

# Prof. David N. Gibbs: Trump & Iran Confirm the MoU Is Closer Than Ever

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## #Nima

Hi, everybody. Today is Friday, June 12th, 2026, and our dear friend, Professor David N. Gibbs, is here with us. Welcome back, Professor.

## #David

Thank you for having me back, Nima.

## #Nima

Let me start with what is happening. In the last two or three days, what has happened? We had an Israeli attack after Iran announced that if Israel attacks Lebanon, they're going to respond. Then we had an Israeli attack on Lebanon, in the southern part of Beirut, which was some sort of test, I don't know. They wanted to assassinate somebody, but they basically attacked an empty building in the southern part of Beirut. Then Iran responded to Israel in the northern part of Israel. And after that, we had Israel responding to the Iranian attack, then Iranian retaliation.

Then we had, two days ago, the United States coming out, Donald Trump saying that Iran has hit one of these Apache helicopters in the Strait of Hormuz that was patrolling the region, facilitating the passage of the tankers or something like that. It was hit by Iranian drones. "We have to respond to that," and he attacked Iran. Then there was an Iranian attack on Kuwait, Bahrain, and Jordan. So that attack happened while we had the Qatari delegation in Iran, talking with the Iranians and bridging the gap between the two sides, as it was mentioned on Fox News and by Iranian media as well. So right now, what we're witnessing is that Donald Trump has announced that he's reaching some sort of deal with Iran. It's not a deal.

It's a memorandum of understanding between the two sides, and Iran has confirmed that. And we had some sort of speculation today because some outlets in Iran mentioned a 14-point plan on the part of Iran. They said these are going to be the main points of the agreement or memorandum of understanding. Then Iran's foreign minister came out and said these are all speculations, they don't

know what they're talking about. But we have never been so close to agreeing on this letter and this document, which they call a memorandum of understanding. And Donald Trump retweeted the Iranian foreign minister's tweet about the memorandum. Here we are today, looking at what has happened in West Asia, in the Middle East, and the Strait of Hormuz. What is your understanding of the current situation there?

## **#David**

My understanding is Iran retains the upper hand here. And it's not clear to me they really have that much interest in an agreement here, because we're talking about the memorandum of understanding, as they always say, the agreement before the agreement. It only settles things in a provisional way, without any final settling of the issues at hand. And of course, there's always the possibility—one might say the likelihood—that this will simply be violated, or Israel will violate the agreement and draw the United States into it once again, as has happened repeatedly. And so there has to be some degree of trust, even between warring countries, in order to get a peace settlement—something that isn't unconditional surrender, something short of that. There has to be some degree of trust that the other side will honor what they agree to.

And Iran, based on the record of the United States and Israel, has no reason to trust anything that is said or agreed to. And so it's not clear to me they have that much of an incentive for an agreement, which makes me skeptical about the whole thing. Let me say, I would like to see an agreement. I would like to see an end to the war. There are all sorts of ways this is extremely dangerous. So if an agreement, even a provisional one, is established and the fighting stops, that's all for the good. I'm just not entirely convinced that's a likely outcome here. If there is an end to the war, I think it's most likely to end with the U.S. effectively just walking away and accepting what will, in effect, be a defeat for the United States and a humiliation for Donald Trump.

Or there might be some fig leaf of an agreement. Again, the problem with it is that Iran has the upper hand here militarily. It controls the Strait of Hormuz, which is a really critical point of leverage. Some have called it Iran's nuclear weapon. Iran, I can't imagine, would relinquish that leverage, relinquish control of the Strait of Hormuz. They also will have to control it for an extended period to generate enough funds to reconstruct their country from the damage that has been done. And, you know, given all those considerations, the United States would have to accept Iranian control of the Strait of Hormuz.

That's at least my guess. I doubt Iran would part with that enormous power they have from control of the Strait of Hormuz. And so, given that, I just don't see—I don't think Trump is at the point yet where he's willing to accept defeat. And given that, I'd be pessimistic about an agreement. But I could be wrong, and I certainly hope I'm wrong. I mean, one of the backers of Iran clearly is China, and I think China is a country that is interested in stability. And I think they would have some preference for some agreement. They have some leverage over Iran, though I don't think it's decisive leverage. So I guess we'll see.

## **#Nima**

Yeah, I think when it comes to the memorandum of understanding, if they sign it—which, let's go positive, they're going to sign it—because as they were talking about right now, the latest news is that Pakistan's foreign minister is traveling to Geneva, Switzerland, tonight to continue efforts to mediate between Iran and the United States, according to Iranian media. And when it comes to the Iranian position, there are some points that are so important for Iran. First of all, to put an end to the war on all fronts, which includes Lebanon. This is of particular importance for Iran.

There is no way, in my opinion, looking at the Iranian media, looking at the tone and atmosphere in Iran, you would believe that they're going to back down on this issue. At this point, they're going to demand it, and they're going to achieve it, or the United States decides not to make a deal, not to make any sort of, you know, get along with this memorandum of understanding. But after all, as we talk right now, Israel is attacking the southern part of Lebanon. The attacks are happening. That's why I don't see—I don't know what your understanding is of the relationship between the Trump administration and the Israeli one—but there is nothing there for Donald Trump to do. He proved that he's incapable of putting pressure on Israel.

