

Col. Larry Wilkerson: The Middle East Trap: US Strategy & Iran's Rise

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#Nima

What JD Vance said last night — we know the attacks: Iran, Israel attacking in Lebanon, the Iranian response to the Israeli attack. But before getting there, I want to play what JD Vance said about the situation between the United States and Iran.

#Guest

How concerned are you about Israel spying on the United States and freelancing in Lebanon?

#Speaker 03

Well, look, I think obviously the Israelis and I—excuse me, the Israelis and the United States—we have a lot of shared interests, but we also have some situations where our interests diverge. And I think where the president has been very clear here is that while Israel obviously has some objectives that it has, the United States' main objective in Iran is to ensure that Iran does not have a nuclear weapon. And we've actually, thanks to what's happened over the last few months, but really over the last year and a half, created the space necessary where the president believes, and I think he's right, that we can get a long-term settlement to Iran's nuclear deal. Now, Israel may like that, they may not like that, but fundamentally, we think this is in the best interest of the United States of America. So we're going to keep on pursuing it because that's what the president of the United States was elected to do. That's what we have to do in order to properly serve the American people.

#Nima

Yeah. What is, in your assessment, in your understanding, hearing what J.D. Vance just said, hearing what Donald Trump said just moments ago about in two, three days he's going to get some sort of deal? And he was telling us for such a long time—you remember, you know, I would say more than 40 times he said that—and in two, three days we're going to get an agreement with Iran. What is your understanding of the current situation and the ongoing sort of messages between the two sides?

#Larry

Well, J.D. Vance has become like a broken record in many respects. He keeps playing essentially the same message with different intonations every time. I love the slip-up there. Note at the beginning of his remark, he says, "between Israel and I." Then he changes it to "the United States." J.D., do you have a personal situation here? You bet you do. You bet you do, because you want to run for president, and you better not say anything adverse to Israel's interests, because you will never gain the White House if you do. That's essentially what he's admitting to. Then the second thing I would remark on is, I may be in error here, but I think I'm right, because I don't watch Fox News much.

But I did happen on the story—I believe it was in the New York Times, maybe the Wall Street Journal—but it was about the Nielsen ratings. Those are our ratings on who gets watched the most, and how long, and what shows, and who has the most attraction to the American people. That dude talking to J.D. Vance from Fox News was one of the top ones, as I recall. So he's speaking to the MAGA group, and the MAGA group, all to say, still dominates. It still dominates. Now, clearly, the network news, both visual and narrative, is not doing as well as it used to. But at the same time, Fox is doing better than any of the rest.

And that individual, so targeted, going to the person who's going to talk to the most MAGA people, is most believed among the MAGA people and delivering his message there. What is the message? It's the same old thing. I mean, I can't believe that even the dumbest MAGA dude out there, male or female, old or young or middle, isn't aware of the line they're being fed now and who's feeding it to them—in this case, the vice president. And the line is still, I don't think this administration, from the vice president to the president to the secretary of war, they're going to spend \$125 million, Nima, and probably more than that, to change the name officially in the Congress to the Department of War—a retrograde step if there ever was one.

But this is a retrograde administration. It's not "Make America Great Again." It's "Kill America." That's what it's all about. But all of that going on doesn't mask the fact that they have, I won't say outright lost the war, but they never had a chance of winning it. So what's the difference? And they're not going to win it now. And Bibi is showing, characteristically, that he is more interested in staying out of jail. Therefore, he must win the upcoming election in Israel. Then he isn't obeying Trump because he is still killing people in Gaza.

And, oh, by the way, he's still killing people in Lebanon. He's still killing people in Gaza. He's still killing people in the West Bank, in East Jerusalem. Got a wary eye cast over Syria. And he's attacking Iran again. So he's not doing anything that the United States president claims he has ultimate power over him to make him do. And he's not doing it because the people who oppose him in this upcoming election and may well beat him are taking him to task for paying any attention to the American president. And increasingly, I think Trump's reputation in Israel, because of these phone calls and such, is falling off too.

Not necessarily because he told Netanyahu to get screwed, but because they see the premier, Netanyahu in this case, but ultimately Naftali Bennett or whoever, actually taking orders from Trump. And that didn't sit well at all. Eighty-some percent of the Jewish residents of Israel are still very much in favor of everything that Bibi has done to this point in each of the places he's doing it. And, oh, by the way, in Gaza, it's really become treacherous. It's become treacherous from so many different aspects—people making tons of money, lots of Egyptians, lots of Israelis making tons of money off of charging \$200 for a carton of eggs, even more for enough gas to run your stove for a 10-hour period.

