

Ray McGovern: Iran Is Playing Chess While Everyone Else Plays Checkers

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#Nima

What has happened in Lebanon, and the government in Lebanon is saying that Iran is using Lebanon as a bargaining chip in ongoing negotiations with the United States. Here is what Michel Aoun, the president of Lebanon, said.

#Guest

It's our country. It's our obligation. It's not your job to interfere in our country. I reject the statement totally because our people are being killed, our houses are being destroyed. They are using Lebanon as a bargaining chip in their negotiations with the United States. It's unacceptable. And here also, Hezbollah must understand that. Hezbollah must understand that there's no other way but to sit and talk, no other way to solve this problem and to save what's left except through negotiation and diplomacy.

#Nima

Yeah, what amazes me is that he's saying "Hezbollah," while the correct name is "Hezbollah." And he's the president of Lebanon.

#Ray

Well, he's a figurehead. He's a client of the United States. We put him in. Lebanon has always been that way. That's why Hezbollah is rather popular, among other reasons. I'm sorry to interrupt you.

#Nima

Yeah, Ray, the thing is that Iran has somehow changed its strategy when it comes to Lebanon and Gaza. They said that there is no agreement with the United States without considering Lebanon and Gaza. This is not somehow facilitating the process of negotiations and the deal between the two. It totally complicates the negotiations, the situation. It's so difficult right now because we know how

Israel is in the southern part of Lebanon and fighting Hezbollah. So bringing back, withdrawing Israel from Lebanon, from the southern part, is one of the most, I think, one of the most difficult missions to be done.

But after all, when they're talking about Iran using Lebanon as a bargaining chip, what is in their mind? And just moments ago, before coming to this live, we learned that the Israelis killed a Lebanese army brigadier general, a captain, and a soldier by drone. And they said that was an accident. This is the way it is right now in Lebanon. They can kill each and everybody. Aoun came out and he posted—he posted on X and said, just condemning what Israel did. But they have nothing to do. They cannot retaliate. They cannot do anything. This is Hezbollah fighting back. Without Hezbollah, there would be no force in Lebanon to fight back. Go ahead, your understanding of that.

#Ray

Well, I'll just reiterate that Aoun is not his own man, so to speak. He looked rather frazzled, didn't he? He looked sort of a little bit worried about what's going to happen to him because he's expendable. Let's face it, the U.S. could interchange him as they do regularly with Lebanese high officials. So the whole thing really boils down to an understanding of a country, namely Iran, that is serious about resistance, that is serious about international law and the right under international law for resistance people against illegal occupation to work their will against the occupiers. Now, is that legal? Yes, it's legal. Okay. Is it supported in international law? Yes. Oh, yeah, but how about violence? You can't do it violently. Yes, you can. It's legal, okay? My forefather's grandfather took up arms against an occupier. It happened to be Great Britain in Ireland.

#Guest

Do I support that?

#Ray

I don't like violence, but they have every right to throw off the invader, and they got back their country, all but six counties. That'll come later. So, you know, I have some personal experience with that. Other occupiers need to be driven out. Now, the post-colonial atmosphere these days is not going to tolerate occupiers. And, you know, if you look at the legalities, I'll just run through this one more time because there's a chance that your viewers need to be reminded. Israel occupied the occupied territories—Gaza, parts of Egypt, the West Bank, parts of Jordan—during an unprovoked war in 1967, the Six-Day War. Now, how do I know it was unprovoked? Because the former Prime Minister of Israel, Menachem Begin, said so.

Now, he waited until 1982 to, with unusual chutzpah, brag about the fact in an open lecture in Washington, D.C. He said, we have to be honest. Those Egyptian formations in the Sinai, they were

no threat to us. We just decided to attack them. That's how it went down. It was an opportunity to attack them. We were not threatened by Nasser's folks. Well, hello, I mean. So 1967, 1982, was there some sort of reaction in the UN to that pronouncement in 1982? No. No, but there was in 1967. And just to finish this up, everybody in the world, like all conditions in the UN Security Council, condemned Israel in November. Resolution 242, okay, saying Israeli forces must withdraw from the occupied territories. That's where we are today. They didn't do it. Instead, they thumbed their nose and they even bragged about it.

