

Ray McGovern: Iron Dome HUMILIATED Again – Ukrainian UAV Hits Zaporozhye NPP

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#Nima

Hi, everybody. Today is Saturday, May 30th, 2026, and our dear friend Ray McGovern is here with us. Welcome back, Ray.

#Ray

Thanks, Nima. Glad to be with you again.

#Nima

Ray, let me start with what was happening yesterday. Everybody was talking about whether they were going to announce the agreement between Iran and the United States. What's going on in the Situation Room in the United States? On the other hand, we've heard from the Iranian side that somehow they're assessing or reassessing the situation. And Donald Trump himself yesterday posted that he's going to lift the blockade on Australia for most. That didn't happen. So far, we have no sign of the United States, you know, withdrawing that blockade or removing that blockade from this trade. And here is what was said by Speaker Mike Johnson about yesterday.

#Speaker 03

Bloomberg is reporting that there were Iranian missile strikes that injured several Americans at a Kuwaiti air base. We know the president was in the Situation Room for about two hours yesterday. He's been very clear: no dust, no deal. There could also be votes about Iran next week—war powers votes. Where do you think things stand?

#Speaker 04

Well, I talked to the president most recently last night about all of this, and you're right. He is dialed in on it. We've got to get the Strait of Hormuz reopened, and we've got to get this to a situation where there's no kinetic conflict. The Iranians, you know, there's a bunch of al-Jihadis over there, right? And the new leadership, I think, wants to bring an end to this conflict. I certainly hope they do.

#Nima

These guys are fascinating—a bunch of jihadists out there. Just remove the whole question, the whole problem. So, your understanding of what is going on, Ray, between Iran and the United States?

#Ray

It will be difficult to write the history books of this episode, won't it? I've never seen the like of it, and I've been around for a while. U.S. foreign policy being revealed by Truth Social and some rants by a president that will or will not take any advice. I think the Iranians are very settled in their notion that no matter what comes out of Washington, nothing can be trusted. After all, the JCPOA, negotiated at great pain—Trump left it. And then, fooled me once, fooled me twice, fooled twice—and starting attacks, that is, the U.S. and Israel, while negotiations were going on. This is enough. They don't trust the United States. And they don't have to trust the United States because they have their own very specific conditions.

And one of which that completely awes me is that the Iranians really care about the Palestinians and others who are oppressed in occupied territories. I think I may have said this before, but, you know, couldn't they cut a deal, just, you know, I mean, a self-centered deal like the Gulf monarchies? They don't give a rat's patootie about the Palestinians or the people in occupied territories—South Lebanon, for example, or Gaza. So this is one condition: it's got to include no more attacks on Lebanon. Wow, that's big. And then we can talk about, well, from the Iranian point of view, we talk about lifting sanctions, right? And we talk about opening, then under proper conditions, opening the Strait of Hormuz, which I think was open before we started these attacks. Wasn't it?

I think it was open then. So, reopening it. And then finally dealing with the nuclear issue. As you and I know, that can be dealt with. I mean, if the Iranians were seeking a nuclear weapon, that would be sticky. They're not. Nobody knows that. So Trump is quite free to say, I stopped them. I made them promise not to work on a nuclear weapon. And those highly enriched uranium canisters or whatever, we're going to deal with those. The Russians helped us out in the past on that. So that's dealable. We could do that, but that's sort of a second stage. Now, of course, everybody has their own ladder of which comes first, right? But who's in the driver's seat? Iran is. And to the degree that Trump will say one day, we'll have lifted the blockade—what does that mean if he doesn't do it?

There's no trusting him. There's no... well, there's no dealing with someone who is so mercurial and who they can't really depend on to deliver on what he says or what some of his sycophants say. So the way I see it, it's extremely disturbing because, well, let's face it, if you come down to the whys and wherefores—I did some notes here—I say something about the Epstein factor. I've been saying that for a long time, and there is some evidence now from the Mossad case officer who ran some of these people. How much does Netanyahu have on the president, and how much is that influencing his inability to step away and his servile acquiescence in what Netanyahu wants? Let me just remind you, I did print these out because I want to say them just so people have some background here.