Just exploiting the Palestinians who are left, the Gazans who are left, to the maximum for money. So it's a—and Nima, I read a piece in the Jerusalem Post. If I talked about this with you before, please stop me. And I had never heard of this guy, but I probably should have. He's a pretty established historian in Israel. And he wrote a piece that was based really a lot on Halford Mackinder and Mackinder's theory of the land state versus the maritime state and vice versa. And his contention was that what's happening now is really three nuclear weapons are being, quote-unquote, deployed against the United States and against Israel.

One of them is the Strait of Hormuz, and it's an incredibly powerful one because it's geographically fixed, can't be moved, and it is essential, for the moment at least, until pipelines obviate it, to a lot of global commerce. So that's a nuclear weapon, and Iran controls it. The second nuclear weapon is more indebted to Mackinder's theory, and that is that the landmass, such as it is, has shifted just a bit. And I don't mean the geography actually moved. I mean the power centers within that geography, exploiting that geography nonetheless, widened to an extent, as was in the original theory. And what's happening is you have Iran now a major component of the Russian, Chinese, and I think Central Asian landmass.

So you have an overpowering 67, 68% of the world that is occupying this now increasingly viable, because of land routes rather than maritime routes, economic structure. Maritime routes are still important to an extent, but at any moment they may fall into high seas piracy, much the same way they did several hundred years ago, when you may recall that Britain initially was very much involved in the slave trade across the Atlantic, and then got a new prime minister, a new foreign minister, and all of a sudden they started fighting the slave trade viciously on the high seas. We were the most guilty party, and they were attacking our ships and everything else.

That's what we're headed for in the maritime realm, while the land realm is relatively peaceful and successful economically and otherwise, politically, economically. I think there's something to that. And then the third—he doesn't stop there. Those are the two nuclear weapons Iran is now in possession of, like the Strait, or a party to, like this new land configuration. The third nuclear weapon is a real nuclear weapon. And he's convinced that that's there too. It's either coming from Pakistan or it's already there, built by the Iranians themselves, and it only awaits evidence that it exists.

And the purpose for that, going into a narrower definition of that nuclear weapon, which is, of course, an actual nuclear weapon, he talks about deterrence, and he talks about they have to do that, as Kim Jong-il had to do it, because that was the only way to survive. And with Israel possessing a nuclear weapon—again, I come back to the Omani foreign minister—Israel is the problem in the region. Now Israel is the problem in the region not only because of its slaughtering methodologies, but also because it is the only state with a nuclear weapon that is poised against the rest of the region. And this will balance the scales, so to speak. So they don't have to use it. They don't even have to test it.

Mossad just needs to know they've got it. I think he thinks they will test it, but that's to be seen. I think he's right in all three components of that analysis, which means, Nima, there is no way Donald Trump is going to get out of this except by doing what J.D. Vance just did—obfuscate, state the same thing over and over again, say that diplomacy is succeeding, have an occasional tit-for-tat strike, have an occasional U.S. Apache helicopter go down in the region, God knows for what reason, have all these things going on and stretch them out until the midterms when you can consolidate your control over the United States. That's what I see as base policy now for the Trump administration.

Let this go on at a low simmer, as low as you can keep it. Try to keep Bibi Netanyahu in check. Hope he's defeated. Hope he goes to jail, and then start a new sheet of music, if you will—that's the same thing without Bibi—trying to deal with Lapid or Naftali Bennett or whoever happens to take his place. But I don't think they have a strategy. I do not think they have a strategy other than rope-a-dope. You know what that means from Cassius Clay's fighting days? You bounce off the ropes all the time. That's what Trump is doing. And J.D. Vance is a spokesperson in that regard. And he almost screwed up as he started by saying it was his personal position. Nope, United States' position.

#Nima

Larry, can I add a number four question? A nuclear bomb in the region, which would be the new equation of the region—that for Israel, there is no red line for the acts of resistance to attack Israel. I'm talking about Iran and Yemen.

#Larry

Well, that comes out of the second one in this guy's estimation—the new leverage Iran has because of being a part of the Mackinder landmass and having Russia and China behind it. And being connected, being connected—I saw two more railroads. I didn't even know. I didn't know there were three railroads. There are three railroads. I knew about two of them, but there are three railroads that actually come through that area and now debouch in Iran. I mean, you've seen these Chinese railroads, the freight railroads alone—they can be 150, 200-car trains. They may take 13 hours or 14 hours, 14 days, 13 days, or whatever. One of them, I'm told, has had a train—I don't know how big it was—but a train actually traversed it in 25 hours.