We did this all by ourselves, you know. So we didn't need to do it. We did it. And now we're going to expand it just a little bit into Lebanon. Here's Iran looking at the U.S. trying to widen this Israeli influence in that area and says, you know, this is part of a whole. There's a seamless garment here. We call it the arc of resistance, right? And it includes Lebanon. And now, and this is more recent, it also includes Gaza. Now, what does that mean? Wow. The Iranians don't usually brag about things they're not prepared to defend or to go forward with. So the terms on Iran's side are even more stringent now than they started out to be when it was not clear that they were winning this war. So in a justice kind of framework, and in international law, I'll cite once again, I just came across a Chinese lawyer at a UN body in Geneva, right?

And what did he say? He said, look, under international law, it's not only permitted, it's encouraged to throw off the occupier. And that includes using violence to do it. Now, do I like the fact that Hamas and Hezbollah do that? Well, it's not about whether I like it or not. It's whether it's justified, whether it's understandable. And it's not understood in the West because of the Zionist control of our media. And that's it, pure and simple. Americans don't understand what's going on there because the Zionists control our media, and it's very hard to break through. Your program now, Nima, is gathering steam, and maybe more people will listen to it. But otherwise, people like me don't get a voice. And so Americans just lose out on getting the whole picture, or even a part of the whole picture, an honest part.

#Nima

Ray, what is your understanding of what's going on between Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu? We had the report on Axios. Then Donald Trump talked about it, Benjamin Netanyahu talked about it, the phone call. We know that the situation is not good for Donald Trump, and he wants to get out of what's going on there. But there is a lot to be done, you know, before leaving the region. He has to do a lot for Israel, not for the United States. I think the United States can get out of the region without having any sort of problem. But the problem is that the situation Israel is in right now, it can't. Israel created it for itself because they convinced the Trump administration that they could do something in Iran, they could do regime change. It's going to be short and beautiful, big and beautiful. And here is, Ray, what Robert Kagan said two days ago in his interview about the situation right now.

#Speaker 04

You can clearly see now what the future looks like. Iran is in control of the Strait. There seems to be no prospect that the United States is going to be able to open the Strait by military force. Trump clearly doesn't want to do that, which means the Strait will be open, but under new management. It'll be under Iranian management, which means they will control who gets in and who gets out, how quickly and at what price, because they're certainly going to charge for it eventually. And this gives Iran enormous leverage in the region and in the world. And we're already seeing that leverage playing out today with the crisis in Lebanon and how Trump is handling that.

I don't see any particular options. I think we have already lost this war. It's just a question of when we acknowledge it. Trump, of course, doesn't want to acknowledge it at all, which is why we're sort of in this stasis of paralysis right now. But I don't see any options for the United States. This mistake, unfortunately, is going to be a lasting mistake with lasting strategic consequences. Well, it means that the power relationship in the region will shift dramatically. I mean, before the war began, Israel was by far the strongest power in the region.

Iran was decimated, weak, isolated. After the war, with Iran in control of the Strait, Iran is going to be calling the shots. You'll see the Gulf states cutting deals with Iran — they've already begun to do so — and you'll see Iran exercising influence over Israel's behavior, as it is doing right now in Lebanon. Iran wanted an end to Israel's bombing of Beirut — they demanded it — and Trump called up Bibi Netanyahu and told him to cut it out. That's the future. Israel is going to find itself tremendously isolated. Iran is going to be in a position to have leverage over countries as far away as Japan and Korea, who are, of course, utterly dependent on access to the energy supplies of the Gulf, which Iran will be able to control.

#Nima

Ray, we had the phone call. I get back to the phone call and the assessment of Robert Kagan. How do you put these two together in the way that Donald Trump is trying to communicate with Benjamin Netanyahu?

#Ray

Well, with respect to Robert Kagan, and with all due respect to rats, there's a rat jumping off a sinking ship. Why didn't he say this before this? Why didn't he weigh in and not encourage the United States of America to get involved in wars for Israel? The first big one was in Iraq, and Kagan and his folks were the ones that persuaded Bush and Cheney to do that. I mean, I almost got sick listening to him. Yeah, the situation has changed, but it's partly your fault. I won't use the adjective I'm just thinking of. So, yeah, you know, it's really complicated, isn't it? Here, Trump shows that he's able to restrain Netanyahu from obliterating Beirut. Pardon the term. Okay, that's good.