## **#David**

Well, the U.S. does clearly have an option here. It's more than just the U.S. Under Trump, and under every other president, it has been unwilling to take, and that option is to cut Israel off from financial, military, and diplomatic support. The United States provides crucial support to Israel in the form of annual subsidies—since the early '70s they've been doing this—which is very important to Israel. It would be very difficult for Israel to engage in quite the degree of military aggression it has been engaging in if they didn't have the United States backstopping them with financial aid.

Plus there's military support, giving Israel high-tech weapons and so on. There's diplomatic support at the UN Security Council, vetoing efforts to censure Israel for its conduct and so on. All of these things the United States gives to Israel, and it could simply put a stop to it, and it could do two things. One, it could condition the aid on better behavior by Israel—that Israel will stop its aggression in Lebanon and will abide by U.S. demands in that respect and not simply ignore them as it has done—and condition support on those kinds of behaviors, or better, in my view, just cut them off.

Tell Israel that they're going to be treated like any other country in the world, with no special privileges, no special aid, and they're on their own. And if the United States were to do that, Israel would have to behave very differently from the way it's behaving. It could not engage in the degree of military attack they've been doing if they didn't have the world's biggest superpower behind them.

So the problem, of course, as everyone knows, is Israel does have a lot of influence on the U.S. government and U.S. politics. You know, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt wrote the famous book *\*The Israel Lobby\**, which, as far as I can tell, is completely accurate.

I've never seen any credible refutation of the claims that were made, which were 20 years ago, and it's as relevant today as it was then. Also, the U.S. support for Israel is predicated on other things as well, which is, I think, there is an ideology in Washington—the dominant ideology of neoconservatism—which is predicated on the idea that what America needs to do is become more like Israel. Israel is seen with admiration in policy circles, especially neoconservative policy circles, as showing the way for what America should be like. And that ideological connection gives Israel a lot of prestige in Washington and a lot of influence among elites.

This was shown by public opinion polls over decades. What's very interesting, however, is that support is rapidly eroding. Okay, public support in the U.S. is definitely going down. And that's true both in the Democratic Party and increasingly also in the Republican Party. A critically important development, in my view, is the decline of support for Israel among evangelical Christians. Evangelical Christianity is an immensely large and influential bloc in American politics. And they've been rock solid in their support of Israel on biblical grounds. Israel is seen as a fulfillment of biblical prophecy. And so in many ways, evangelicals have been more uncompromisingly supportive of Israel than Jews. Jews, I think, are becoming much more divided.

But increasingly, you're seeing younger evangelicals—and this is brand new—younger evangelicals are moving away from this and are starting to view Israel much more negatively. I think what's happening is very simple. They can watch YouTube like anyone else, and they can see what Israel is doing in Gaza, and some of the very disturbing videos of the results of Israeli actions in Gaza and elsewhere in the Middle East. And I think that's starting to weigh on the consciences of evangelicals just as it is on everyone else in the world. And so I think you are seeing a new situation in the United States, and it's very possible that you will see the United States distancing from Israel in the future just based on the fact that the public may increasingly demand it.

## **#Nima**

I think that's the feeling among the Zionists in the United States, because the way this new Section 224 is, basically they want to merge the two militaries—the U.S. military and the Israeli military. That's right. This is a sign that shows they're feeling somehow threatened by what's going on in society in the United States. They didn't need before to go that far, and they want to formalize something because they're afraid that maybe in the future they could face some sort of substantial policy changes, or maybe foreign policy changes, vis-à-vis the Middle East.

## **#David**

Well, I agree with that. I mean, there has been an effort by Israel supporters in the U.S. to sneak in provisions into legislation to effectively merge the Israeli and American military-industrial complexes at the level of intelligence sharing and other things like that, as a way of entangling the two to such an extent that it'd be very difficult to disentangle. I think that is a sign of weakness and fear along the lines exactly of what you said. Something else, by the way, is an increased level of repression—an extraordinary resort to blocking open discussion of Israel, including on American university campuses.

This is the worst I've ever seen in my career, I have to say—the extent to which there is really intimidation of open discussion of this issue. Just this last semester, I taught a class in U.S. foreign policy. I announced in advance to the students, we will not be discussing Israel and Palestine because it is just too tense and the risks are too great. So I'm just taking that off the table. And the students nodded as if they understood exactly what I was talking about. But again, I don't see that as a sign of strength in the long term. I see that as a sign of desperation by the Israel lobby, resorting to these kinds of extreme measures.

## **#Nima**

Yeah. When you look at the way that Donald Trump has been, I would say the Trump administration was used in the war in the Middle East because the Israelis have been asking the United States for this war. Benjamin Netanyahu wanted this war for such a long time, but finally he got it with the Trump administration. This is what John Kerry said. He said Benjamin Netanyahu, each and every time he came to the United States, was asking, "Let's go, let's attack Iran."