First, on the 26th of February, the Omani foreign minister, who had refereed these talks between the Iranians, including Foreign Minister Araghchi, and those real estate agents, came and said, "Wow, we're this close to an agreement." He came to Washington the next day, the 27th of February, and said, "I want to talk to somebody important." And they said, "Well, you should talk to J.D. Vance." They talked to him, and he must have sensed that J.D. Vance was not really hearing what he had to say. So he calls up Margaret Brennan at CBS. "Margaret, I got to talk to you right now. We're this close. As a matter of fact, there are going to be UN inspections. We have the IAEA right in here. There might even be U.S. inspectors here. We're this close. I'm so happy. We did a good job of mediating this thing."

That was the 27th. The 28th, the attack—28th of February, the attack. Now, how did that happen? Well, we know how it happened, because three days later, on the 2nd of March, this is what Rubio said. I mean, it's really worth remembering. Quote: "We knew that there was going to be an Israeli action. We knew that this would precipitate an attack against American forces. And we knew that if we didn't preemptively go after them before they launched those attacks, we would suffer higher casualties." Okay, so in effect, Israel made us do it. They went ahead. Of course, we probably knew they were going to go ahead. We probably told them to go ahead.

But then we had to take care of our own casualties, and so we had to go. Now, the last thing I'd say is something I'm very proud of, because it's the highest-level whistleblower that I've seen in decades in the U.S. government. His name is Joe Kent. He was a deputy to the National Intelligence Director, so the highest you can go. And what he said was two things: on March 17th, "I resign. I cannot in good conscience support the attack on Iran. Iran posed no imminent threat. We started this war due to pressure from Israel and its powerful American lobby." My God, bad enough to resign—you don't say exactly why you resigned if it has to do with Israel.

This is guts. This is courage, okay? Two weeks later, what does he say? For any peace agreement to work, we must first restrain Israel. Israel will thwart any peace deal unless we take away the military aid it needs to attack Iran. Now, sometimes these guys just get it so right in so short a form that you have to pay attention to them. So what I'm saying here is that it's intractable right now, unless

Trump can break himself free from Netanyahu. My God, it's altogether possible that Israel will preempt the possibility of peace again because they have so much. I mean, Netanyahu is in danger politically as well as losing the war.

So there are so many moving parts that I'm not surprised that the Iranians are just standing firm and saying, okay, these are our desiderata. These are our problems. This is what we want out of this. Let's talk. We can put off the nuclear issue until later. But let's reopen the Strait, which was open before you guys did these things. I can't believe it's been three months. But it has—three months, my God. And, you know, the world is really suffering. It's going to suffer big time in just a couple of weeks when there are no more deliveries from ships that haven't left the Persian Gulf area. So I don't want to go on here, but that's how I look at it.

And I just would add this. One of my—well, one of the people, one of the statesmen, and that uses appropriately—of all time is George Shultz, whom I used to brief every other morning, carrying the President's Daily Brief one-on-one. I learned so much from him. And when he was 100 years old, older than even I am, Nima, he wrote his last article for the **Foreign Affairs** journal, and it was titled "Trust." Without trust, you can't do any diplomacy. And without diplomacy, you're inevitably going to end up killing people and maybe not winning. So that's what's happening. Maybe you see it a little differently. Please comment if you do.

#Nima

I don't think that Donald Trump, the attitude of the Trump administration, would produce any sort of trust between Iran and the United States, because he's just coming out and he agrees on something behind the scenes or through these written messages that they're sending back and forth to the Iranians. Then he comes out, as he did yesterday, just putting something else out, like the Strait of Hormuz, which was one of the points that he mentioned yesterday—the Strait of Hormuz—they're going to open it up with no tolls or fees. That's not the case. That wasn't mentioned in that statement or memorandum of understanding. The other point would be the enriched uranium, which wasn't mentioned in that memorandum. There was no term referring to that because that's the next step. It's not the initial step. And this is the problem that they're dealing with. Today, I talked with Professor Morandi. They're so confused. They don't know who to believe or who to trust.

#Ray

You talked to Morandi today?

