

Larry Johnson: Iran Abandons Talks & Threatens to Retaliate Against Israel

Larry Johnson is a former CIA intelligence analyst who also worked at the U.S. State Department's Office of Counterterrorism. Johnson discusses Israel's attacks on Lebanon, Iran walking away from the talks, and the rapid escalation as Iran threatens to retaliate against Israel. Read Larry Johnson's Sonar21: <https://sonar21.com/> Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glennDiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glennDiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glennDiesen> Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back to the program. We are joined again by Larry Johnson, a former CIA analyst who also worked at the U.S. State Department's Office of Counterterrorism, and who is also a prolific writer on the website Sonar21. I'll leave a link in the description. So thank you for coming back on, Larry. There's a lot to go through here. The Iran war is escalating quickly now, and it seems very likely we're going to go back to large-scale warfare. Over the past few days, we've already seen that the U.S. has struck Iran, and Iran has retaliated.

So we see that Israel's bombing of Lebanon has intensified, and they will start bombing Beirut, it seems, and the U.S. apparently has given a green light to do so. Iran then has responded by arguing that all fronts are linked to the ceasefire. In other words, you can't attack Lebanon, then we'll attack you. Iran has then withdrawn from the talks with the U.S. And in the media, there are rumors, things such as, well, a lot of things that could be done. For example, Iran could shut down the Red Sea. It's hard to follow. This is all happening very, very fast. So I was wondering if you could give a nice overview of what we're looking at here.

#Larry Johnson

Yeah, so it started off about 10 o'clock this morning, East Coast time. So I guess that's like 3 p.m. your time. You're five hours different from me. Six. Six, okay. So that's 4 o'clock your time, which means you're up past your bedtime. Thanks for doing this. And Iran said, okay, we're done talking to the United States because the initial ceasefire, the agreement was that Israel would not attack Lebanon—not just Beirut, not attack Lebanon. It would stop its attacks on the Palestinians. And instead, they're continuing. So we're out. We're not going to have any more talks. We're closing the Strait of Hormuz. Now, up to this point, Iran has allowed a number of ships to go through.

And they said, we're going to shut it down completely again, complete shutdown. And we're going to close the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb. That's going to be shut down. They haven't shut it down yet. I think they were giving the United States basically 24 hours to see if they would go back to the original agreement that was signed. This got Trump's attention because within an hour of that announcement, Trump's on the phone with Bibi Netanyahu. Now, here's where it gets confusing. Trump's version is he had a great call and Bibi's going to know they're not going to bomb Beirut. But that's not what Iran's asking for. It's not just don't bomb Beirut. Stop bombing Lebanon and stop killing Palestinians.

Stop. Well, Israel's not willing to stop. And since that phone call, Trump's given one version and Bibi Netanyahu has given a completely different version. And then you've got people like Smotrich weighing in, and Israel Katz, the defense minister, weighing in, and Ben-Gvir weighing in. And it looks like Israel has not stopped. And so then here's a concerning point. One of the spokesmen for the IRGC in Iran, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, issued the warning: if you live in northern Israel—they refer to it as the northern occupied territories—if you're in northern Israel, you want to get out because we're going to hit you. So, unambiguous.

So, I think within the next 24 hours, you're going to see Iran re-engage Israel with ballistic missiles and drones that will be targeting northern Israel. So this looks like it's heating up. Now, what's the United States doing? So far, on the military side of the house, they're not spinning up. And what do I mean by spinning up? Basically, the air tasking orders go out, where you tell this squadron, okay, these are your targets, this is where you're going to hit, this is when you're going to launch. Now, a lot of that's pre-programmed because these were planned maybe six weeks ago, eight weeks ago. So you don't just grab it and say, okay, that was good eight weeks ago. No, you got to go through and check them.

You know, that's how they got into trouble with killing those girls at the school in Al-Minab on February 28th. They used some existing plans that had been planned before with dated information. They hadn't updated it. They hadn't checked it. So now, you know, I think one of the consequences of that for new air tasking orders is they go in and have to verify and double-check. So... it was instructive that Trump didn't waste any time getting on the phone with Netanyahu. Now, Netanyahu's telling the exact opposite, that he's not listening to Trump. Trump claiming that maybe Netanyahu listened to him. So we'll see. We'll know whether or not, if the attacks continue in Beirut and in southern Lebanon, then I think we're going to see Iran strike Israel within the next 24 hours.