Obama administration, Bush administration, then Biden administration. He asked each and every president in the United States, but finally he got it through the Trump administration because the structure of the Trump administration facilitated that, in my opinion, because many people were so close to the Israelis, particularly Benjamin Netanyahu himself. That was a huge factor in deciding to go along with that war. But what else can the United States do for Israel? I think this is the peak of what the United States could have done for Israel.

## **#David**

This could be, so to speak, the straw that broke the camel's back. This could be the event that fundamentally changes America's attitude towards Israel. It could also be the event that ends American hegemony. That, again, is just an American defeat in the Persian Gulf, which I think is pretty close to inevitable as far as I can tell, would be such a blow to American hegemony that it would be very difficult for the U.S. to recover from it. And domestically, yes, it would be very difficult to explain to the public how Israel got us into this war that we lost at enormous cost to the economy. And so I think all of those things could produce basic changes in U.S. politics and international politics.

The short term is likely to be very bad, in that we may very well—almost certainly—get an economic downturn of some kind. The question is, how bad will the downturn be, especially since we're seeing the possibility of an El Niño in the South Pacific and possible effects on things like harvests? And so the short term will be very bad. In the longer term, I would be somewhat optimistic about the prospects of Israel being restrained and the United States being restrained. I think the American public is ready for a change in U.S. foreign policy. The public, I think, is getting tired of permanent war. And again, this is true in both parties.

## **#Nima**

Yeah, both parties are somehow supporting the Israeli agenda. But David, when it comes to the Israeli agenda, look at the Middle East today. Israel is basically, I would say, they're saying that Israel is occupying the southern part of Lebanon. But this occupation is some sort of trap when you look at what's going on recently with the case of Lebanon and Hezbollah, how Hezbollah is fighting back. You know, we may ask the basic question: why does Israel need to attack somewhere like Dahiya, which is a huge, populated area—500, 600 thousand people in that area? They announced some sort of evacuation: you have to get out of your homes, we're going to demolish, we're going to destroy everything. Why do they need to do that?

Because of the way that Hezbollah is attacking them, they said that the Israeli ambassador to the UN said that the use of FPV drones, the use of rockets, the ambushes that are happening in the southern part of Lebanon—they don't have a solution for that. Particularly with the case of FPV drones, because they're hitting Merkava tanks, they're hitting air defense system batteries, they're hitting Israeli soldiers. And it's too difficult for the air defense system to detect these FPV drones. So if you cannot fight on the battlefield, you cannot fight on the ground, you have to do something else. That's why you need to attack Beirut. And here comes the Iranian role. They come and say, you attack there, we're going to attack, we're going to level the northern part of Israel. You have to evacuate. This is a totally desperate situation considering what it was for Israel before this war started.

## **#David**

I'm going to have to say, I think Israel is pursuing what to me seems like an irrational policy. There's no way Israel is better off starting a war with Iran. You'd think they would have learned their lesson in June. And you'd think some of this was predictable. Well, not entirely. Iran is much better prepared for war, I think, than anybody expected. They've been extraordinarily well prepared, I have to say. That, by the way, is also a source of strength for them because there's the classic image of David versus Goliath. And very clearly, Iran is David here. And there's a natural human tendency to sympathize with David.

And when David strikes a blow, even people who don't like the Iranian regime, as I do not, have to basically see that there's some... one has to be very impressed by the fact that they've been able to

resist Israel and the United States to the extent that they have. That's also true of Hezbollah, which is Iran's forward line of defense in Lebanon, which is why Israel is going after Hezbollah. I don't really know why they're bombing Beirut. I'm not quite sure what they had in mind there. I suspect there's a story behind this that we haven't heard yet. Southern Lebanon is fairly obvious. They want to destroy Hezbollah.

I should add that the image of Greater Israel has also included Lebanon south of the Litani River. That's among ultra-nationalists in Israel, who seem to have a lot of influence on their current policy these days. Southern Lebanon has always been on their agenda, on their radar screens. And so that's somewhat easy to explain. And of course, getting rid of Hezbollah is easy to explain in terms of getting rid of a potential ally for Iran. The problem they're facing is, as with Iran, Hezbollah is more formidable than the Israelis would have imagined, and they really should have been forewarned because they went to war with Hezbollah in 2006, and Israel had to withdraw in what was essentially a military defeat.

Hezbollah is better armed and better organized than the Israelis realized in 2006, and you'd think 20 years ago they would have learned their lesson, but evidently they haven't. And it's amazing, the extraordinary appetite for risk Netanyahu has and his willingness to take what would seem like very reckless risks, risks that obviously are going very badly for Israel right now. I don't really see Israel's exit here. As you noted, Israeli soldiers are being killed in Lebanon in larger numbers than they might have expected. And, you know, Iran and Hezbollah have both made very effective use of missiles and drones. And Israel does not have a good solution to this, as far as I can tell.