Now, that would be 100 miles an hour or whatever, you know, the whole distance, and it'd probably be an unloaded train. But the average time, I'm told, for the big one at least, is 13 to 14 days. But that's chicken feed when you're talking about ships and the cost of ships and the danger of going through places like the Bab el-Mandeb and the Strait of Hormuz now. The Houthis have let it be known that the Bab el-Mandeb is back to its previous status. Nobody crosses through who's friendly with Israel. So you're talking about a lot of pressure being brought on the world economy that is being relieved for this Mackinder-like landmass because they don't depend on it. They'll take advantage of it when they can and when the rates are right, but they don't depend on it. Everything is land now.

#Nima

When you look at Israel and the way they're attacking in the southern part of Lebanon, Larry, they know they attacked an empty building in Beirut, in the southern part of Beirut, in Dahia. They didn't kill any Hezbollah forces, but they killed ordinary people—at least two or three of them were wounded, something like five casualties.

#Larry

They're not killing Hamas fighters, by and large, in Gaza either. They're killing Gazan civilians—24, 30 a day—moving the yellow line, the old tactics. The yellow line's in one place at night; the next morning, the yellow line's somewhere else. If you're on the other side of the yellow line as it has moved, you get killed. They're doing the same thing. But these aren't Hamas fighters. These are Gazan civilians. But it's their strategy, by the way.

#Nima

I don't know if you heard what Ben-Gvir said. Ben-Gvir, the Israeli minister, said he's calling for kidnapping Lebanese women and children to break Hezbollah's morale. To break their morale, you have to—it's just unbelievable.

#Larry

Ben-Gvir is unbelievable. Yeah, he's unbelievable. He's the one I think is going to be first on the docket at the International Criminal Court when people wake up and do something about this in the distant future. I really think it will happen, just as it happened with Radovan Karadzic and Milosevic in Serbia. Now, that happened really because the United States threw its weight behind it. Because—you ready for this, Nima?—the real reason we did that was because we were being accused of only backing the court when it picked on people in Africa who were Black, like Charles Taylor. And so we looked around—we being, uh, who was the guy? I can't think of his name. I just lost his name.

But the great diplomat who was in Pakistan as our emissary—he was before that in former Yugoslavia—Dick, Dick, Dick... I can't think of his last name now. But anyway, they were looking around for someone that they could get that would balance the scales at the court—a white person. And so they picked on Radovan Karadzic and Milosevic in Serbia because they were in the news at that time and they were doing some pretty brutal things. So was the other side, but we were on the other side, so we picked them. And I think Karadzic either went to the court and died in the process of the trial, and Milosevic did pretty much the same thing, I think. I think he was hauled out to go before the court and then he passed away.

God knows how he died. But that, you know, we will do this again somewhere. Europe will do it again somewhere. We'll come to our senses to a certain extent, but there will be other reasons too, as there were with Yugoslavia, former Yugoslavia. But we'll put these people before the bar. I doubt anybody like Netanyahu will. I think Netanyahu will do a Sharon on us. Sharon left office and died. And one of the reasons he died was he was actually, I think, afflicted with a form of cancer that was pretty virulent. But he also died conveniently, let's put it that way. And I think Netanyahu will die conveniently too. And maybe Mrs. Netanyahu too. And I will be first to stand on their grave and clap.

#Nima

We have two leaders, the President of the United States and Benjamin Netanyahu. When they started the war, they had some sort of overlap in their objectives because they wanted to do something in Iran. They wanted to do regime change or whatever they had in their mind. They were locked.

#Larry

Both of them thought they were going to overthrow the regime in Iran and turn Iran into, at best, a Bantustan nation with all kinds of little other things scattered across it—you know, a little Kurd, a little Azeri, a little this, a little that—all over the place. I bet they even thought in Israel that there'd be a little Jewish enclave with the 50,000 or so Jewish citizens around. I got news for them: they would probably fight them tooth and nail. But it didn't happen. It didn't happen. That was Mossad and Bibi Netanyahu's advice to, prediction to, outcome of this war will be to Donald Trump. And Donald Trump swallowed it hook, line, and sinker.

#Nima

Yeah. And looking at where they are today, you know, we have again two leaders who are seeing the future totally differently, because Donald Trump, as it was mentioned, Axios—there is a report on Axios that a U.S. official said to Axios that the continuation of the war for Israel, for Benjamin Netanyahu, is so important because he wants to stay alive politically in Israel.

#Larry

And probably stay alive, period. Because when you go to jail, you die pretty quick in Israel. I mean, I'm not saying somebody takes you out, but I'm just saying they don't—former prime ministers in jail do not last long.