#Glenn

Well, this should have been the key lesson from the war, though — that the Iranians are able to deter by going up the escalation ladder with the United States. So this whole idea that the U.S. and Israel can simply say, well, let's do a limited ceasefire — we won't strike Beirut if you don't hit Israel — but again, it's open season on the southern parts of Lebanon. The idea that they would be able to decide how the war should be fought — there's no indication that Iran would go along with this. So

again, this seems very, very predictable. But what do you think is the calculation now in Tel Aviv? I mean, are the Israelis, with their bombing of Lebanon, deliberately trying to prevent Trump from making any extended ceasefire or peace deal with the Iranians? Or is this just, you know, them going along with their usual business?

#Larry Johnson

Yeah, no, I think it's a combination of the two. I don't think it's an either-or. They're convinced that they can beat Hezbollah, or they think they can. And that's why they want to blow up, destroy that suburb. You know, as Katz or Ben-Gvir was saying, flatten it, flatten it, flatten it. You know, give it the Gaza treatment. But, you know, the thing we're seeing now with the tactics that Hezbollah have employed with the first-person point-of-view drones that are fiber optic — number one, they are immune to electronic warfare countermeasures. Number two, the drone operators, they don't have to expose themselves.

You know, it's not like in 2006 when they were shooting an RPG, you know, shoulder-fired. You had to get out and sort of, you know, be visible. If you could see the tank, the tank could see you. And so they lost some personnel that way. This reduces Hezbollah's casualties. And they usually get to do it from underground bunkers. So that, and then the volume — I don't know what percentage of, you know, actual casualties, you know, killed in action versus wounded. Some of the public sources show that it's well over a thousand wounded. The official death toll was like 24. I think that's not true. That's entirely too low. But an estimated 400 Merkava tanks have been destroyed.

That's a lot of tanks. I mean, Israel's got thousands, you know, I think a couple of thousand, but this is still a significant number — loss of tanks. And if you're losing tanks, that means you're losing personnel. Now, whether they're being killed or wounded, you know, that's a whole other thing. So Hezbollah is not going to stop this until Israel withdraws from southern Lebanon, goes back into northern Israel. Now, and that brings back Iran's threat: tell them to get the hell out of northern Israel because we're going to hit you. That was the message. Because you don't tell people to vacate that area just because you're trying to create business for a moving company. They're going to hit it.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, I saw that the Israeli National Security Minister, Ben Gvir, he was making the point that they should, well, at any opportunity, they should say yes when it's possible to the United States and no when necessary. And his argument was, when it comes to attacking Lebanon, it's time to say no to the Americans or the American president. Yeah. This is something that Israel will do irrespective of what Trump says, which can be seen as another way now of pulling the United States back into the war. Because if they begin now to intensify the attacks on Lebanon, Iran will then retaliate. Do you think there's any chance that the Americans will sit on the sideline?

#Larry Johnson

Yeah, I think initially, yes. Because America doesn't have any good military options. These are all... Trump, according to Robert Barnes, and I think Barnes has good enough contacts still, despite him being seen as a critic now of Trump. He was Trump's lawyer. But he said that Trump was terrified of getting back into a Jimmy Carter situation where you got American hostages being held in Iran. Because, you know, day one, day two, day three, the news media starts keeping track of how long they're being held hostage, which becomes a measure of your own incompetence. So Trump's not eager to get back into that. And, you know, when you look at it, Iran has become pretty adept at shooting down drones. So if you can shoot down a drone, you can potentially also take down an F-16 or an F-18 or an F-35 or an F-22 or an A-10. Those are like the five major categories of aircraft that are in theater.

#Glenn

Well, Trump, you know, he took to social media as well. He was making the point that because of, you know, his call, as you said, to Netanyahu, they're not going to march on Beirut. So essentially, he took care of business.

#Larry Johnson

Yeah, I mean, where did that come from? Who was talking about marching into Beirut?

#Glenn

Yeah, that was...