And they're going to come out of this greatly weakened. Israel will come out of this weakened, for sure, both diplomatically and also militarily. There is some tendency in Israel to be overconfident. I have to think back to the 1973 war when Israel was caught by surprise and almost defeated. And there was an Israeli general who tried to explain why Israel wasn't prepared. He said, well, we figured we were just fighting against Arabs, not Germans. Against Germans, they'd be worried, but against Arabs, not so much so. Well, you know, there's a tendency for Israel to overestimate its capabilities and underestimate those of its adversaries. We're seeing that playing out right now in Lebanon.

## **#Nima**

That was, I think, considering what has happened in Syria. You remember the fall of Bashar al-Assad in Syria. That was, they said, a huge victory for Israel, and it's going to be a game changer. But as time goes by, the enemy was Iran in those days. Right now, the enemy of Israel is not just Iran, it's Turkey. They want to pick a fight with Turkey. That's going to be, in my opinion, when you say Israelis right now, they're talking about, at this step, we're fighting Iran. The next step is going to be Turkey together with Pakistan. The war is expanding. These people are expanding the war. They're

not shrinking. The shrinkage is not happening in their attitude. They don't care. That's why I think this Section 224 is going to be a huge, a disastrous policy for the United States, because these people are going to expand this war over and over.

## **#David**

Well, the legislation you're talking about is worrying. I'll grant you, it's very worrying. I'm very surprised at the extent to which Israel seems to have the need to be in a state of permanent war. It's not good for their economy. I mean, one thing you're getting in Israel is a brain drain. Israel has become very proud of the fact that it has a very large technology sector. It's the startup nation. They're very proud of that fact. They've been successful in that area. They have a high standard of living, supported by the United States partly, but also partly on their own initiative. They have a lot of talent in Israel.

That talent is leaving. One of the most widespread activities in Israel is acquiring a second passport. Jews who are of German or Polish descent, even distant German or Polish descent, can usually get a passport from those countries, which gives them even working rights. Other Israelis manage to get passports from Canada or the United States. And large numbers of Israelis are doing this. And many of them are taking out their passports and simply leaving, and leaving for good. And who leaves? It is the most talented people who leave. This can't be good for Israel's future trajectory. And so I don't see how the war is helping Israel.

There's also an Israeli general that said the Israeli Defense Forces are at the breaking point. They've had too many deployments. There have been too many call-ups of reservists, and soldiers are getting exhausted. You'd think Netanyahu would listen to those facts and not be constantly hungry for new wars, but there does seem to be kind of a political dynamic in Israel that always needs a new war. In some ways, you might say they suffer from the same malady as the United States, which also seems hungry for war. Really, the two most aggressive countries in the world are Israel and the United States. It's not an accident they're allies.

## **#Nima**

The problem for Israel and Netanyahu today is that the objectives of the United States and Israel were somehow overlapping before the Iranian attack, before the attack on Iran. Right now, they're totally different because for Donald Trump to stay, as one of the U.S. officials told Axios, Trump's survival is political. If he wants to survive or stay alive in the political arena of the United States, he has to get out of this war. And for Israel, for Benjamin Netanyahu, it's the opposite. He has to continue this war. Without this war, he's going to be removed from power. And we know that the people who are against him, by the way, don't have a different sort of mindset when it comes to Gaza or Lebanon, but they want to remove Benjamin Netanyahu from power. That's why you see these two different— you know, the two leaders, they have different objectives at this particular moment. Donald Trump wants to get out. Netanyahu wants to stay in the fight.

## **#David**

Netanyahu clearly doesn't want to stay in the fight. And, you know, there's been speculation, I think, that if he loses this war, he'll be removed as prime minister and then be put on trial. He doesn't want that. So he has a personal interest in it. I think it maybe overestimates his influence here in the sense that he has a government behind him. People are more extreme. Ben-Gvir and Smotrich, the finance minister and the national security minister, seem to be even more aggressive than Netanyahu. So it's not just Netanyahu here. I think you do have—there's an element of irrationality in Israeli policy that I don't fully understand, it must be said. As far as Trump goes, clearly he was playing with fire in getting involved in this war.

And he got himself into a war he cannot get out of because he was expecting, quite clearly, a quick capitulation. From what we know of the decision to go to war, Israeli intelligence—you know, he met not only with Netanyahu but the head of Mossad. And evidently, the personality of Netanyahu is somebody who impresses Trump, his tough-guy image. Netanyahu, I guess, is the ultimate tough guy, and Trump likes that. And the head of Mossad—and I guess Mossad has this mystique. I'm not sure if it's deserved, but this mystique is that they are the world's top intelligence service, at least according to mythology. And they said, we have this plan to decapitate the leadership, and if we decapitate the leadership, the whole regime will fall like a house of cards. Just like Venezuela.

