under your house or whatever. Not that simple. So this is, to a certain extent, a manufactured problem for political purposes. At the same time, I have to admit that China has a lock on the abundance that is currently available in some critical areas that make it difficult for us not to have better relations with China. But it's not game-stopping in any way, fashion, or form. Now, something might pop up tomorrow that's lithium to the 10th power or something that's very different and we don't have much of it. But most of these things exist in the continental United States and Alaska, and they exist in great quantities.

It's just that we won't go after them because, one, our civilian infrastructure won't do it because it's not profitable at the particular moment, all the things they've got to do to be environmentally safe and so forth. But in time of war, near war, we would probably break, pillage, and plunder these things. So it's not nearly the problem that people are making it out to be. At least that's the way it looks to me. And if you read Jim Carey's book **Missouri Mule** about Harry Truman, 1940 roughly to 1944–45, and his Senate Special Investigating Committee, you understand that this is the way we've always operated.

We were blessed with, as Washington and Franklin and Jefferson said, we were blessed by divine providence, they said, with enormous natural resources—from rivers running north, south, east, west, from one end of the country to the other—to what they couldn't even conceive of then, these vast stores of minerals. They saw it as gold and silver and other things like that then. But now it's still paying off. We still have enormous, enormous natural resources. And to say that we need things from the rest of the world is to say the truth only in a prima facie sort of way. War would bring out a different complexion.

But then, as this book I was telling you about shows, that different complexion is pretty nasty and poisonous too, because you have people that want to profit off of it. And they want to profit big time off of it. You know, Truman's analogy about the railroads, for example, was Jesse James. I like Jesse James' way. He got his gang ready, they put on masks, got a few horses, rode down to the train and robbed it, and then they left it. The Vanderbilts destroyed the entire rail line—the cars, the engines, the tracks, the beds, and everything else—and robbed it blind of hundreds of millions of dollars. I'd rather have Jesse James. Yeah.

#Lawrence

Do you know who Jesse James was? No. He was a very famous criminal, a horseback criminal. "I steal from the rich and give to the poor," that sort of guy. Three Musketeers type. He was a pretty successful bandit, though, until—I think it was Frank James and he, his brother. Anyway, long story. But Harry liked those old-time crooks better than he did at IG Farben and Standard Oil and U.S. Steel. They were much worse than Jesse James. They robbed in the billions, not just a few dollars here and there.

#Nima

Yeah.

#Lawrence

And it's no different today. It's no different today. And that's what Marco Rubio is over there coordinating—a little more thievery at a scale that's unimaginable to the average person.

#Nima

Larry, when I compare the Trump administration to the Biden administration, I see one the opposite of the other. What does it mean? It means that whenever we were talking about the Biden administration, we were talking about Jake Sullivan, Antony Blinken, Victoria Nuland, and nobody basically was talking about Joe Biden himself because he didn't do that much during his presidency. And right now, everything that happens is connected to Donald Trump. The head of the Pentagon, it's like a little kid that's trying to do his best to be the best kid in the family, to be so close to the daddy, something like that. And everything—Marco Rubio, who's Marco Rubio?

He's the Secretary of State. We haven't seen anything about the foreign policy of the United States in terms of what Marco Rubio is advocating, for example, for the Middle East, for the war in Ukraine. We haven't seen anything coming out of his administration—Marco Rubio, you know. And then the vice president, somehow he started good when this administration began in January. Then we see him disappearing from the scene. And nobody—each and every disastrous policy by the Trump administration—Donald Trump himself is behind all of them, each and every one of them. No one else is there. Do you find anyone else close to Donald Trump?

#Lawrence

Not at all. I find Vought and Miller—Vought at OMB, the Office of Management and Budget—Vought or Miller, sort of the general Reinhard Heydrich for Trump, the man of the final solution for Hitler, and others like them doing a lot of consequential things in the wings, so to speak. But I don't find anyone, like you're saying, up there in the triumvirate—the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, and the President—doing anything much at all except what Trump wants. Now, let me be quick to add that one of the reasons the Congress acted in 1947, 48, 49, after much debate, with

the National Security Act of that era, was because of that very thing for potentially 16 years, but certainly for 12 plus by FDR, Franklin Roosevelt.

Everything was kept close to his chest. No one knew what he was thinking. Even his closest advisors often didn't know. His vice president surely didn't know. He usually operated independently, especially Henry Wallace. And the Congress wanted to stop that, and so what they created was the National Security Council and the decision-making process that came out of that, essentially directing that the executive use that process to make national security decisions and share the decision-making and the counsel and the advice and so forth. Some have done that, some have done it less than others, but at least they've sort of adhered to that.