#Larry Johnson

I mean, Israel did it. Last time they did that was like 1982, I believe—44 years ago, or 34 years ago? That would be 44 years ago. So yeah, they've done it before, and then they go up, and then they get picked off and killed and wounded, and then they retreat and go back to Israel.

#Glenn

But what is the negotiation tactic here, though? Because it looks like Trump is sabotaging himself at times, because, you know, they're trying to move along the negotiations with the Iranians, and then suddenly Trump decides to elevate the demands of the United States when the initial demands weren't acceptable anyway to the Iranians. Right? You know, it's not as if the Israelis are alone in sabotaging these talks. He seems to be doing this quite well on his own.

#Larry Johnson

Well, in fact, there are eerie parallels with the negotiations with the Russians over Ukraine, because the Iranian position has been unchanged since the outset of the war when they laid out, you know, the 10-point and then the 14-point plan. And that was always immediate sanction relief, return the frozen assets, recognize we control the Strait of Hormuz, delay the comments on the nuclear program, you know. They haven't deviated from that. It's the United States that keeps trying to change what we're going to talk about or what the position is. And Iran keeps, you know, they thought that they actually had some agreement on that, and then the United States, Trump, backed away again. So that's why that was, I think, the frustration with Trump, coupled with the actions of Israel in Lebanon that have just, you know, become untenable.

They've killed close to 4,000 people now just in the last two weeks, or last, let's see, last four weeks. So this ceasefire started, really went into effect around April 15th. And so it's lasted from April 15th through, you know, 45 days. So, you know, close to seven weeks, a little over seven weeks now, or coming on seven weeks. But, you know, now Iran has been with the United States trying to get ships through the Strait of Hormuz, and that has led to these new confrontations and then led to Iran hitting the base in Kuwait. Now, notice it doesn't appear that any of these flights are originating out of Saudi Arabia in particular. Qatar is as well. If they were, then Iran would be targeting those bases in those countries.

So far, the only country it's targeting is Kuwait. And this has been, I'm told, one of the issues that's been worked behind the scenes with the Pakistanis and the Saudis and the Qataris — that they're negotiating to get the U.S. out. The U.S. is going to be out of the Persian Gulf. You get this new security architecture. You get sort of a new ruling — let's call it NATO-lite, sort of NATO for West Asia — which will include Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan. You know, sort of the big four, which, you know, could be interesting. And then, you know, Iraq could join in as well. But the goal would be to bring in Iraq, bring in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, as well as the United Arab Emirates and Oman — make them all a joint responsibility for security with no U.S. presence.

#Glenn

Well, then the NATO analogy might not be ideal because in the, you know, in the security arrangement, one usually divides, because NATO is a military bloc where, you know, country A and B seek security against country C, which was Russia. Right. But like in these other security arrangements they might, well, they might be discussing now in the Middle East, it's not security against a non-member, but security with the other members. Because I don't think anyone would suspect that Iran and Saudi Arabia would somehow ally up against the United States. So, you know, that's not going to happen. But no, I agree. I think this is very significant. And I think it's in the interest of Iran as well, not to make it, or to reduce the zero-sum aspect of this whole thing. So what do you think is the significance of Iran walking away from these talks?

Because I sometimes think about the way Trump was negotiating with the tariffs. That is, first he'll come and say, oh, I'll put a 50% tariff on you, and then he'll scale it back to 15, and then the

counterpart should be walking away being happy, even though there was nothing there before. And it seems a little bit like that's what he tried to do with Lebanon as well, saying, okay, we're not gonna bomb the southern suburbs of Beirut, so now Iran should be happy. But, you know, at least, you know, this is what we'll give you, and you should meet us halfway — you should let us bomb the hell out of southern Lebanon at least. But the Iranians walking away, this is interesting because they, so far, for a variety of reasons, probably kept talks open all the time. They were willing to talk to the Americans. Do you think this is just a pressure tactic, or have they given up on the ability to have any diplomacy?