#Nima

Yeah, I talked with him today. So nobody knows what's going on in the United States. Nobody knows. Ray, we've heard Donald Trump talking about Oman. He's talking about Iran. And he said, I'm going to blow them up. And here is what the foreign minister of Oman tweeted on February

28th, the same day that the United States attacked Iran. Look here at what he said: I am dismayed that active and serious negotiations have yet again been undermined. Neither the interests of the United States nor the cause of global peace are well served by this attack. He's talking about the attack on February 28th. I pray for the innocents who will suffer. I urge the United States not to get sucked in further. This is not your war.

#Ray

Now, Nima, let me just comment. This is the very person that I mentioned mediated the talks on the 26th of February, was so enthused, was so happy with the results, almost there, that he got on his own private plane—didn't have to wait for a charter plane—to get over the Atlantic and talk to whoever would talk to him. J.D. Vance—oh, that's interesting. So he went to publish it on CBS, for God's sake, chapter and verse, what he told Vance. And then the next day, the attack. So now he's writing that next day, "My God, I don't understand this. We were so close." I don't understand it either. I understand from you and him that you're a bit angry about this. Well, so am I, for God's sake.

And I can imagine how irate, or how the Omani foreign minister feels about this. Now that Trump has said, well, Oman too will be, what, leveled to the ground or whatever. So there's no sense in this, except for the fact that the Iranians have shown for three months that they can withstand the worst. And the new factor is China and Russia are behind Iran. In my view, given the closeness of those two major countries and given the stakes they have in the outcome of this, they're not going to let Iran fail. And no matter how much Trump has to worry about disclosures, about Epstein and all that kind of stuff, somebody sensible has got to say, look, this is a no-win situation.

Let's ask the Russians and the Iranians to give us enough lipstick to put on this pig of defeat. Let's say we prevented them from making a nuclear weapon. That should satisfy a lot of our critics in the United States. It's all a PR thing. And let's go ahead. Now, he doesn't do that. And I'll just say one more thing. What bothers me about that, and what bothers me about the whole thing, what bothers me is how Trump doesn't seem to care about the midterm elections. I mean, he must have known they could have closed the strait. That's why I was convinced that he would never join Israel in this thing. And, you know, so why is it? Why does he insult the Pope? What percentage is it? Well, I don't think he cares about the midterms. Why? I think he has his own plan.

In our 250th year of the republic, I am very afraid that the midterm elections will be interfered with by outfits like ICE, the National Guard, and so forth. And that may be why Trump doesn't seem to care much about what happens now with his obvious defeat in Iran and with the other things that have gone sour for him. I mean, he can't even get it. They've taken his name off the Kennedy Center. Oh, isn't that awful? So, you know, he's reeling from a lot of... how a mercurial person reacts to all that is really worrying. That's why, as I said before, I think that's particularly why Putin and Xi, to a degree, would treat him with kid gloves, give him any benefit of the doubt, at least rhetorically, separate him, for example, as Putin does, from the crazy Europeans.

And that's legitimate. Because Putin said on the 9th of May, look, it's not the Americans, it's the Europeans. We believe about Ukraine. We come with the same solution as the Americans, and we think alike about Ukraine. Whoa, wow, that's come a long way, hasn't it? So they're trying to make sure that they can do a deal with Trump if it's possible. And until it becomes possible, they're just going to persist and build up their defenses and make it still more difficult for the Americans and the Israelis to attack, which unfortunately doesn't rule out the possibility that they will again.

#Nima

Ray, when you look at Pete Hegseth, he's the head of the Pentagon. And the way he behaves, the way he talks, the way he, you know, expresses himself or his position — do you see any sort of, you know, any sort of decency in the way that he behaves? Because this guy is the head of the Pentagon, for God's sake. There has to be some sort of understanding, because we had Lloyd Austin. I'm not telling you that Lloyd Austin was the best guy in the Pentagon. It's not even comparable to what Pete Hegseth is doing. Let me play a clip of him convincing American troops about the war in the Middle East.

#Speaker 05

Hey, Iran has a choice: meet at the table with the president and give up their nuclear program. And as the president said — I'm lost on time, two days ago now — in the cabinet meeting, sitting right next to him, he looks in the camera and says, "Well, Iran can either do it the right way, with a deal across the table, or they can deal with my guy on the left." That happened to be me. It's not me, it's you guys. It's what you're ready to do.