You'll have a glorious victory to your name at very little cost. Now, the American advisors to him—General Kane, the head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—advised against the war, but evidently he went with what the Israelis recommended, because they have such a flawless record, as everybody knows, again according to mythology at least. And I have to say also, Trump's inexperience is a factor here. He has no real experience in foreign policy; he doesn't know what he's doing. He's advised by people, many of whom don't know what they're doing. Now, with Koff and Kushner, these are real estate moguls, and they seem to be his top advisors in foreign policy. And so I think basically he got himself into a war expecting it would be easy. But once he got into the war, it's a classic quagmire. He can't get out.

Because if he simply walks away from the war, Iran is much more powerful than it was before, at least in a military sense. It will control the Strait of Hormuz probably for a long time to come. And Trump will be humiliated. The United States will be humiliated. It would go down—Trump would go down—as a disastrous president. He knows that. And I think that's what he's trying to avoid here. But he has no way out. Trump has no way out except basically to capitulate. Any way this war is settled, whether it's settled currently, which I hope it will be, or settled down the road, it will be settled on the basis of terms that will favor Iran because Iran has the upper hand here. And I suspect Iran will push their upper hand and will demand things that will be very embarrassing for Trump to accede to. But in the end, he will have to accede to them because he will have no choice.

## **#Nima**

How do you see the balance in the region, in the Persian Gulf, with the GCC countries? You remember they wanted to normalize. We had Abraham, of course, and then the normalization of the relationship with Israel. Those days are gone. And right now, the only GCC country that is close to Israel today is the UAE. The other ones, you know, you look at Saudi Arabia, for example, or Qatar, they're somehow in the middle. They don't know what to do. Qatar, I think, has decided to have some sort of understanding with Iran. But Saudi Arabia, still, we don't know what's going on in Saudi Arabia. But they're not that close to Israel anymore.

## **#David**

Why is the UAE—I don't have a good explanation—why is the UAE the holdout so far? What do they see in their interest to maintain a relationship with Israel at this point in time? It seems very odd to me. I don't have a good answer to that. I'm wondering, do you have any thoughts on that, Nima?

## **#Nima**

My understanding is that they have, you know, the UAE is the country called UAE. It didn't exist during the British Empire. It was part of the desert of Oman. Oman is somehow close to the Iranian government. It's close to the American government, by the way. They have good relationships with Americans and Iranians, but they're not that close to Israelis. But when it comes to that region, they want to be in the opposite position of Oman. On the other hand, they see themselves against Saudi Arabia because they were fighting Saudi Arabia in Yemen. Saudi Arabia somehow got close to the Iranian position in Yemen, in Somalia. They're basically fighting Saudi Arabia in each and every part of the world. So they wanted to emphasize that they're going to be different.

They're not going to be part of the GCC countries that Saudi Arabia runs. And they want to have their position and the borders and everything. My understanding of their position is this, and I have no other explanation. There's so much—because I don't see—the way that Iran has closed the Strait of Hormuz, you look at how those two UAE ports that they were using to export oil, Iran just closed those two ports. And they're not going to be able to export oil. This is the problem for them. But they don't want to accept that. They want to be different in the region. They want to be seen as different from the others. This is the whole point, in my opinion, on their part. And I don't see any other reason for that.

## **#David**

You know, they're playing with fire. And the reason they're playing with fire is that if this war escalates, and if Trump does something crazy like he's threatened to do—such as, let's say, destroy much of the energy infrastructure of Iran—Iran could retaliate by destroying the desalination plants in the UAE. And that would be catastrophic for the UAE. You'd think they'd be much more worried about that possibility. It just doesn't seem like a very rational policy from their standpoint to still be maintaining a positive relationship with Israel under those circumstances.

## **#Nima**

The fragility, as you mentioned, with the desalination plants, is that Iran is something like 2% dependent on desalination. They don't need it. And these countries are basically more than 70, 80, 90% dependent on it. But so far, even with the latest American and Israeli attack on Iran, they hit some water tanks in Iran, on these islands. But Iran has never attacked desalination plants because that's part of the Shia sort of faith that the Iranian government is so committed to. That's why that hasn't happened so far. But when it comes to the strategy of Iran, I think, with the Strait of Hormuz, they're basically, David, sticking through the Strait of Hormuz. They want to make a new security structure for the region.

And it doesn't mean that you want to put pressure, you want to have some sort of upper hand with other countries. You want to make some sort of partnership. Their understanding is the partnership between Iran and other states, if that would be possible, to my understanding. I think that's the whole agenda. They're not going to go—the Strait of Hormuz is not going to be some sort of leverage to put pressure on their economy because you want to say, I am the big guy in the region. But what Iran sees by the Strait of Hormuz is that before that, the United States, all those bases in GCC countries were used, and Iran was telling them for many, many years. You go back 30 years ago, you see what the Iranian Supreme Leader, the former Iranian Supreme Leader, was talking about.

What is the meaning of these bases in your countries? These bases are not to protect you. They're going to use these bases to attack us and to defend Israel. After more than 30 years, you see the same thing is happening in these countries. I don't know if they're going to understand that, because we know that Saudi Arabia, the agenda of MBS in Saudi Arabia, the crown prince of Saudi Arabia, is that he wants a peaceful region, a prosperous region. This is the moment that they can do something about it, in my opinion. And it should be—the move should be on the part of the GCC countries. How do you see the mindset of these countries in the aftermath or during this war?

