

Robert Barnes: America's Geopolitical Gamble: Who Controls the Next War?

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#Nima

The situation in the Middle East, the negotiations between Iran and the United States, is not direct negotiations. The two sides are sending messages back and forth. At the same time, they're fighting each other. Just last night and the night before, we had the United States and Iran hitting at each other, firing missiles. And, you know, some people were killed, some sailors were killed. And Donald Trump, at the same time, is bragging about how beautiful, you know, the negotiations are happening right now as we talk. What is your understanding of the situation in the Middle East? If you were to mention—let's put it this way—what were the main objectives of the Trump administration with this war in the Middle East, and how many of those objectives have been achieved so far?

#Robert

I mean, the objectives are really the Israeli objectives disguised as American objectives. I mean, the president's objectives, and he was alone other than Hegseth, as Max Blumenthal calls him. Everybody else in the room was opposed. The most vocal opponent of going into any kind of regime change war was Vice President J.D. Vance. But the Director of National Intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, had advised against it. Her intelligence report advised that what Bibi Netanyahu was forecasting — which was that the regime would collapse in four or five days and peace and freedom and liberty would emerge out of Iran in an American Western fashion and model — was not realistic.

And Iran couldn't wait to sign up to the Abraham Accords and do America's bidding, Shah-style 1978. And the intelligence report said literally none of that's going to happen — probably just the opposite. The regime will be more hardline, and there'll be a rally-around-the-flag effect. Joe Kent, head of counterterrorism, advised the same. He advised the same the summer before last summer, when this was under consideration and contemplation then. The Pentagon had advised that it was unlikely to achieve the military objectives that the president was seeking, which at that time was basically the Israeli list — that Iran would have no capacity to have nuclear weapons, that there would be complete regime change in Iran.

And the way we're discussing that, I'm not sure about some of the New York Times stories about certain people being floated. I think that was sort of a belated effort to rationalize some things. It may have been some other insiders who he somehow accidentally killed. But in fact, it was full, complete regime change in a compliant manner, with no ballistic long-range or mid-range ballistic missile program, with no nuclear enrichment program, with no capacity to be a meaningful threat to Israel — that's really what the objective was. Now, for Israel, they would have been fine and would have actually preferred a chaotic, divided, fragmented Iran that looked like Syria, that looked like Libya, that looked like Iraq, that looked like Lebanon.

The other places they've gone into over the years or had America do it for them. But Trump's thought was, it'll be regime change, peace, and freedom, and liberty. Somebody that loves Trump would probably build big golden statues of him in downtown Tehran, like he thinks they're going to do in Venezuela for him in Caracas sometime soon, like he's doing himself in his own presidential library. If this isn't a sign of somebody losing it, I don't know what is. The people need to see. So, you know, that was the official set of objectives. Unofficially, it was really Iran-Israel's objectives.

And it was Trump's increasingly diminished decision-making process. That is due to what people around the White House described to me all the way back in January as basically early-stage behavioral frontal lobe dementia, which is, you lose your sense of empathy. You start to have delusions of grandeur beyond, you know, Trump's always had a healthy ego, but at a whole different level. And to give you some comparisons, first term, go back to **Art of the Deal**, other books. He believed in, yeah, positive thinking, like he came up with a religious tradition that was about positive thinking.

Vincent Peale and all that. But he said, always expect the best, but also at the same time plan for the worst. So it was always tethered to this hardcore realism. Trump used to say, all that's ever going to be offered with a Middle Eastern war is blood and sand. And all you'll get is a lot of blood trying to fight for a little sand. So that was him — he was a deep skeptic of every Middle Eastern conflict. Going back to the 90s, in a range of public statements and comments he'd made over the years, the New York Times had a deep dive in part on this in the buildup to the war. All that is gone. So the geopolitical realism is gone. Being tethered to realism is gone. He used to love second opinions. I mean, I was his lawyer for a period of time during the 2020 election.