#Nima

Ray, what is your — I know you've seen many of these administrations come and go. Have you ever seen such a guy as the head of the Pentagon?

#Ray

No. No, and what's important is how the Russians look at that. They know that Hegseth has been egging on Trump. He and Rubio probably — the rest of them just go along. So if this guy is so deranged, if he thinks that war against Iran is a good idea, I mean, they take that into account. His demeanor is one thing, but what it means in terms of the inner councils in the White House, that's another, that's much more important. I can see Belousov, who's 180 degrees away from this kind of approach — he's the Russian defense minister — looking on at this and saying, oh my God, the time will come I may have to talk to this fellow. I'll have to have a little tutorial as to how to get through to this guy because he's not all there.

#Speaker 04

Now, the other thing, of course, is those troops.

#Ray

USA! USA! They have been indoctrinated, just like everyone who goes into the Army or the Marines or Navy or whatever. And so they're not able to make calculated decisions. It used to be that you would have officers at higher ranks — not so high. I was a captain when I got out of the Army. You don't have to be all that high in rank, but you know a little bit about the world, and you can kind of say, oh my God, well, this is not a good idea. And you can kind of tell the troops the truth in terms of saying, well, okay, we have these orders to do that.

You'll get a lot of conscientious objectors that way, but at least there used to be people, even some generals at the top, some generals even under Kennedy, who advised him — a Marine general who was really a terrific advisor, who dissed all those real warmongers like Curtis LeMay and gave him good advice. So that's missing now because, as one Marine captain told me, the way you get from captain to lieutenant colonel is you take a test and then they give you a lobotomy, and then you're good to go because you'll do whatever you're told. So if that was a joke, I hope, but it's not far from the truth.

#Nima

Ray, we know one of the issues, as you've mentioned, is the case of the war between Israel and Lebanon. And this has always been the first point of the negotiations between Iran and the United States. And they are still the same, but we have seen recently some sort of escalation on that front. Israel is attacking Lebanon, killing many people, destroying their homes, everything there. And Lebanon, Hezbollah is escalating by using drones, FPV drones. These are a new strategy, a new technique, I would say, which it seems is turning into some sort of strategic problem for Israel. As one of their commanders said, they don't have a solution for these FPV drones.

And yes, today we've learned that Hezbollah's rockets hit the target in Kiryat Shmona in the northern part of Israel. I saw that. And these are the escalations that are happening. And looking at the Trump administration, do you think—let's assume, let's be optimistic, let's believe that they're going to get something after all. What about the front? What about the war between Israel and Lebanon? Is Donald Trump going to be able to do that? Force Israel into some sort of ceasefire, a meaningful ceasefire, I mean, not the ceasefire we are witnessing right now.

#Ray

Not as things now stand. In other words, Middle East experts who know more about these things than I do would tell you, forget about it. Israel sees this as its way to prevent any progress in a

ceasefire or a real deal having to do with Iran. Iran is in this for existential reasons, strategic ones. Israel is in this for existential political ones. Netanyahu can't lose this one, or else he ends up in jail or has to flee to the Bahamas or someplace like that. It's getting really, really narrow, very narrow. Elections are coming up in Israel. All kinds of bad things are happening to Netanyahu. So, you know, will we see a false flag attack that Trump will be persuaded to, oh, resume the attack? I fully expect that Israel will do anything in its power to do this. Whether they succeed or not depends on what Trump thinks they have on him, and whether he could see the light for once. If I were Iranian, I would say, well, that'll be the day. We'll wait for it, but we won't expect it.

#Nima

Ray, shifting the gear to the war in Ukraine, which was supposed to be over in 24 hours since Donald Trump was elected. He said, I'm going to put an end to the war in Ukraine in 24 hours. It's going to be as easy as this. I'm going to go there, I'm going to teach a lesson to Zelensky and Putin, and they're going to put an end to the war. And right now we are more than a year into Trump's presidency, and we have the war, we have the escalation happening. We've seen Ukrainians using drones, attacking civilians in Russia and killing teachers, students. And then we had an attack on Romania, which they said was—a Romanian said that it's a Russian drone coming and hitting some targets in Romania. Then we had Vladimir Putin coming out and saying something else. I will let you say what has happened and what is your understanding of the way that Russia is talking about what has happened in Romania and what Romania is trying to put out about the attack and the situation on the battlefield.