Roosevelt was different from Trump in a number of ways, of course, but the most formidable way he was different comes out again in this book, **Missouri Mule**, about Harry Truman. Roosevelt was competent, supremely competent, and Roosevelt was a master politician. And Roosevelt had the pressure of the biggest disaster, financial-wise. It really was not even as bad as the one at the end of the 19th century, but in terms of the 20th century and the population base and what it did immediately after the '29 crash in the market, it was a very profound crisis. So Roosevelt gets elected, what, in '32, I think.

And then you spin off all these things he has to do that are very, very different from what any president has ever done. And it works, largely. And then the war comes along and ramifies it and makes it work even better. So you had supreme competence, but you had the same kind of president in terms of not letting anybody know anything. So just think about that for a minute. Supreme competence, not letting anybody know much, keeping it close to his chest, doing what he needed to do or making people around him do it, whether they knew they were doing it or not. Like Frances Perkins, the first female Secretary of Labor, who really was at the heart of the New Deal, which was Roosevelt's signature domestic program.

Now we have a president who operates in the same way, disregarding the structure that Congress set up, because Congress doesn't give a shit. Congress belongs to him. They don't give a shit. They don't care. So he is operating the same way Roosevelt did, and he's a first-class idiot. I can't say it any more powerfully than first-class idiot. Now, he's a great grifter. He makes tons of money for his family. That's all he knows how to do. The only talent Donald Trump has is making illicit sums of money in gargantuan proportions, mostly because he knows how to manipulate debt, and he knows how, as president, to strong-arm others to contribute to that debt, whether it's personal or national. That's the kind of president we have now. He operates the same way as FDR did, but he's dumber than mud, except in that one category—making money.

Making money illegally, illicitly, or licitly, and making it for his family in particular. That's his total strength. And he's trying to do other things that presidents are from time to time called upon to do, like defend the country, like make decisions about spending, like make decisions about allocating resources and such. He's not doing that except by fiat and by what he thinks will make him even

more money. That's what motivates this president, I think. It's pretty clear to me that that's what motivates him. Is he the Antichrist? Sometimes I think he is. Sometimes I think he is. He has materially and physically come to the helm of the United States of America as everything the Bible predicts the Antichrist will be. And he's real.

#Nima

He doesn't feel that way. He feels that he's real—Jesus Christ...

#Lawrence

He's the savior, he's the saint. I mean, look at the images he's sort of conjured of himself—he's Jesus Christ come to the reckoning, he's the pope, he's everything. Wow. How dare that—how dare Pope Leo assume that he's as powerful as I am, or that he can pontificate to me? How dare he? This is a rare bird, there's no question about it. We've never had anyone like him. I dare any presidential historian to step forward and tell me that we've had a president like Donald Trump, other than the allusions I just made, like to Franklin Roosevelt, who was so superior to Donald Trump—it's night and day difference. But similar methodologies in terms of ignoring everyone else or, you know, keeping everyone else in the dark all the time.

That was part of Roosevelt's success. And you can look at the domestic situation and then the international situation—a war on two fronts and allies he had to supply and so forth. And you can say, well, it was masterful the way he did that, but it was called for by the atmosphere and the challenge of the times. I think Roosevelt was that kind of person because I studied a little bit how he operated during earlier times, particularly when he was in the Navy and he was leading the Navy to a certain extent. And I see some of Franklin Delano Roosevelt at that time later to be manifested as president. I'm not sure that he didn't anticipate the Herculean struggle that we would have from roughly 1941 to 1945, as early as the end of the First World War.

#Nima

Col. Larry, what do you make of the new escalations between Russia and Ukraine after Ukrainian drones attacked Russian civilians, and the response from Russia for the second time using a Russian missile as a sign of how serious the situation is getting for Russia? But it seems that with what is happening in the Middle East, the war in Ukraine is not the priority of the Trump administration anymore. That's hugely dangerous, in my opinion.

#Lawrence

It's dangerous from the implications you're giving it, I think, but it's also dangerous in that there are a lot of people beavering away under Trump to continue to support Zelensky. And I wonder if he knows it. I wonder if he knows to the extent that we're still supporting Zelensky and how much that

support, along with your support, is keeping him on life support. And Putin is sick and tired of it. And this latest statement by Lavrov, and essentially backed up by Putin, I think, is a statement of that fatigue. And I think he's serious, and I think we're going to get Zelensky. We're going to put enough airstrikes on key targets in Kyiv that we're going to get Zelensky. That's, I think, one of his purposes. That's a lesser purpose.