He would seek, you know, 50, 55. I mean, there was no limit to the second opinions. It was kind of frustrating at times. Now he doesn't want any second opinions. He doesn't do any contingency planning. In fact, he doesn't want to hear anything he might even emotionally respond to negatively. His own chief of staff, Susie Wiles, was advising people back in late fall and early winter, "Don't share information with the president that he might react negatively to emotionally." So that's how we kind of got there. The Israel lobby figured this out before a lot of other people did. That's why they had Bibi come in February when Vance, by the way, was out of town. He was over in Armenia, in Azerbaijan, in the Caucasus, and that's when they used it because Trump's declining emotional state confabulates all the time.

He has memento memory. He remembers what he wants, doesn't remember what he doesn't want. He creates a memory that didn't happen. That's why he reinterprets the Iran deal at different times in his way, even though it's not the deal. He convinces himself that it is the deal. So, you know, that confabulation is probably the worst part of this, but it's not the only negative part of the decision-making process. And he's become obsessed with being this, like, emperor-type figure. That's why he's compared himself to Jesus, compared himself to the pope, claims he picked the pope, claims he was going to pick the next prime leader of Iran, says maybe he'll be the next president of Venezuela or maybe the next prime minister of Israel.

#Nima

He hasn't decided yet.

#Robert

This is not normal behavior, even for Trump's relatively abnormal first term. You saw none of this in his first term. Viciously attack his longest supporters and people like Marjorie Taylor Greene and run them out of Congress. Spend all of his political capital and the Israel lobby's cash to take out Thomas Massie, who is the only real representative of that wing of the Republican Party, the old Ron Paul wing of the Republican Party, but just adding Maha to that equation. And going after Congresswoman Lauren Boebert. Right now he's advocating en masse for Lindsey Graham, the queen of the war whores, always inviting us into her brothel of blood. You know, Lady Lindsey is now his number one favorite person to talk to every night when he's not talking every night to Sean Hannity. His main favorite sources, like the Pentagon, have told him repeatedly that no, in fact, we haven't destroyed 70, 80, 90 percent.

We haven't obliterated 70% of their Navy, because their real Navy is the boats and the torpedoes and the drones and the little mini subs. We haven't destroyed their Air Force because their Air Force isn't a conventional one. We haven't even actually destroyed their planes either. But it's their drones and their missiles built in those missile cities. We haven't destroyed their missile cities. But he convinces himself that we have. They only have a few that can occasionally cause some issues. And that's the way he comes up with crazy plans like Project Freedom, you know, navigation, all the rest that the Qataris and Saudis had to quash before it got out of hand. So his delusional mindset is a continued problem.

Haig's death advocates really dumb stuff, but everybody else — General Kane, Admiral Cooper, other people in the military chain of command — were not even going to execute on his destroy-civilization plan with Iran and told him so. They would redefine the list to only be true dual-use infrastructure, which is what's legally required, to be just legal under American law, not to mention international standards and whatnot. Not to be a war crime, which is a law in the United States. So he's been advised on all those things. But at any given moment, he doesn't want to be Obama, because he

made a huge deal with the JCPOA and pretends things were in the JCPOA that weren't, and so forth. So he's scared of any deal that gives them money, scared of any deal that looks like they can enrich.

But at the same time, he's terrified of looking like Jimmy Carter. He doesn't want to look like he doesn't want hostages left behind. So that's where Joe Kent has been very effective, hammering that point over and over and over again. If you put soldiers on the ground, probably some are going to end up like hostages. You're going to be Jimmy Carter on steroids. He's also terrified of being George W. Bush. He doesn't want to be the guy in a dragged-out, failed war in the Middle East. So the logical thing to do would, of course, be to exit rather than escalate. But I've told people I cannot imagine a deal ever being signed and delivered because Trump is too terrified of the Obama comparison.

#Nima

And too deferential to the Israeli lobby.

#Robert

At the same time, I can't really see him escalating as long as the Saudis and Qataris are exercising their veto, as long as his own U.S. military and intelligence are saying this will backfire against you, as long as the economy is screaming. Deutsche Bank came up with something they call the pressure index. And so follow the 10-year Treasury. Once it gets over 4.5, Trump tends to taco. If gas gets over 4.50 — it already is — Trump tends to taco. If his approval ratings drop into the 30s, Trump tends to taco. He's got all three going on at the moment. And his own family is deeply tied in. Kushner and the Witkoffs and Don Jr. and Eric are tied into investments in the various venture capital and other funds they've set up, getting fabulously rich off his second term. He puts any oil monarch to shame.