#Ray

The press conference Q&A that Putin gave in Astana, Kazakhstan, yesterday is really worth reading in full, actually. I've selected some excerpts from it. But as he comes out very late from an hour and a half with Lukashenko, the head of Belarus, he doesn't seem as at ease or confident anymore. My guess was that Lukashenko was playing some themes on this. You know, you got to retaliate. You got to hit those NATO bases or NATO capitals. Come on, let's get to these things. That's just a guess on my part. But an hour and a half with Lukashenko in Astana, and he comes out, and he's really kind of miffed. And the first question he gets is, "Mr. President, a breaking story every minute."

Oh, yeah. Let's see. Here's my question. Are you aware of this story about the drone that flew into Romania? Yeah, I've just been told about that. My question is, why didn't the Europeans shoot it down? You know, Putin, something really strange here. I just learned about this. I was informed that something happened. You know, if you would be so kind as to explain again what really happened—I'm not joking, I'm not being ironic—just tell me what really happened. He's just in a very prickly sort of mood. He's not the calm, graceful Putin. He's not feeling very much in command. Okay, so why didn't they shoot it down? Why don't they shoot down a drone, Putin? Are you listening to me or not?

I don't even understand what you're talking about. Before entering the hall, they told me, you know, some drone flew into Romania. I said, I don't know what kind of drone. So tell me, what's going on? What is the media saying? They're saying it was our drone. Who's saying that? Many people in Europe are saying that. Many people and nobody. Give me a specific name. Ursula von der Leyen. Huh. Oh, okay. And he goes on, he gives a couple of harsh words about what the Iranians—tell me a real person who's saying this. So what I'm saying here is that he was irascible. And he's so up to here with the drone attacks. And now he hears about one in Romania being blamed on the Russians.

I mean, hello, are the Russians going to fire one drone into an apartment building in Romania? I mean, hello, what happened, Rick? Well, he's saying, we have to look at this. Has Ursula von der Leyen done an investigation? Has she been there? No. Well, who is she relying on? Are there pieces to this drone? For God's sake, let's look at that before we make judgments. And then he says, you know, there were pieces of the drone that were shot at one of the presidential residences near Valdai, you know. And we pieced those together and we gave them to the Americans. So it is possible to find out where such drones were fired from, what kind of guidance they had, and so forth. Now, he hasn't often mentioned that.

But that must have been a real, real provocation to have that happen at the same time that he was talking to Trump on the telephone. Maybe, worst case, people in the United States thought that Vladimir Putin was also in that residence in Valdai at the time. I mean, how can he escape that possibility? So he's pissed off. He's really angry, and he's up to here with these drones. Now, when they asked him later—now, the Latvians, the Latvians are reportedly ready to give bases in Latvia for the Ukrainians to fire drones and missiles from. The SVR, the CIA equivalent in Russia, has reported an interesting report. I didn't know they had a press office, Nima, but apparently they do.

And they said, look, we know—this is the CIA of Russia—we know that the Ukrainians have persuaded the Latvians that they can put drone bases in Latvia and no one will ever know when we shoot drones into Russia. And Putin says, you know, it's a combination of irreversible Russophobia and not clear thinking. Don't they know that we can find the coordinates? Don't they know? So it was wishful thinking here, but apparently they're going to do this. Now, if they do that, says the SVR, membership in NATO is not going to prevent retaliation. Okay. Whoa. Now, so Putin was asked about this just yesterday in Astana, in Kazakhstan.

And he says, well, yeah, you know, if they do that, then they would be legitimate targets, you know. Now, in my view, if the Latvians have any sense at all, they're going to annul those plans for those five bases. OK, so I don't think it'll be a problem. But if they do, what is Putin sort of committed to doing? Something against Latvia, retaliation against Latvia. Most people assume, well, they will strike those bases in Latvia. I suggest that there are other options, that yeah, they will be legitimate targets, but Russia has all kinds of ways to get at Latvia, some of them subterranean. So it could be that Russia would hit Latvia, and that would be hitting a NATO country, and that would be big.