#Larry Johnson

No, I think they've reached sort of a... a moment of a clear break. You know, if the United States is not going to be serious, they're not going to stay tied to this. So Pepe Escobar and I, we received some information the other day, and Pepe's in the process of confirming it. We'll find out. I'm supposed to hook up with him in about an hour, at 5:30 p.m. We're going to be on a channel hosted by Zulfiqar Ali. It's called PowerShift. But what we heard was last Friday, and we're confident in the reliability of the information, but you'll understand why I'm a little hesitant with some of the final details. The foreign minister of Pakistan spoke to Marco Rubio and told him in no uncertain terms, he said, here is, this is where Iran is right now. If this does not get resolved, Iran is going to withdraw from the talks, which has now happened.

It's going to withdraw from the NPT, the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and it's going to set a date for a detonation of a nuclear device. Yeah. Now, so when I, well, I went to this, okay, are you saying — and this is what Pepe's busy trying to confirm — are you saying that Iran has its own nuclear device now? Or have they been given it by another country, like Pakistan or like North Korea? And our source says, I asked my source that. He's going to get back to me. So I know that's one thing we're trying to verify. But so far, what we were told Friday about them going to withdraw — they've now withdrawn. So that turned out to be true. We'll see if this NPT thing is true. And if those two things have been true, then I'm going to say... they may not be bullshitting about the other. I don't, you know, like I said, I can't confirm that yet.

We're trying to get it confirmed. But it shows that the frustration level with Iran is real, and they are acting not on their own because they've had the full backing up to this point of China and Russia, and the Chinese are working primarily through Pakistan. And so Pakistan has played a lead role. Now, this has created some of the confusion in the West because people say, well, Pakistan is so closely aligned with the United States. Yeah. But, um, that has been true. Yeah. And the history of it goes way back to, you know, the fifties with the CIA, and then the role that Pakistan played in supporting CIA operations against the Soviets when they were in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

And then all the Pakistani contractors who made millions of dollars off of the United States government, which needed to get supplies trucked in from ports, you know, Karachi into Afghanistan, to support the 20-year presence of the United States in Afghanistan. But that said,

there's also been a close relationship between Pakistan and Iran as they fought against the Baluchis. So the Baluchi population, you know, the Baluchistan movement, has been a thorn in the side of both Pakistan and Iran. And so they've actually cooperated on that. Then Pakistan's relationships with the Saudis, where they've actually signed, in the last two or three weeks, a security deal with the Saudis. So what's happening is the United States — the ineffectiveness of the U.S. military attack, I think, has awakened a lot of doubts about the reliability of the United States anymore.

And then, so that's having a rippling effect as it affects a variety of these different relationships. This source also told us, though, or was writing to us, that the Saudis and Qataris have made a decision, as well as Oman, to distance themselves from the United States. And Qatar is talking about closing Al Udeid Air Force Base. That would be huge if that takes place, because that is the largest U.S. base and has been for, good Lord, 30 years in that region. So this thing's in flux. But the fact that Iran, you know, they said we were told in that document on Friday they were going to withdraw from the process — they did that today. So I've got to, you know, so the source got that information right. I don't know. I can't tell you about the other two.

#Glenn

Well, I truly hope they're not going to use a nuclear device. That would be very disruptive and, well, it would alienate their partners. Also, they've been scoring a lot of points in terms of how people view Iran. I've never seen this kind of support for Iran. This was unthinkable. I remember 23 years ago during the invasion of Iraq, if anyone would have said there would be this much sympathy for Iran, it would be hard to believe. But again, I can understand why the Iranians are at least walking away now, because, you know, saying enough is enough on these talks. Because it's worth remembering that if we go back, the U.S. agreed to use the 10-point plan of Iran as a point of departure and then walked it all back, and now slowly introducing more and more violence, a little bit like in Gaza. Here's a ceasefire, but we'll still kill Palestinians every day. And now essentially it's the same thing. These attacks on Lebanon, they continued, also hostility against Iran. I mean, there is no real ceasefire. So what they're demanding from the Iranians is, you know, you live by your commitments, we'll walk away.

#Larry Johnson

And let me emphasize, they weren't talking about using it against somebody, but it was to demonstrate, "We got it, so leave us alone," as a way to use it as a deterrent for a future attack. I think that was how I understood the intent. Again, we don't know—is it their own? Have they been provided? We know that North Korea, for example, has been providing some missiles as well. And I got into a discussion, I forget with who, but initially I said, well, Iran can't hit the United States.