He puts any Latin American tin-cup dictator to shame, puts any Eastern European oligarch to shame. Nobody compares to the amount Trump has added — more money to the family and friends' net worth than all of the prior presidents before and after their presidency combined, in just a year. Well, a lot of that's tied to the Middle East. What happens if the Saudis are in real trouble? His own personal finances, family finances, get put into danger. So you have those restraints too. And then China and Russia have been imposing restraints. He really went to China thinking he was going to get China to capitulate, which was mind-boggling. But it gives you an idea of where the confabulation comes from. I mean, they changed Rubio's name because he's banned from coming into China, so they changed it in a way that sounds like "Ratio." And little Rubio is wearing that little badge.

#Nima

Look at me. I'm a rat. I'm a rat right here.

#Robert

You have no idea what the symbols meant. I call him Narco Marco because his family's history has ties to the cocaine cowboys. That's how Narco Marco got his family going financially in the States. Now the Iranian explosive media, those kids that do those Lego videos, they've created a Narco Marco label, which is great. It might not have helped my personal relations with the State Department.

#Nima

That's another story for another day.

#Robert

So I think there's enough restraint — the incoming midterms, the economic problems, the lack of alliances, the opposition from both China and Russia, the other great powers in the world — that I think escalation is a low risk. But because of his declining mental state, it's never zero.

#Nima

What does Netanyahu want from Donald Trump? Because every time—remember when he announced the ceasefire after 39 days of war? Right after the announcement of the ceasefire, we had the huge Israeli attack on Lebanon. And as we talk right now, we have the same sort of attacks in Lebanon because Netanyahu, he's not feeling good with the ongoing—it's not a negotiation—ongoing messages between Iran and the United States, because they feel maybe something comes out of these sorts of talks. But Donald Trump did everything for them, in my opinion. This is the ultimate sort of attempt on the part of the Trump administration to do something for Benjamin Netanyahu. He wanted this war for such a long, long time.

And he got it. And today's Israel is not even comparable to what it was before this war started, in terms of militarily, politically, geopolitically. You know, before October 7th, they had the Abraham Accords somehow going on, and that's not there anymore. And there is nothing else for the Trump administration to do for Israel. I don't know why he's insisting on the American presence in the Middle East. Not only Benjamin Netanyahu — we had Lindsey Graham, as you mentioned — Lindsey Graham says this is disastrous for Israel if Donald Trump leaves the region under the sort of conditions that we're witnessing right now. And what can he do, in your opinion?

#Robert

I mean, there's what Bibi should do, but there's one aspect of it that's quasi-religious, another aspect of it that's just geopolitical reality. So, taking the geopolitical reality part, small powers surrounded by countries they perceive as hostile or adverse tend to try to parasitically latch on to a

great power and get that great power to fight their wars for them. They tend to be expansionistic in their minds as defense. And so it's a risk with any kind of small power like Israel is right out of the gate, just from geopolitical history. The second aspect is the Greater Israel Project that has been an obsession of a certain wing of Zionism — not always the dominant wing, but the current dominant wing of Zionism under Bibi Netanyahu.

And they've aligned their Likud party politics in the U.K.—I mean, I'm sorry, in Israel—to the U.S. politics and evangelical boomer-con politics here in America, which was a marriage of convenience politically made in the late 1970s. But it is dying in the United States. Israel is using up all of its political capital. You see it sort of in that one little race in Kentucky for Thomas Massey. You see it fully displayed. They had to spend more money than they've ever spent before to beat a congressman. And, you know, he was five points away from winning—got 45 percent of the vote. So it took everything they possibly could. You know, they were blackmailing a range of groups to keep their mouths shut about Massey.

Turning Point, where Charlie Kirk's favorite congressman was Thomas Massey, decided to keep their mouths shut, even take potshots at him because of the blackmail, extortionate threat pressure they were under from the Israel lobby. A wide range of other influencers that had long championed him—people like Matt Walsh and Michael Knowles at the Daily Wire—they kept their mouths shut, even though Massey was one of their favorite congressmen. So you had a wide range. And then you had all the local political pressure brought. Congresswoman Boebert endorses him, and President Trump threatens her, even though she's his, like, you know, one of his longest-standing allies in the House of Representatives. So, but why did they have to do that? Why did they have to expend that degree of political capital on a closed Republican primary?

