

Mark Sleboda: Trump & Iran's Final Move – Deal Within REACH?

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#Nima

Hi, everybody. Today is Saturday, June 13, 2026, and our dear friend Mark Sleboda is here with us. Welcome back, Mark.

#Mark

Nima, thanks for having me. It's always an honor and a pleasure to be on Dialogue Works.

#Nima

There is a lot of noise, Mark, coming out of West Asia, coming out of the United States. It's all about...

#Mark

Noise is the operative word.

#Nima

Exactly. And it's all about them making a deal. Tomorrow, maybe they're signing a deal. And what is amazing to me is that the whole concept of the negotiations, or not negotiations, the messages between the two sides, is based on the first point — putting an end to the war on all fronts — which Lebanon was mentioned by the Iranian foreign minister last night. He had an interview on Iranian state TV. He mentioned that, and the United States repeated that, while Israel just moments ago said they have no commitment.

They're not prepared to give any sort of commitment to what's going on between Israel and Lebanon. And as soon as they feel some sort of threat, they're going to do the same. They're going to attack. They're going to bomb. They're going to do it. This is the main issue. This is the issue of Lebanon. The second part is this, say the foremost. It seems that the United States has accepted

that Iran would charge some sort of— they don't call it a toll, it's going to be a fee, administrative fee or whatever, service fee. Service fee, service fee. Environmental services, guidance services. Exactly.

#Mark

It's a protection racket, right? I mean, let's be honest.

#Nima

Yeah, this is the threat of Hormuz. When it comes to the other important points, which were the Iranian sanctions, they're not going to talk about it in the first round. It's going to be later on. The Iranian nuclear program is not part of this, what's going on right now. It's going to be later on. American troops withdrawing from the region is going to be later on. And within 60 days, I would assume that it's going to be 60 plus 60 plus 60. And as we've seen with the negotiations between Russia and the United States, what is your take on what's going on? Okay.

#Mark

So, I mean, I don't think it's any surprise. Color me skeptical. I'm unapologetically a cynic in both the classical and the modern sense when it comes to such things. I will refer you to actually one of the few decent pieces of journalism by CNN I've seen in recent years, where they put out a clip in the middle of this week of the 37 times that Trump has said that they're about to make a deal, a deal is imminent, or we have a deal, since the ceasefire began. And by the end of the week, it was up to 39, as even the CNN bobblehead noted. So we don't have a real good track record here.

And of course, when we're saying a deal, I mean, first of all, that is such a diminutive, derogatory word that Trump, of course, loves using, referring to agreements reached between states. And if this were actually to lead to that, then that would be properly thought of as a treaty. The idea that it has some type of international legal, such as there is international law—which admittedly is debatable—but gravitas and consequences and repercussions. Not that the US has any problem throwing up international treaties and agreements when they're reached, even when secured, confirmed in UN Security Council resolutions, which are supposed to be binding international law, and Trump's own ripping up of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

The last deal reached with Iran, you know, by Obama and then ripped up by Trump at the beginning of his first administration, which, of course, ultimately has led us to this point where Iran, whatever they might claim anyway, any deal that, quote unquote, is reached and at least an attempt is made by the United States to adhere to as a result of it—which I'm extremely skeptical about—but would objectively put the U.S. in a worse position than it was under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

with Iran, certainly in the total geopolitical situation with regards to increased Iranian power and influence in the region at the end of this. Now, whatever they—first of all, the Iranians and the Americans, as far as we know, are not actually meeting each other.

And that needs to be pointed out. They are exchanging messages, as far as I can tell, usually even that through intermediaries—the Pakistanis, possibly the Omanis and the Qataris as well—maybe playing some role in that situation. And a number of other countries, Turkey, Egypt, are kind of on the fringes of all of this. Certainly, Trump loves to throw their names in there out of the blue occasionally when he's making posts that seem to indicate some type of common Middle Eastern or Arab consensus, although that's not clear. The main problem here is that, first of all, we've had two major incidents of military conflict, if you want to call them skirmishes.