I said, well, if the latest missile that North Korea has, if they provided that to Iran, from Tehran that missile covers the distance to San Francisco. So they absolutely could hit New York or Washington, D. C. So, yeah, this, I mean, we're getting into some, you know, sounds like crazy territory. But again,

put yourself in—well, we know how America reacts when we get attacked on 9/11, and how we perceive that we've been attacked by this foreign threat. Man, we go around the world to track down and kill the people responsible, ostensibly. So why do we think that Iran won't do the same thing? Sorry, my dog. Hey, quiet down. Sorry.

#Glenn

No, no, sir. But what do you think is likely to happen now? Because again, just to, you know, Iran has said they're walking away from the talks and more or less warned that they are prepared now to retaliate against Israel. So what do you expect to see now? Because I don't see any way to get back on the diplomatic track now. Again, I hope I'm wrong, but it's the most likely scenario now that Iran begins to launch missiles toward Israel. The U.S. will then have to decide whether or not it gets pulled back into this, and then we're back into full all-out war.

#Larry Johnson

Yeah, that may very well be where we're headed. And only this time, the growing economic pressures on the global economy will become more and more important. Let's note that Trump has been playing games with the oil, asserting that, oh, we're America, we're energy independent. Well, we're not. Yes, with light crude, yeah, we're energy independent with that crude, but that's used to make gasoline and maybe aviation fuel. But, you know, that price is going up because there's a 20% shortage around the world. But diesel comes from heavy crude, and the United States is a net importer of that. It imports it. It doesn't produce enough.

It has to import it from Mexico, from Canada. Canada has been the number one source. Now Venezuela used to get it from the Saudis, who could have got it from the Russians, but we stopped trading with the Russians on that account, and Russia's sending more of it to China. So that's one of the reasons here in the States—I don't know what the situation is for you in Norway—the discrepancy between your, if you will, your gasoline, your petrol price, and your diesel price. But here in the United States, it's about a \$2 difference, \$1.50 to \$2 difference, because the diesel has to be processed in a different way, and it comes from a different source.

So that price is going to continue to go up. And so this is where we get into the impact on the global economy, because you've got the price of computer chips going through the roof now. Why? Because the helium—44% of it came out of Qatar—is not coming out. And that helium is used to make computer chips. And so without the helium, you don't make computer chips. So I think this whole economic cloud that's hanging over the world will be another factor in here. I mean, we're in unprecedented territory. We don't have any historical example here to point to.

I don't think there's ever, at least in modern history, a period you can point to and say, yeah, this is where we lost 25% of the liquid natural gas supply, 20% of the oil, 35% of the urea and sulfur used to make fertilizer, and 44% of the helium. And these go to different sectors of the economy. Never

have we had that kind of shock that I can recall. I'll leave the history judgments to you. You're far more qualified on that. But then how does that impact against the backdrop of this war? Now Iran is basically—it looks like they're prepared to re-engage Israel, if for no other reason than to stop Israel from attacking Hezbollah and from attacking the Lebanese.

#Glenn

After all these years of making more efficient economies, decades of globalization, to have it all unravel at such a rapid pace, it's very destabilizing. But often we hear about Iran in the context of these other energy wars—for example, going after Venezuela. I keep hearing the argument, though, that the United States, as an energy exporter, will make a lot of money from these energy shortages. It will, I guess, restore some of the strength of the petrodollar, given that people will have to pay the U.S. in U.S. dollars more. They refer to the ability to cut off China, of course, from Iranian energy. So energy-wise, it will be good for America, bad for China as its peer competitor. Do you see any credibility to this, or is this just oversimplification?

#Larry Johnson

Yeah, it's a Western fantasy because, you know, look at what both Russia and China have done in the last week. They've continued to increase their purchase of gold, increase their purchase of silver. And just two days ago, China sold off \$41 billion worth of U.S. Treasury bonds — so a significant number. And this comes at a time when the Japanese are actually going to have to sell because their debt situation is getting so much worse. So they've got to raise some cash. They sell those bonds. The purchases of oil are increasingly being made with yuan, right? Not with the petrodollar, but with the yuan. So the yuan is almost becoming the petroyuan.