#Nima

Where often a majority of the electorate are boomer cons, they're going to be told they have to vote against Massey for Jesus on the Sunday before Election Day.

#Robert

It's because Israel has collapsed amongst every other group in America. They now have a net negative with young evangelicals. Evangelical Christians under the age of 50 disapprove of Israel, are more sympathetic to the Palestinians than they are to Israel. And that's amplified times ten with every other political group in the country. And so, given that, they think everything they ever want to get, they think they got to get now. They think they got to get their Christmas wish—well, I guess their Hanukkah wish list—in quick, because it's going to be gone maybe in six months. The Democrats take the House and the Senate, and Trump is facing a bunch of impeachments. Is he really going to be able to wage a war in Iran in December and January? I don't see it. He'll be lucky to even survive that impeachment.

The risk of removal will be high as his base discovers what Glenn Greenwald recently educated some of them on, which is the scale, scope, and severity of corruption. This is the most corrupt, self-enriching administration in American history. And that's saying something, you know, about American presidents and politicians. They make Nancy Pelosi's stock trading look like amateur hour by comparison. And so, in that context, they know everything they've got to get, they've got to get in the next six months. That's why he's paranoid about any deal, paranoid about anything that delays this until after the midterms, because he knows that Trump's a dead man walking politically once that happens. Then you have it compounded. You have the Greater Israel Project, which has this sort of almost quasi-religious texture to it.

You've got this sort of small regional power wanting to expand its borders and parasitically feed off a great power in order to achieve that, because they can't without it. And then you've got the upcoming midterms that are going to sink the Israel lobby in the U.S. politically. Both parties are going to face major trouble. My preview is in 2028: whichever Democratic candidate is the most anti-Israel candidate, much like the Republican candidate in 2016 that was the most anti-immigration, is going to get nominated. The Democratic candidate that is perceived as the most anti-Israel candidate will be the next Democratic presidential nominee. And so that puts maximum pressure to get as much done as fast as possible now, and no delays in the Israeli mindset.

And then Bibi is facing election in the fall. And if he doesn't get reelected, he goes to prison for life because the corruption scandals he's found dead to rights. So what does he see? He thinks the war can't be perceived as a loss, and any kind of deal will be perceived as a loss, as even Robert Kagan says. The neocon champion has confessed on the public pages of major U.S. publications. And so it will be seen as surrender. It will be seen as unnecessary sacrifice. And so Bibi's willing to risk everything. He's willing to risk Israel's own future to save his own hide, because basically all these projects depend on the Iran war continuing and even escalating between now and November, or Bibi's probably spending the rest of his life in an Israeli prison.

#Nima

Yeah. Looking at the situation in the United States, the domestic policy, in your opinion, the negotiation, the way that Donald Trump—we know that he wants to get out of the conflict in the Middle East. He really wants that. But how much of what's going on in his mind is a product of the domestic policy of the United States, and how much of it comes from the reality of the war in the Middle East? It seems to me that he feels he's trapped in something that is so dangerous, getting so dangerous for him.

And because he's losing, you remember when he went to the GCC countries and how generous they were in those days, you know, the way they were communicating with Donald Trump, giving him a lot of money. You know, the Qatari government gave him an airplane, and it was amazing what was going on. And right now, it seems they're feeling so much pain in the GCC countries because they couldn't sell their oil, their energy, fertilizers, you name it. And they have their difficulties right now.

They want to get out of these sorts of problems they're facing. And Donald Trump has his own sort of issues, as you've just mentioned, in terms of domestic policy. But when you compare the domestic issues and the foreign issues for Donald Trump, which one is more important, in your opinion?

#Robert

So a rational Trump would be seeing that the current crisis in Iran is crushing his coalition, dividing it and fracturing it in ways that may be very difficult to recover. And at the same time, sinking the U.S. economy. U.S. consumer sentiment is the most negative it's ever been. If you look at independent voters and working-class voters, it's the worst it's ever been with both of those voter groups. That plays into the midterms, where he has the lowest approvals on issues like the economy and cost of living of any president ever polled. You put it in that context, the rational thing would be to exit as quickly as possible, with as minimal long-term harm as possible.