I think the U.S.-Iranian exchange went beyond the level of the skirmish that occurred during the last week, right, in the run-up to this. And the first one was between Iran and Israel. And this is very important for—that is very important for any possibility of any final agreement, any final deal being reached. Because Israel has, during the entire time of this ceasefire, denied a previous agreement that was reached between the U.S. and Iran through the Pakistanis, which the Pakistanis have confirmed—that that ceasefire was supposed to extend to Lebanon as well, and Gaza for that matter. And of course, the Israelis never accepted that, and they continued their occupation and ethnic cleansing of southern Lebanon all this time.

The most that can be said is that for most of the ceasefire, they refrained from airstrikes on the Lebanese capital of Beirut, even if they were hitting Tyre, Lebanon's second city, the largest city in the south, on a regular basis. So they completely continued operations. Now, they were paying a price for this all along. Hezbollah has very quietly, evidently become quite skilled in the use of drones, particularly fiber-optic drones, the sort of drones that Russia has become a pioneer of for the last couple of years in Ukraine. Just saying. Wonder how Hezbollah got those drones and that knowledge and training to use them so effectively. So they've been making Israel pay a price, certainly.

And that's well reported and complained and whined about in the Israeli press. But at the beginning, or should I say the end of last week, last weekend, what we saw was Israel shifted and returned to airstrikes on Beirut, specifically the Dahiya neighborhood, which is historically a Hezbollah stronghold, supposedly. And that evidently was a red line that Iran was no longer willing to accept. And they responded with strikes on Israel. And then Israel responded with some rather tepid strikes back on Iran. And that was the end of it, with Iran warning that Israel needed to stop its attacks on Iran, Lebanon, and Israel angrily responding that they wouldn't, and punctuating it just hours later with more airstrikes on Tyre in southern Lebanon.

Now, while Iran seemed to set a new strategic equation, which has never existed before — which is that if Israel attacks Lebanon, really Hezbollah, but Lebanon — then that is not acceptable to Iran, and Iran will strike back at Israel. That has not happened before. That is a new strategic equation.

And Israel even angrily talked about it in exactly those terms, saying they would not accept that new equation. First of all, it tells us that Iran is feeling their oats. They're feeling strength, that they're willing to implement this now with a U.S. small armada still sitting somewhere off their coast and with aircraft poised all throughout the Middle East to begin hostilities again. They're obviously feeling extremely confident.

It is a change, and it seems to be a somewhat unexpected change. Because as far as the U.S. and Israel are concerned, Hezbollah is a proxy of Iran. And one doesn't go to bat in a tense situation for one's proxy. One throws one's proxy under the bus. At least that's what the U.S. does. The Kurds are a perfect indicator of that, again and again and again. So they're somewhat surprised by Iran stepping up for Hezbollah, for Lebanon, in a way that they never have before. Now, Iran did threaten Israel that they needed to stop attacks on southern Lebanon as well as Beirut, and that they would reply if Israel replied and if they continued attacks on Lebanon. Well, Israel did reply on Iran, even if those were somewhat, shall we say, tepid retaliations.

And Israel immediately, within hours, resumed strikes on southern Lebanon. And Iran did not respond again. They let it go, shall we say. So now we know what Iran's real red line is: attacks on Beirut, attacks on the Lebanese capital are the real red line of Iran, beyond which they are attempting to set a new strategic equation to put the shield of their conventional ballistic missile and long-range drone strike deterrent in defense of at least the Lebanese capital. That is the new reality that is being established. And that's important because that hasn't happened before. Iran has never attacked Israel proactively because Israel attacked Lebanon before, or Hezbollah, however you want to term it.

That hasn't happened. So then the U.S. was trumpeting, or Trump personally anyway, was trumpeting that he was sneaking—the U.S. was sneaking—tankers through the Strait of Hormuz. They were doing this by going dark, by shutting off their transponders and hugging the Omani coast. Now, supposedly, according to reports that have come out through The New York Times—which means leaks, intentional leaks from the government—they were getting out about two or three tankers a day. Now, that's not a lot. That is much smaller than, for instance, the 120 or 130 tankers that were transiting the Strait of Hormuz on a daily basis before the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran began.