Now, you've heard me say NATO really is falling apart and that the other NATO members cannot depend on the U.S. honoring Article 5 obligations to come to its aid if it's attacked. But, you know, I'm not Putin. And as I read Putin, he's going to be very, very careful. He's always careful. And if there are other ways to get back at Latvia, which there are, I just think that even in his view, if I'm thinking about how Trump, this unpredictable person, this mercurial person, might react to an attack on a fellow NATO state—well, my advisors can tell him, wow, he's not going to. Yeah, right. Easy for you to say.

The last 25 years I've been building up this country. My overarching priority is never to give people like Trump, irascible and unpredictable as he is, an excuse to honor Article 5 of the NATO treaty. So even if you tell me it's a 5% chance, right? Oh, you say 10%. That's too much—still too much for nuclear war. Now, I may be wrong on that. I hope I'm not. But everything in Putin's demeanor and his record so far, and how I think he looks at the world, especially the fact that they're winning in Ukraine—and nobody ever says that—on the ground they're winning big time in Donetsk and just, you know, wrapping up this year, slow as it has been, it's been positive from the Russian point of view.

So, my view is that the risk-benefit calculus in Putin's mind is, yeah, if Latvia does some really stupid things, it will become a legitimate target. And you know that Putin is a lawyer. This means something to him. But whether the Russians would fire back and hit a NATO member state, I just don't know. I think the chances are that, as Putin ducked it, he said, yeah, they'd be a legitimate target. He didn't go to the next sentence and say, and would blast the hell out of them, would level Riga and the rest of Latvia. He didn't say that. He might do that, but I don't think so.

#Nima

Ray, I think the other point—you talk about the case of Israel. With the case of Ukraine, we have the same sort of issue: the use of drones. Ukrainians are using drones. They're using them, as we've been witnessing, against civilians. And the other point is, just hours ago, before coming to this live, we've learned that they have hit the nuclear power plant in Zaporozhye. And again, an attack on a nuclear power plant—and everybody knows how dangerous that is, these sorts of attacks. It seems that the damage—they made a hole in the wall of the unit, unit six, they call it number six—but the main equipment was not damaged, as Rosatom reported.

And who's, Ray, when it comes to the production of the drones, we know some of them are produced in Ukraine, and some of them are produced outside of Ukraine, namely the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom is one of the countries that is producing them and sending them to Ukraine. You mentioned Latvia. Don't you think that as the escalation—because the war in the Middle East is somehow distracting all of us because of its importance, because of its impact on the global economy—and what's going on with the Strait of Hormuz, many people don't understand how dangerous the situation in Ukraine is getting as time goes by?

And these people who are producing these drones are attacking civilians, and these attacks are putting tremendous pressure on the Russian president—from the people in Russia, from politicians, decision makers, going back to ordinary people. They are all angry about what's going on with the war in Ukraine. And don't you think that is hugely, of particular concern when it comes to the escalation? And how do you see, as time goes by, Donald Trump defining or making some sort of new negotiations, I would say, because Rubio said there are no negotiations going on right now, that they have some sort of pause? Your understanding of that.

#Ray

Well, Nima, one has to go back to the spirit of Alaska, that spirit that the Russians talk about all the time. It meant that Trump was going to lean on the Ukrainians. He was going to tell the Europeans, look, the war is going to be settled. Don't do any more of this stuff. And I thought when Trump convened what I call the seven dwarfs there in front of his desk three days after Alaska, that he was reading them the riot act, telling them—in the midst of that conversation, he said, oh, could you hold on for a second? I promised that I'd call Vladimir Putin.

Just hold—well, you could go have some coffee or something. I'll be back 20 minutes later. I mean, hello. So it was clear to the West Europeans and to Zelensky that the U.S. was not going to support them anymore. And yet they did it anyway. That was the violation of the spirit of Alaska. More and more European stuff for some strange reason, because Europe is not really very powerful without the U.S. So how do you explain all this stuff? Well, it continued. Now, what is the good news as far as Russia is concerned? Air defense, missile defense. Ukraine has none. The Russians keep building up, keep building up.