But is he able to stop Netanyahu from what he's doing in Lebanon? No. I don't think so, but I think maybe Iran can. Because, as you know, the Iranians have threatened to, you know, look, if this doesn't stop, then northern Israel is going to be subjected to our missiles as well. And Iran has that capability. So I just get sick listening to Kagan and those people who are largely responsible for all this stuff, who would never contradict what Mossad says. Oh, it's going to be a piece of cake. Or as in Iraq, one big Zionist said it would be a cakewalk. OK, so now we have a cakewalk. Now we have a piece of cake. B.S. It's not going to be that. And the Iranians now are in a position to face down Trump. Kagan admits that.

And so the reality in the world has suffered another tectonic shift, the first one being Russia and China being so close together, and now this one where Iran has come out on top and Trump is in a really delicate place. Now, if Beirut or if Lebanon continues to be subjected to Israeli attacks, I have full confidence that Iran will work its will against the Israelis in northern Israel. They have the capability, and the Israelis know that. So why? Why is it that Trump is unable to make a reasonable decision and say, look, you know, maybe he did. Maybe he said, with those F-words and the other words he used, according to Axios, maybe he said, look, no more, stop it. You know, now, is that going to stop?

It won't stop until we stop giving Israel military aid. OK, I'm going to do that. Well, it doesn't look like it. Not only that, but we're meshing the Israeli and the American armies together, for God's sake. So he's got people — that is, Trump has people — in Washington, in Congress, in AIPAC, and he's got Netanyahu, a slippery guy, to deal with. And I will add just one extraneous but pertinent element, I would suggest, and that is Epstein. I think Netanyahu has tapes, videos, whatever, that could embarrass Trump and perhaps his wife so that they could no longer function at all. That's blackmail. Israelis are not above blackmailing people. As a matter of fact... well, I won't go on any longer. That's the Lebanon thing.

And the last thing I'll say is that this arc of resistance is not only based on international law, including the use of armed struggle, but it's something that the Iranians take really seriously in a kind of edifying way for me, you know? I mean, if I were, you know, a realpolitik guy and I was an American and putting myself in the Iranians' place, I'd say, well, for God's sake, you know, let Lebanon deal. Let those guys in Lebanon figure it out for themselves. We got a deal here. We don't have to include Lebanon. Well, it's a principled position here that has to do with resistance. And as I say, resistance is something I know a little bit about from my history. And you do, you do too, Nima. So in a way, resistance should be applauded and not criticized.

#Nima

Ray, what is your assessment of the acts of resistance today compared to what it was? Because one of the points that Robert Kagan was mentioning is that Iran has come out of this war stronger than it was before. And when it comes, I see not only the case of Iran, I see the acts of resistance. My

understanding is the acts of resistance, because Yemen, when they were talking about bombing Iran, the southern part of Beirut, we've seen that the Yemenis and Sanaa coming out and saying, if they do that, we're going to respond to Israel. It's not just about Iran. We're going to be part of this as well.

You see some sort of unity within the acts of resistance because they want to. If they don't do it, I think the only force, as you've mentioned, is not the United States under the Trump administration doing this. It's about the acts of resistance, how they're changing their strategy. Because if they don't do it, Israel is going to do whatever they've done so far in Gaza — the bombing, destroying, genocide in Gaza, in the West Bank. And they're going to continue with the same thing. This is the duty of the acts of resistance right now. That's why they're changing their strategy. What is your understanding or assessment of that?

#Ray

Bab el-Mandeb Strait. So one might say, if one were a poker player, Iran has a straight flush, you know. It's got two straits, right? Yeah, that is really something. I'm glad you brought that up. The Houthis, of course, are part of this arc of resistance. And actually, if memory serves, just two days ago, one of the Iranian spokespersons said, OK, yeah, we're throwing not only Gaza in, but, you know, we can get that strait closed right quick. What would that mean for Saudi oil? What would that mean for... That would make the problem with the world economy about one and a half times greater. So... You know, talk about cards. Here's Trump saying they have no cards. They've got all the cards, and Trump doesn't have any. And so what will he do? I don't know what he'll do. I'm hopeful that he'll lean on Netanyahu. Now, he did, and prevented the obliteration of Beirut just two days ago.