## **#David**

Well, I mean, China has been a stabilizing influence in my view. I think China, contrary to what a lot of people think, mostly wants stability. That seems to be their aim. I don't buy the idea that they're going to become a worldwide military power. I'm just not seeing any evidence of that, really, or very little. I think in the Persian Gulf, what they want is a stable Persian Gulf, and they will use their leverage—and they obviously do have some leverage there, as well as everywhere else—to try and promote a stabilization of the region. Famously, of course, they sponsored reconciliation, at least a temporary one, between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

And I think that speaks to a desire for a non-militarized Persian Gulf. I think one of the things that the world is going to have to face, though, is that Iran is likely to have control of the Strait of

Hormuz for an extended period. And they will set up what some have called a toll booth in the Persian Gulf. And I think one of the motives here is to generate funds to reconstruct their country from two wars. You know, they will claim they're entitled to reparations from the United States and Israel, and you can certainly make a case that they are, I would say, but they're not going to get reparations. That's, I think, an impossibility. So short of reparations, they can generate funds through shipping in the Persian Gulf.

And so my guess is that they will, for an extended period of time, for at least several years, do that—operationalize that idea. And so I think that that's something the world is going to have to come to terms with, that Iran will have that kind of influence. But again, if the United States and Israel didn't want that to happen, they should never have attacked Iran. Something that has to be said, which I think is often forgotten, is the extraordinary illegality—and one has to use the word criminality—of the attack. What the United States and Israel did was a brazen violation of the UN Charter, which is a treaty the United States has signed.

And so this is a criminal act according to international law. And people forget this, but the United States Constitution has a clause that says treaties are the supreme law of the land. If anybody reads the Constitution, treaties are the supreme law of the land, meaning they have domestic standing as domestic U.S. law. So this attack on Iran was a violation of U.S. law as well. And it's remarkable how complacent the world has become with regard to American military aggression, that they don't even notice the illegality of what has happened here. And that would violate American law as well as international law.

## **#Nima**

I think the reason that Donald Trump has decided to talk with the Iranians is that he couldn't achieve regime change, which was the basic— I don't know, what is your understanding of the main objective of this Israeli-American attack? It was, in my opinion, regime change. Yeah. Then he couldn't achieve that. He basically exhausted each and every move that he could have done during the war. He attacked the arms production. He couldn't hit those underground cities. There is a report in the Financial Times that shows more than 40 times Israeli and American forces attacked an underground city in Yazd, in the eastern part of Iran.

But they couldn't hit it in a way that could somehow destroy it. So Iran, till the last moment before the ceasefire was announced, was attacking the United States, GCC countries, and Israel from that base. So basically, they reached some sort of conclusion that they could not destroy it. So they went after the bridges, hospitals, and schools. And the other move, in my opinion, he tried to convince Russia to help him. Then he went to China. By the summit, he went to China. He literally wanted China to open the Strait of Hormuz. And you remember, he was begging Europeans to join the fight in the Strait of Hormuz, to do something about it.

## **#David**

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, it's a certain desperation. I mean, from China and Russia's standpoint, I'm sure they're very impressed with Iran's military capability, I think as everybody has been. They've performed far better than I expected, I suspect far better than anybody expected, including in Beijing and Moscow. And Iran has proven itself a very worthy ally to China and Russia. And I don't see any incentive they would have to see a defeat for Iran. I think, as I said, both countries, I think particularly China, have an interest in ending the war at some point and bringing stability, but a defeat for Iran is something that China and Russia will not support, probably will not tolerate.

My guess is if Iran starts to run out of missiles, which I don't think is about to happen, but if they were, I suspect Iran would get replacement missiles from China and Russia, because I just don't think they want Iran to lose this war. And so Trump, I think, was desperate, must have been very desperate to put pressure on those countries since there wasn't a chance they would agree. As far as the Europeans go, what could they do? I mean, they could send down a small number of ships. They have a much smaller navy than the US. And if the US Navy couldn't open up the Strait of Hormuz, how could the Europeans help? So there really wasn't any, I think, well-thought-out process going on here. And the Europeans had no incentive to get involved in a war they couldn't help with anyway. Militarily, there was no incentive for them whatsoever to do this.

They also could be attacked. It was that possibility. They could be attacked by the Iranians. And so I think, again, what we have here is a very desperate American president who is grasping at remote possibilities because he doesn't see any other option. The option he's going to have to take, as I said, is to accept defeat and walk away. The question is, is he there yet? My guess is probably not. The time will come when he will be there. Again, the world economy is going to put such pressure on him, he will have no choice at a certain point in time. And I think that time is approaching, but it's possible the level of economic pressure isn't quite at the point that Trump's ready to walk away yet. Again, it's possible I'm wrong, and maybe we're about to see an end to the war right now. But I wouldn't bet on it.