And so, in some ways, these drone attacks can be regarded as pinpricks in the grand scheme of things. Yeah. Are they embarrassing? Yeah. Do they increase pressure on Putin to do more? Yes, they do. Okay. How much in control is he? Uh-oh, he slipped from 70% to 67%. Okay, I make a joke. Now, so if we have—if the Russians have air defense, the Ukrainians don't. And if, I think, well, 21 young women—well, 18 of those 21 who were killed in Lugansk were preparing to be teachers. They were in college, teacher's college. They had to be avenged, and that was the 22nd of May, and they were avenged on the 23rd and the 24th.

Putin said he was going to do that. He warned everybody, and he did. Now, the West is saying they attacked civilian targets and they indiscriminately wreaked havoc in Kiev. How many people died? Well, Ukrainians say 19. How many people were injured? Well, twice that. Well, if the Russians are trying to obliterate civilian targets in Kiev, they're doing a really lousy job. I mean, they don't have it calibrated right. What they're doing is pinpointing military-industrial targets, which apparently there are a plethora of still in Kiev, and trying to get the people to move out so that they're not—so this myth about the Russians deliberately targeting civilians is belied by the fact that even though they were provoked—21 young budding teachers killed—and the next day, not only an Arashnik, but all kinds of other missiles, modern ones, 19. Well, you know, you have to keep this in proportion.

And again, the saving grace, in my view, is that Putin says we're winning in Ukraine. There's not a damn thing that the Europeans can do now to beat us in Ukraine on the ground. The U.S. and we look at this the same way. Even Medvedev, the fire-breather, says in his last paragraph, yes, we believe that the United States is sincere—his word—in trying to wind this thing up. It's just that, you know, we can't use their help now. They're distracted by Iran, and there'll come a time when we can get together. The big thing is that there's a comparison to be made here. The Russians are not gonna settle for simply a battlefield victory in Ukraine. That would bespeak another war in three, four, five years, okay? They want a new architecture for security in Europe. And they're going to be gradual and try not to kill too many Ukrainian cousins and so forth, and try to get rid of the Nazis after they do away with the army.

So they look, they're kind of Cool Hand Luke here. They're looking toward the longer term. Similarly, the Iranians are not going to settle for some sort of false ceasefire, okay? It's an existential threat for the Iranians, okay? So you have that kind of comparison, which I think is apt and which bespeaks the tenacity and resilience that you'll be able to see both in Iran and with respect to Soviet objectives in Ukraine. And unless you deal with that, unless you look more than just two months ahead or three months or two years ahead, as we tend to do in Washington, you don't quite understand. You can't win these things quickly. You can't even make progress quickly. You have to understand where the other people are coming from. And that's hard for Americans to do for some reason. We used to do a lot better about it. Now it's a lost art.

#Nima

Ray, do you think if the United States decides to do something in Ukraine, it's going to be the same people? I'm talking about Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff again, back to negotiation. Just imagine you have Lavrov as the foreign minister of Russia, and you have to negotiate with Kirill Dmitriev. I'm not talking about the guy because the guy is not a negotiator. He's not a diplomat. He's in business. He knows the market. He knows everything about the market, but he's not a negotiator. He's not a diplomat. And that is the main problem with the Trump administration. That is the main problem with Iran and with Russia. They don't see anybody, any negotiator on the part of the United States to talk with, to negotiate with. That's the main problem, in my opinion. Go ahead.

#Ray

No, I would say that you're quite right about that. I think it was a mark of courtesy to Trump that Putin would receive Trump's personal representatives. I mean, it's not as though they came as real estate agents, although it's pretty much the way they acted, right? But I remember one time they came on a Saturday night and they started negotiating at 11 o'clock at night and didn't finish till four in the morning. And Putin sat through that whole thing and later said, oh, that was awful. But we covered each one of the points and ended that paper that way. So.

#Speaker 04

So that's over, as far as the Iranians are concerned.