And what supply that Iran is getting out of the Persian Gulf is going into the yuan. Russia as well is selling yuan, not dollars. So the dollar is starting to come under real pressure, and you're not looking at a global economic situation that's stable and healthy. The Trump people, I think I've mentioned it on some other broadcasts, but Danny Davis did an interview with a geologist who's an oil expert named Art Berman, and he did that last Friday. And that is outstanding. I mean, Berman really knows his stuff. And he's not political. He's not emotional. He's just the facts guy. But when he lays these facts out, it makes you sit there and go, oh, I didn't know that. And so it's, you know, he thinks we're in for some real trouble.

And it's been, you know, he was commenting on, like, Kevin Hassett, who's a White House advisor on the economy. And he made some claim about, oh, you know, the oil is going to be back down, we're going to be back to normal prices in four weeks or five weeks. And Berman said, he's lying. This is just not true. So this now, this added factor of instead of, you know, we're on the cusp of peace, we're going back to war. That is what the signals say, unless we get a complete reversal in

position. But we've got the IRGC spokesman saying, and he's, you know, no, he wasn't being vague at all. He's just telling, hey, you people in northern Israel, get out for your own safety. I would take that seriously.

#Glenn

Yeah, that doesn't seem like a bluff when it could be, you know, it wouldn't make any sense. But my last question is just about Israel. That is, why this enthusiasm to restart the war with Iran, though? Because as I understand it from, you know, even statements from the IDF, they are very overextended. And they also know that the United States, irrespective of any will to support Israel, doesn't actually have the capabilities. That is, the 40-year war drained the U.S. to a large extent. If the U.S. can't achieve its objectives in terms of defeating Iran, the Israelis are already overextended. Why go into this? I mean, there's a lot to lose here at what appears to be quite predictably a losing bet.

#Larry Johnson

Okay, so your problem is you are a rational, logical person. You don't think with emotion. I'm not saying you're unemotional, but you know the difference between your brain and your heart. Israel doesn't. And I just, from my own personal experience with having worked with them, done some training — I did some training, you know, 20 years ago for Israeli police — there is an arrogance factor where they just assume that they know more than you, that they're smarter than you, and that they know what they're doing. And even though you could objectively sit down and show them that they're wrong, they won't listen to that.

And they don't think it through two or three steps ahead. And, I mean, it's something as simple — and let me just illustrate — with a semi-automatic pistol. Anybody that's familiar with that knows it has a magazine that holds ammunition. You put that into the magazine well, you grab the back of the slide, you pull it back, and then release it like a slingshot, and it chambers a round. The Israeli army trains everybody not to do that. They walk around with an unloaded gun and they wait until they say, wait until you've got a threat, where you pull it out and then quickly cycle it to chamber a round.

Well, the reason they do that is their training is so lousy that in the past people would still shoot themselves because they'd put their finger on the trigger when they weren't supposed to. So instead of properly training them, they came up with this as a method. And so even though I can go show them with a stopwatch that doing that adds at least a half second to the time from when you draw to having to engage a target. And plus, if that target is close, you know, within arm's length of you, when you're up there trying to cycle your gun, they can grab it. That's just an illustration, but that same mentality is what transfers over here.

#Glenn

That, oh yeah, we're going to go in and we're going to kill Hezbollah. We'll stop them.

#Larry Johnson

And then you go, but now they've got more fortifications underground after the experience of 2006, and now they're using FPV drones with fiber optic cable. You're going to face a tougher fight. "No, no, no, we're not." They underestimate the enemy always. So I don't know if that helps explain it, but that's been my experience with them.

#Glenn

Yeah. Well, I see up on my screen here that Iran's IRGC announced it targeted the U.S.-Israeli MSC Sariska ship with a cruise missile, so... here we go. It appears so. Here we go. Well, it seems at least more likely than not that this escalation cannot be stopped now. Again, I hope I'm wrong. But thanks again. I know you have a lot of commitments today, so I'll let you go. Thanks again for your time.

#Larry Johnson

Hey, my friend. I always appreciate the invitation, Glenn Diesen. Thank you so much.