## **#Nima**

Yeah. I think what Iran sees, looking at it, we don't know basically what the mindset of decision-makers in Iran is, but from their actions, from what they've done so far, we can understand their main focus is on the region. Because basically, with this new plan that they're talking about, it's about Gaza, Palestine, Lebanon, and they want to do something when it comes to the Israeli invasion of these people — Lebanese people, Palestinian people.

## **#David**

What do they say about Gaza? Okay, I know about Lebanon, but what are the Iranians saying about Gaza at this point?

## **#Nima**

You said that in the final decisions that they're going to make, if they reach something with the United States, Israel has to stop attacking Gazans. In a long plan, together with other countries, they want Israel to withdraw from Gaza. This is the plan that they're putting out. This is the plan, the mindset on the part of Iranians. They're basically mostly focused on the region — GCC countries, American bases in GCC countries — and what's going on in Lebanon, in Gaza, in Syria is so important for Iran as well. We know that the Assad government is gone and the new government is not in. Iran is not in favor of this government, but they don't want chaos for Iran — after all, for Syria. And this is the policy of Iran. But coming out, you've mentioned the case of China.

China sees the bigger picture because they're far away from the conflict, and they see what the outcome of the conflict is, considering it together with what has happened in Venezuela. The United States basically is trying to control, to have some sort of dominance over the energy market. So that's why, that's the main reason in Venezuela. Many people are arguing that was the main reason for the attack on Iran. So they want—just imagine if they could have controlled the Strait of Hormuz. What would have been the outcome of that? Huge for China, in my opinion. Look at the Strait of Hormuz, the importance of the Strait of Hormuz — not only oil and gas, but fertilizer, helium, everything, even the internet. So China, in my opinion, you mentioned how China is backing because China has no choice. China sees what's going on in Venezuela.

And Venezuela was providing China with oil. They're gone. Nothing more is happening there. So if you remove Iran from the scene, if you remove the Strait of Hormuz, the control, that's a huge loss for China. For Russia, it's different. They see the South Caucasus. They see what's going on in Armenia, Azerbaijan. They see how these sort of movements from Syria going to Central Asia can destabilize Russia in Chechnya, in Dagestan — these Muslim, you know, sort of movements, radical Salafi, you know, Wahhabi sort of movements that Russia was fighting for more than 10 years to stabilize the situation in Russia from 2000 to 2010. That's a huge loss for Russia and China. That's why I think both China and Russia are supporting Iran in this war.

## **#David**

I think with Russia, I assume one of their assumptions would be that if the United States could get some degree of control over Iran, they would use it as a base to sort of infiltrate support into Muslim areas of southern Russia — Dagestan, for example — to destabilize Russia. That would be their fear. And, you know, you could see how under the circumstances that would be something they'd be very worried about. There's a longstanding relationship between Iran and Russia. As everyone knows, of course, the Iranian Shahed drone was widely used by the Russians in Ukraine, and they developed their own drone, the Geran, which is developed from the Shahed.

And so I think, based on all of these considerations, Venezuela was seen as maybe, shall we say, an ally of secondary importance. Iran is of primary importance, and they're much closer. There wasn't

that much Russia and China could do about Venezuela, just partly given the distance. But Iran is a different story. I don't think China or Russia will allow Iran to lose this war. And it's not likely to happen because Iran, it seems to me, is doing just fine with its missiles. But again, they will resupply Iran if Iran requires resupply, if that's necessary. I have no doubt about that.

## **#Nima**

Donald Trump, in his visit to China, tried to replace Iran with the United States — with energy from the United States — saying, "You can remove Iran; I'm going to provide you with oil." But China doesn't want to be dependent when it comes to energy, because energy is so critical. It's totally related to their national security. That's why they don't want to be dependent. They have diversified the way they're importing oil and gas. That's because they didn't want to be dependent on Iran or Russia, so they have somehow diversified their energy sector.

And what's coming in, considering the United States as part of that deal, I think there's no way for them to accept the United States or to let the United States enter that area providing them with energy. Because that could produce some sort of problem for them if the United States decides, in some way, "No, we're not going to send you." Because I think what the United States was talking about with China, they were not talking about oil or gas from the United States. They were basically talking about Venezuelan oil, because the oil from Venezuela goes into the hands of the Trump administration. They are selling the oil of Venezuela; it's not the Venezuelan government.

## **#David**

Well, there's no doubt one of the reasons the United States decided to intervene in Venezuela was to get direct control of their oil, which effectively they have. And they want to do the same thing with Iran, with much less success, evidently. Iran obviously is a much more formidable country than Venezuela. I think what happened in Venezuela is Trump became overconfident. He went in, it was easy, it was remarkably little cost, and he figured, if we can do it in Venezuela, I'm on a roll right now, and I'll get another success in Iran. It'll be just the same thing in Iran.

And it's very clear Iran was extremely well prepared for this war, not only at the military level but at the political level. They have multiple layers of leadership that can be put in place as one previous layer is killed. They're prepared for that. They were prepared for that. That seems to be basic to their operating procedure. And the result has been a disaster for the United States, a disaster really for the whole world. This is so unnecessary. This whole war was so unnecessary. But, you know, the world's been dragged into it, like it or not.