And even significantly less than the average of about 25 tankers that Iran themselves have selectively been letting through after agreeing with them and paying a toll. Sorry, not a toll, a service fee. A service fee. It's not a toll. Remember that. Totally not a protection racket. But anyway, it's a relatively small amount. But there does seem to be—and I say seem because there is some evidence of this, right? And of course, I don't trust anything that the U.S. or CENTCOM or Trump says—but independent trackers like Kpler, TankerTrackers, and others seem to indicate that some tankers, a number of them, have gotten through.

Now, the U.S. is not sending their Navy, right, into the Strait of Hormuz, and that's important to note. What they are doing is providing guidance, which says they've got their satellites, and

occasionally it seems they've put a helicopter or an aircraft in the air around or possibly even in that end of the Strait of Hormuz to, I don't know, provide moral support. I guess that's it. Go for it. Go for it. Come on. Come on. Come on. Come on. It's safe. Come on. Come on. Come on. Right. You know, we got a bird up there somewhere. We're watching.

#Nima

Right. You know, it seems, I mean, there's no way that Iran didn't know, right?

#Mark

They have enough radar and other sensors, a way of detecting. It's only a 21-kilometer stretch, so it means that Iran was probably letting a certain number of ships get through that way.

#Nima

Now, others, they were making occasional examples of them.

#Mark

Right. Their fast boats were coming out. They hit them with drones. We saw two more of these during the middle of the week. So they were being extremely judicious. But none of that takes away from the overall geoeconomic asymmetric leverage that Iran was still holding by, you know, cutting off the vast majority of the normal traffic through the Strait of Hormuz. Now, at the same time, with regards to the U.S. blockade, the U.S. has been a little bit more vigorous in trying to implement it, attacking a number of third-country, you know, flag-of-convenience-flagged ships.

And they actually hit a number of ships this week that were crewed by Indians, and one of which they killed three Indians, to which India rather meekly objected, I must say. And the U.S. immediately responded by hitting another Indian ship. So, yeah, no respect for India in this situation, by the way—no apologies, nothing. No, no. Yeah, and India has asked the U.S. to respect and to not attack civilians. And, of course, the U.S. just ignored India, right? That's the diplomatic power of the most populous and democratic, supposedly, country in the world. Anyway... India, you're going to have to take a side one of these days, man. Really, you are. You're going to have to take a side. You're going to have to pull that ostrich head out of the sand and take a side.

Regardless, what we saw, I believe it was on Thursday, was that during one of these attempted guidance operations, Iran decided to smack back. And they knocked down one of the U.S. Apache helicopters that was supposedly providing this moral support, flying around the Strait of Hormuz to encourage another tanker to try to sneak through. And Iran hit them. As far as, you know, what the U.S. says and what seems to have been confirmed by some Iranian official statements, yeah, that's what happened. They were lauded as heroes and martyrs and so forth. So they hit an Apache with a

Shahed drone, and that was it. And the U.S. felt the need to respond to this, Trump making another blustery, you know, fire and fury post.

And the U.S. responded with some strikes on Iran that, as far as I can tell, mostly seemed to target, attempted to target air and missile defense installations. But among the other targets that they hit were water reservoirs, which is not in any conceivable stretch of the imagination a legitimate military, dual-use, anything target. Water reservoirs—this is a war crime. And the New York Times even admitted this and said, well, if the Trump administration knew about it and knew what they were hitting—of course they fucking did—then it was a war crime. So that is a new level of escalation, of course. And it is a sign of desperation, not strength, as the Iranian Speaker of the Parliament, Ghalibaf, pointed out almost immediately in a post.

So depriving 20,000 civilians of at least running drinking water, potable water. For what? I don't know. If Iran were to adhere to the quid pro quo type of retaliation they have kept to, you would expect them, you could expect them to hit back at a Gulf Arab state, you know, allied with the U.S., from which the U.S. has allied water infrastructure, which would likely mean desalination plants. And that is a major escalatory card that Iran has yet to pull because the Gulf Arab states rely on desalination for the water supply for their populations, from between 60 and 90%, depending on the country.