Unfortunately, it only sporadically motivates him, even though he knows if he loses the House by substantial margins and loses the Senate—and the more Senate seats he loses, the greater the risk—it's a guarantee: he loses the House, he gets impeached. But the greater the risk, he actually loses a removal vote, a conviction vote in the Senate, and becomes the first president ever removed from the presidency. So you would think that that would motivate him, but it only sporadically and erratically does, because his mindset is so focused on "Emperor Trump is about to conquer the world," and he convinces himself of these things on a nightly basis.

And so his diminished mental state is why you're getting irrational actions. Because you're right, there's rational self-interest—get the heck out of this. And sporadically he realizes that. But then it comes back to, I bet if we did this, everything would be great and I'll be a hero again. And he can't get his mind out of that trap. And every night he listens to, talks to Sean Hannity every night, talks to Rupert Murdoch often, even though he's suing him, which is ironic. He talks to people like Laura Loomer. I mean, this chick's probably already in a nut house.

There are people that think that her fake apartment is probably in the back of a nut house. I mean, just totally crazy. But these are the people that the president of the United States is talking to. But he won't listen to Tulsi Gabbard. He won't listen to Joe Kent. He won't listen to Emerald Robinson, who just left as the deputy director of national intelligence—the deputy to the director of national intelligence. Won't listen to Michael Anton, who left the State Department. Won't listen to Elbridge Colby, who's the undersecretary of defense. Won't even listen to Ratcliffe and Rubio when they've warned of problems.

#Nima

Now, Rubio goes back and forth because he wants the Israel lobby to back him in 2028.

#Robert

So he does one thing one minute, another thing the next minute. Our worst secretary of state probably ever, Marco Marco. But the people praise him as if he's the best. It's mind-boggling. It's a fantasy fake world they live in. But it's the same fantasy fake world that Mark Levin is living in, Lindsey Graham is living in, the Israel lobby in general is living in. And so it should motivate him, because the more this goes on, the longer this drags on, the more it is guaranteed to sink him in the midterms. I mean, my prediction right now is he would lose 40 or more House seats, and he would lose as many as 10 Senate seats.

He would at least lose the Senate, no doubt about that, but he could lose even more Senate seats that nobody thinks are up for grabs, like Texas, Florida, Nebraska, Montana. Kansas could suddenly show up. Mississippi could suddenly show up being competitive on election night with the way things are trending. And forget about Ohio, Iowa, Maine, and those states, the North Carolina, Michigan, or Georgia they were hoping for. And in that context, he's in serious and severe trouble. But he doesn't consistently recognize it for two reasons: his confabulation and diminished mental state, and the fear people have of giving him negative information due to his temper that just goes off on them for sharing with him.

And then you can see that. I mean, this is a guy who was willing to let Marjorie Taylor Greene, his longest-standing ally in the House, get death threats and tell her it's her fault if her own son dies because of the death threats the president of the United States had unleashed on her family. So that shows you he is so diminished mentally. And we've had little bits of that, you know, obviously with Joe Biden. Ronald Reagan had early-stage Alzheimer's at the end of his presidency. Woodrow Wilson wasn't even really the president the last six months — his wife ran the White House. But not this degree of dangerousness. This is like Dr. Strangelove come to life.

We've got a few generals that think that way, some apocalyptic mid-range military officials who think they're doing God's bidding to bring Jesus back if they could just bring the apocalypse in. I mean, it's terrifying that that's the mindset. Also, you can apply with Trump a lot of confession through projection. Whatever he says about Iran and the negotiations, assume it's what he himself is up to. Who's begging for something? It's Trump, not Iran. Who can't keep their word? It's Trump, not Iran. All of those factors. But his diminished mental state makes it very difficult to do the most obvious rational option, which is to exit. The main restraint on escalation is still his own Pentagon, his own intelligence agencies, his own vice president, and all of his allies in the Gulf, other than the Emirates, who are just crazy.