## **#Nima**

Do you think that Donald Trump is going to learn from what has happened during the last three months? Because looking at the war in Ukraine coming out of the Middle East, last time we talked,

you remember, it was all about Ukraine. Right now, it's about Ukraine forever and West Asia. So do you see Donald Trump being capable of getting out of the chaos he has created in West Asia to focus a little bit on Ukraine, or is he going to hand over the two problems, in Ukraine and in the Middle East, in West Asia, to the next president?

## **#David**

I think what Trump has been trying to do is to distance himself from the Ukraine conflict. The U.S. is still engaged. To the best of my knowledge, we're giving intelligence targeting information to the Ukrainians. The United States is giving some weapons to the Ukrainians, partly paid for by the Europeans. I don't think it has that many weapons to give anymore. We've depleted our stockpiles so much. But on the whole, I think he's trying to turn over the Ukraine issue to the Europeans and trying to walk away from that, at least to some degree. What's very striking about all this is, of course, Trump ran for president in 2016 and again in 2024 as an anti-war president.

He's the president who would not do permanent wars. He would not do endless wars. He criticized the Democrats, with justification, for being the war party, for being full of war hawks, which was true. And he wouldn't be like that. And a lot of people voted for him because he seemed less warlike than the Democrats. Needless to say, he's very much gone back on that promise. He surprised a lot of people, I think. But I didn't expect him to be this degree of hawkish. I have to add, there has been a change. In his first term, he did a lot of very violent things, but he did not start any new wars.

He's almost, not quite, but almost the first president since 1945 in his first term who did not start any new wars. Gerald Ford, who was only in office for two and a half years, didn't start any new wars either, but he's a special case. So he was, to some extent, a president who was less warlike in his first term. His second term, obviously, he's completely changed. And what accounts for that change, I don't quite understand at this point. Why has he become this uber-hawk, this hyper-hawkish president in his second term in a way he was not in his first term? I don't really have a good answer for that. Well, I do have an answer. Should I go on, or do you want to interject anything?

## **#Nima**

Go ahead, go ahead. I think what is important, because the Trump administration, you remember when they started, they had Tulsi Gabbard. We were thinking that J.D. Vance was totally different. You look at the way J.D. Vance is behaving today, because they were all against the war. Tulsi Gabbard was totally against the war. You remember her position before joining the Trump administration. And finally, she got out of the Trump administration. I don't know who's running it. My understanding is that the Trump administration is totally dominated by the Zionists.

## **#David**

Well, to some degree, that's part of it. Although I would say they've always been dominated by the Zionists to a significant extent. I'm not sure that basic fact is really a big change. If I had to guess, the best I can make of it is this: having won the second term for president, Trump didn't just want to be a two-term president. He wanted to be a truly great president. He wanted to go down like Abraham Lincoln or Franklin Delano Roosevelt. And first, he wanted the Nobel Peace Prize. He felt entitled to the Nobel Peace Prize. They didn't give it to him. He wrote a very remarkable letter to the Norwegian ambassador to the United States saying that he was very angry.

The Norwegians, of course, administer the Nobel Peace Prize. The Norwegians did not give him the Nobel Peace Prize. And he wanted to be a peace president, but now that he didn't get the peace prize, maybe he should be a war president instead. Well, that's what we're getting here. I do think that he looked at past presidents and said, who were the great presidents? They were war-winning presidents. Lincoln was. Roosevelt was. They both won wars. So what I have to do is fight and win a war. And if I can fight and win a big war and get a victory, I'll go down like they did as a great president.

I think that's how he was thinking about it. He was thinking in grandiose terms. He tends to think in grandiose terms. That much is known about him. And so I think that's how he looked at it. The Israelis assured him. They promised him this would be an easy win for you. This would enable you to become a great war-winning president. And the Israelis always know what they're talking about. They're never wrong. I guess that's how he saw it. And so they managed to draw him into a war that's going to prove the undermining of his whole presidency and his whole administration, because that will be the result of this.

## **#Nima**

I think Netanyahu convinced him that if you bring down the Iranian government, if you make Iran an ally of the United States or a puppet of the United States, that would be huge. You're going to be remembered in the history of the United States forever.

## **#David**

That's right.

## **#Nima**

The outcome is totally the opposite. He's going to be remembered as the most defeated president of the United States in the Middle East.

## **#David**

I agree. I mean, this could be a historic defeat. We've had defeats before in Iraq and Afghanistan. Effectively, those were defeats, and Vietnam, of course. This is different, though, because I think this could very well be a hinge point at which people will say that's the end of American hegemony. And Trump will be remembered as the president who ended American hegemony on the most humiliating terms, under the most humiliating circumstances. It could very well be that that is going to be his legacy. That could be where he's headed. Most likely, I think that is where he's headed.

**#Nima**

Yeah. Thank you so much, David, for being with us today. A great pleasure, as always.

**#David**

It was a pleasure for me too. See you soon. Bye bye.