It's an add-on, if you will, but they're going to try to get Zelensky. And the bigger purpose, of course, is to say one last time, next time I'll destroy something of NATO. If you don't stop this support, if you don't stop this threatening of Kaliningrad in particular, if you don't stop this mouth-off by Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, and sometimes Poland, if you don't stop this, you're going to have a war with me. And I'm not going to hesitate for a moment to make it nuclear if I have to. Look at the exercise I just conducted that concluded on May 21st — the largest nuclear force exercise since the Soviet Union. That was to send a signal: I'm ready. I've made my decision. I'm going to have to go to war with you, NATO, to make my point. And if I do, I'm going to make my point very powerfully.

#Nima

There was a phone call between Lavrov and Rubio. Lavrov was warning Rubio about the American—yeah, the U.S. citizens, yeah. Exactly. I don't know how serious they are going to...

#Lawrence

I hope Rubio pays more attention to that than he did to the people in Bahrain. I mean, he didn't get anybody out of Bahrain, and they virtually had to come back with a kit bag and all their goods in it — 2,000 of them — to San Norfolk. That's the Secretary of State's responsibility: to take care of noncombatants in the areas where we have embassies and consulates, and to make sure that in a timely manner they are evacuated if necessary. And he hasn't done that so far as I can tell at all. So Lavrov was giving him a heads-up: you need to do a NEO from Kyiv, maybe from the whole state of Ukraine, because I'm going to devastate it. You have made me. You have put me in a position — you and the EU — where I'm going to devastate it. I'm sick and tired of your trying to use Ukraine to bleed me eternally. And so I'm going to put an end to it.

#Nima

Last time we talked, it was the case of these new troops going to Poland. It's 5,000 troops — almost the size of a brigade. Yeah, if I'm not mistaken.

#Lawrence

Reinforced brigade, yeah.

#Nima

Yeah.

#Lawrence

Except for a brigade. Yeah.

#Nima

The problem that you've mentioned, it was people like Sikorski in Poland. And these people are so dangerous because they're capable of escalating the situation beyond any sort of management. If they escalate that, nobody can bring it back to the situation it was before. And here's what Sikorski said, Larry.

#Speaker 04

...skeptical about negotiating with Putin on two grounds. Number one, when you've been a dictator for over 20 years, everybody lies to you. And these dictators always drop some of their maximalist results 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?

#Nima

What did he lie exactly?

#Lawrence

I can turn that around on him and say the very same thing about Polish leaders, especially ones like him, and have a lot more validity and veracity to my statements than to his. And listen to his opening statement. How do you know dictators? You've been a dictator? How is it you have such insights into a dictator's mind? How do you do that? Tell me about it, because I'm an academic. I want to know how you do that. Is it a miracle you do this? How do you get in Putin's head and say, you're a dictator and I know what dictators do. Dictators tell lies. Blah, blah, blah. The guy's preposterous. I have a conversation going on about once a week, maybe more frequently, with Poles who really have some sense, and they are truly frightened of people like him, truly frightened of the kind of statements they're making, the kind of moves they're making. They know that Poland has to deal with two countries, Germany and Russia, just looking at their history.

And to make either of those countries covet you or be angry with you is truly stupid. That's what I would say to that guy if I were in the room with him. You are making a big mistake, and you're making the mistake Poles have made for hundreds of years. You're not taking into consideration what's around you, especially Germany and Russia. Then the second statement I would make is,

what do you think 5,000 troops are going to do for you? Let me tell you, as a military professional, from the country those troops issue forth from—nothing. Well, it's a signal. It's a signal they're on the ground here. Well, they're not even on the ground there, dude, because I'm hearing right now that Kane and others have said we're not going to go ahead with this deployment.

They're not going. So the question is ripe right now as to whether or not they're going. But even if they were to go, they are a drop in the bucket. There's no commitment to anything, really. Certainly not a commitment like we had for so long during the Cold War, which wasn't even that formidable a commitment either. Without what? Without what behind it? Nuclear weapons. You know, we knew when the Soviet ground forces, the 10th Mountain, the Ogarkovs—I can't remember the name they called it—Group of Soviet Forces Germany, with Ogarkov in charge of it, one of their best marshals at the time. We knew if that flowed through the Fulda Gap, we weren't going to stop them.

Not with the troops we had in Europe. We were going to stop them with nuclear weapons. That's what made the Germans so uneasy. You know, you're going to stop them on our soil with nuclear weapons. It's our soil, it's our country. I'm sorry, that's the plan, that's the way we're going to stop them, because we knew the conventional forces—all the bull crap we put out about active defense and all this other stuff notwithstanding—they were going to pour through their 10 motorized divisions, 10 armored divisions, pour through the Fulda Gap. We were not going to stop them except with nuclear weapons. And that was uncomfortable for the Germans. And I understood why it was uncomfortable, but that was the reality of it.