That's good. Can he do that again? Or does Bibi Netanyahu have that kind of blackmail potential? And do the people in Washington and AIPAC and Congress have that kind of power? You know, when you look to simplify the equation, I always go back to Joe Kent, the Deputy National Intelligence Director for Counterterrorism. And when he quit and wrote a very nice letter to Trump, whom he had admired over the years, he said, "Look, I quit, and I want you to know why I quit. There was no imminent threat to justify this attack on Iran, and it was done simply because the Israelis and the Israeli supporters in the United States, the lobby, required it. So I quit." And then two weeks later, he says, "Look, you're trying to do a deal? The only way you can get a deal is if you stop military supplies to Israel. That's it, folks."

#Guest

Forget about anything else.

#Ray

And that would do it. Now, instead of that, well, we know what's going on in Congress. Those people are bought and sold by the lobby. So, you know, it doesn't end well. Trump got himself into this damn fix himself, of course, listening to these very clever Israeli intelligence officials from Mossad, who did a really good PowerPoint presentation among, well, Trump and his advisors. And his advisors, I have to say this, his advisors didn't say squat. They sat there, right? They were unwilling to say it's a lot of BS, right? Oh, wait a second now, Ray. Oh, the next day, when they called up Maggie Haberman from the Washington Post, who was writing a book on all this. Oh, then they told Maggie how strongly they dissented, how stupid the idea was. Yeah, right, the day after.

So we've got a bunch of cowards in place. We've got Pete Hegseth, who is not a very balanced person, if I can put it that way. And they have Trump's ear. The more so, Marco Rubio — he is the funnel through which all intelligence goes to the president. That's the way it works. That's the way it used to work. It always works that way. National Security Advisor, which Rubio is, in his interest of being Secretary of State, he controls all the information that goes to Trump. So just think. Just think what's going to happen in Cuba, among other things. Think how misinformed the president is and what it would take to disabuse him of the notion that he can act independently and bring the Israelis to heel, as he has shown a willingness to do just recently, two days ago, in preventing the outright bombing of Beirut.

So there are these little wisps in the wind. Could he do that? Yes, he could do that. Will he do that? Well, he hasn't been able to yet. Maybe the world will come into the picture here and say, for God's sake, we're going to have a worldwide depression. It's going to affect you guys in the United States. And maybe that will work. I'll say one more thing. People say, what about the midterm elections? Now, Nima, you know, and I wasn't alone in thinking this, that I thought that the last thing that Trump could be persuaded to do is start a war, let's say, in February or March or April. They could never win, you know, partly because of the midterm elections and partly because the Iranians would probably close the Strait of Hormuz, you know. Well, I was right about the last part.

#Nima

But he did it anyway. Yeah.

#Ray

So, right, yeah, all the reasons why you would do this. Well, so that's the key here. And, you know, I used to write and actually deliver one-on-one the President's Daily Brief. I did that for the first four years of the Reagan administration, '81 to '85. So I try to put myself in the position of the presidential daily briefer now. Oh, who is that? Oh, that's that woman who's the Director of National Intelligence. What's her name? Tulsi Gabbard, right? Oh, but just till January 30th. And then who comes in? Some cluck who used to run the financial housing agency or something, with nothing to

recommend himself. And he'll be acting for as long as they're allowed to have it. So is Trump going to get some good intelligence? No. Not of the kind that back in 2007 actually played a huge role in preventing war against Iran. You know that story.

Is he going to get that kind of intelligence? Well, John Ratcliffe's not going to give it to him. Maybe somebody can, well... Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity can try to wheedle in some real analysis. But the thing is constipated, right? And the sphincter, the anal sphincter, is Rubio, and that's one of the nicer things I would call him. The only thing, you know, just talking about Rubio, Putin had an incredibly interesting Q&A for two hours on the 4th in connection with the Petersburg summit. And it was remarkable. And there's nothing in what he said that I would quibble with, that I would say, no, that's not right, except one thing, and that he referred to Rubio as a statesman. That's diplomatic language, I would say. Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin. He ain't no statesman. He's an anal sphincter.