#Ray

I don't see. I think if somebody said, oh, Foreign Minister Araghchi, we have Witkoff on the phone, and he said, well, tell him I'll call back. Maybe, you know, I sense either Ukraine or the Iranians doing that. Whether at some point in the coming months Trump insists, look, this is my man, then I think the Russians would probably say, well, could you send somebody with him that knows a little bit about Ukraine or knows a little bit about Russian history? So these things can be finessed. But this is, in my view, a reflection of how—well, how it's not really servile. It's kind of a weird sort of diplomacy that you have to exert with somebody who is a narcissist, okay? So after Putin called up Trump—and that's the important thing—when that's the way the call comes, that's because Putin wants Trump to do something, okay?

Almost all the other calls are the other direction. So I remember last October, Putin called Trump and he said, look, we hear that you're about to think about giving Tomahawks to Ukraine. Well, yeah, he's, yeah, actually, he's going to come in tomorrow. Well, that's a really bad idea, Mr. President. That's a really, really bad idea. Two and a half hours on the phone that time. Two and a half, okay? Next day, Zelensky appears in the White House and Trump says, you know, we really need those drones for ourselves. Not those Tomahawks, we really need them for ourselves. So that was last October. Now, right before May Day, I guess it was the end of April 29th, I think, Putin calls Trump again, this time only an hour and a half. But he says, look, do you realize what's going to happen?

What I will be prompted and eager to do if those Ukrainians mess up my May Day parade. Do you know what's going to happen? And he says, look, I don't depend on any word. I don't trust the Ukrainians. But you said you had some influence with them. You told me that in Alaska. OK, so if you have any influence, please stop them here and do it publicly so I don't have to worry about this. Well, that's exactly what happened, okay? So my point here is that Putin has some reason to believe that when push comes to shove, Trump still has some influence with Zelensky. With the Europeans, not so much, oddly enough. So he's willing to say, look, when push comes to shove, I can use Trump. And I guess what I started to say is that at the end of that telephone call, Ushakov, his main man for these matters, gives this briefing.

#Speaker 04

How does this start out?

#Ray

The president of Russia thanked and praised President Trump for dodging a bullet from an assassin — again, a heroic defense. And he thanked Mrs. Trump, Melania Trump, for all her good work dealing with separated children from families and so forth. And then he goes into the real thing about what really went down, and the text gets harsher. And, of course, Putin himself has said, you know, if you resume an attack on Iran, that would be completely unacceptable. "Completely" is совсем in Russian. It means not "in particular," as some translate it — completely, wholly, entirely unacceptable.

And two days later, not by coincidence, Wang Yi, a very soft-spoken foreign minister of China, said the same thing — completely unacceptable. So what I'm saying here is that they're warning these things in very stark terms. But in terms of massaging Trump's ego, well, you saw how diplomatically Xi treated him in Beijing. And, you know, sure, he gave much more attention to Putin, but he was discreet and he was diplomatic. I just, I can't resist saying this, that watching some of that video footage, I was really reminded that Trump, before he went to China, said, you know, I'm going to get a great big, big hug from Xi.

Well, none of the footage I saw indicated that Xi was interested in doing that. As a matter of fact, I don't know if it was BO or whatever, but he kept his distance, okay? When Putin leaves Beijing, they're walking just quietly, or their translators are translating, and you can almost sense the camaraderie they have there. After all, this was, what, Putin's 25th visit to Beijing. They've talked to each other 40 times in the last... Okay, so then you see Putin is kind of... They're going to say goodbye, and Putin's not going to make the first move. And he's just standing there, and Xi goes...

And then that's over, and Putin walks off to the train or the plane, and what does Xi do? Bye, you know. You know, I like to depend on more concrete, tangible facts when I analyze things. But sometimes you can see, sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words. I think that spoke it all. And that tectonic shift is working in all these areas, perhaps even in Cuba, which we can talk about at a later date. But there's two against one now, for God's sake. Two against one. And those two are not going to let you run, go down the drain. You can bet on that.

#Nima

Yeah. Thank you so much, Ray, for being with us today.

#Ray

You're most welcome, Nima. It was always a pleasure.

#Nima

Great pleasure, as always.