#Nima

Larry, these drones that Ukraine is using are basically produced in Ukraine and outside of Ukraine. I mean, in the United Kingdom, for example, one of those countries that is producing these drones to send them to Ukraine. Do you think that Russia would change its mind toward the United Kingdom? Because they may attack some of these factories that are producing these drones, and they're hitting civilians in Russia. How do you see that? Because it seems that we are getting so, you know, accustomed to what has happened in Ukraine. We don't see the escalations, the underlying escalations that are happening, and somehow we are ignoring those escalations.

#Lawrence

Well, it's not a perfect analogy, but you're sort of saying the same thing with regard to the Spanish Civil War. Why didn't we do something about the accoutrements of warfare, which were clearly decisive in winning the battle for Franco? Why didn't we do something about those German supplies coming into the Spanish forces? And we didn't because people were, shall we say, cowards. They didn't want to act preemptively. They didn't want to act particularly preemptively against Germany. In England's case, partly because people like Churchill, I think realistically to an extent, but certainly biased and prejudiced, looked at Russia as the bigger threat. And they saw Germany as a bulwark against Russia.

And so there was a failure to act, if you will, on a timely basis in the way you're talking about now. You say, well, we've come a long way from there and this is so obvious. But is it really obvious to the Europeans that they're acting not in their interest, but in their disinterest, and even disastrous disinterest? How do you prove that, and how do you get them to act differently? And it's difficult until maybe an Iranian missile lands on London. And then it's a different calculus altogether, because you've started a war and they are going to respond accordingly. So talking is over. That's the danger of this kind of escalation. But Putin is not what that poll just said.

Putin is a very careful, calculating man. And if he does anything, I think it'll be by stages. And each stage will be carefully orchestrated to try and prevent escalation as best as possible. Now, if a nuclear weapon is used, it'll be a different matter. But using a Resnik, in a sense, is almost like using a nuclear weapon without the aftereffects — you know, without the fallout and the mushroom cloud and all the rest that's symbolic of nuclear weapons.

If he's very circumspect about it, and let's say he even hit something in England, if he were determined that that factory was doing that function and that function was killing Russian civilians, and he thought, in a court of law so to speak—he is a lawyer—that he could prove that, corroborate that, then I could see him maybe doing something like that with hypervelocity missiles and hitting it in an actual NATO country, an actual NATO country that mattered. Even though I don't think Britain matters anymore, I'll say it matters. I'm not sure he'd hit anything in Germany. I'm not sure he'd hit anything in France. I'm quite sure he would hit something in Poland. I'm quite sure he would hit something in any one of the Baltic states, even the Finns. I don't know.

But I think we are courting that kind of a response, as you just suggested — that if he's got really good evidence that that particular factory or plant or whatever, or that particular cell of satellite guidance people, you know, people running — he's done this before inside Ukraine. He's hit elements that he knew had Swiss, British, American, and possibly German citizens in it, orchestrating some of the intelligence inputs into Ukraine's rocketry and drones from our satellite structure. He's hit that, and he's killed NATO civilians and NATO soldiers inside Ukraine. Doing it in a NATO country would be a step up — no question, there'd be a step up the escalation line. But I'm not sure that he wouldn't do it if it becomes that painful for him and he has that good of intelligence as to what's happening there. We're playing with fire — truly, we're playing with fire, maybe nuclear fire. And we're doing it in a listless, not paying attention, stupid, ironic even way.

Almost like those people walked up to World War I, wooden-headed and stupid right till the end. And then after the war started, thought everybody would be home in six months. The most colossal bloodbath Europe had ever put itself into. But everybody would be home in six months.

#Nima

Thank you. Thank you, Larry, for being with us today.

#Lawrence

Truly.

#Nima

Great pleasure, as always.

#Lawrence

We'll see you on the other side with the other Larry. Do we have someone else that day, or just Larry?

#Nima

We're going to have on Friday?

#Lawrence

Uh-huh.

#Nima

It's going to be you, me, and Larry.

#Lawrence

Okay. I saw somewhere this morning, I think he was on with another gentleman who had asked me to be on with him, and I couldn't make it because I was on with you.

#Nima

We're going to be on. It's going to be Friday at 11 a.m. Got it.

#Lawrence

Yeah, I have it. See you then.

#Nima

See you soon.

#Lawrence

See you soon. Take care.

#Nima

I hope nothing bad happens.

#Lawrence

Inshallah. Take care.

#Nima

Bye-bye.