Meaning that if Iran seriously hit their desalination, that's it. They become unlivable as a country. They've got to have mass evacuations of population and so forth. And Iran did not rise to that bait on this occasion, interestingly, because they have held to a pretty firm quid pro quo policy when it came to attacks on energy infrastructure before. But they did not go after the Gulf states' water infrastructure as a result. But Iran certainly did reply back, and they pounded U.S. military bases—some 12 locations, I believe—in Kuwait and Bahrain and Jordan. And in Bahrain, I know they supposedly destroyed one of the last remaining long-range U.S. big radar equipment left in the Middle East that they hadn't destroyed during the first round.

And they also hit an airfield, an air base used by the U.S. in Jordan. And there are various reports of either U.S. or Jordanian F-16s being hit, possibly F-35s, F-15Es being hit. We don't know for sure. But the U.S., of course, and Jordan denied that any missiles hit. That has already been proven incorrect by the low-res satellite. But that's just like the U.S. and Israel and the Gulf states denied, denied, denied all previous Iranian hits on these bases. And then a week or two or three later, the satellite info came out, and it was like, yeah, they hit it, and they hit it pretty good.

Oh, and another week later, oh, the damage was a lot more extensive than we admitted and so forth. So that truth will likely slowly dribble out. If Iran managed to damage or destroy a number of F-16s or possibly even F-35s, that's not something the U.S. is going to be able to keep secret in perpetuity, right? I mean, unless you want to say, I don't know. It is entirely possible, of course, that these F-35s would have just had laundry fires, you know, I mean, because that is a hazard. You know, the laundry facilities on F-35s are a problematic thing. That's well admitted.

Anyway, so it seems to me that Iran's tap back against the U.S. was at a higher escalatory level and showed greater capability, certainly against military targets — I'm not talking about water reservoirs — than the U.S. gave to Iran. Once again, signaling to me that Iran has escalatory dominance over the U.S. in this situation, not only asymmetrically with regards to the Strait of Hormuz, but even conventionally in the region. So Trump was going to bomb, he was going to destroy, he was going to seize Kharg Island, he was going to take all of Iran's oil. All they needed, of course, to do was to surrender and admit that the U.S. is the greatest power, and then they could have the greatest deal in the world.

And all of these other absolutely unhinged, delusional, megalomaniac, madman comments. I mean, do Americans really understand that? That their president is talking like a cartoonish Bond villain. Actually, quite seriously, I think most of the Bond villains have better dialogue, more serious dialogue than Trump does. But he sounds like an unhinged madman. And I believe that probably because he is an unhinged megalomaniac, an extremely insecure little madman. Yeah. But regardless, we had, later on that very evening, another serving of tacos delivered by Trump — Thursday tacos this time. And Trump announced that a deal was once again about to be reached.

And he was calling off his scheduled Armageddon on Iran once again for the 39th time. I've lost count how many times. And then everything since then has been the U.S. and Iran making various claims and denials about the memorandum of understanding that they were supposedly about to sign, or sign off on, or put their digital thumbprint on, whatever, with each other. And that tells me that there are extreme problems, because they both are saying that they're still holding to their own positions, largely, and there's no indication that either one of them has, at least publicly, agreed to the concessions. Now, as far as I'm concerned, Iran has the escalatory dominance.

They are in the dominant position. They have all the cards. They have the leverage. And it should be the U.S. making concessions to them — concessions like withdrawing sanctions, concessions like returning Iran's stolen money that the U.S. has frozen for years. And Iran is even saying that is a precondition, at least some portion of it, to the memorandum of understanding, you know, which, again, is not a deal. It's like a pre-deal. It's like a prenuptial, I guess, something like that. But even that, the U.S. is denying that they're going to return any money. And they're saying they're going to get all the nuclear dust.

And Iran is saying that's not even part of the initial memorandum of understanding. That's a couple of months down the line, and we're not making any commitments on that. Although some of the statements seem to indicate that they actually are willing to dilute their own enriched uranium, essentially because apparently they feel they don't need it anymore. They've discovered their power, their nuclear option of the Strait — control of the Strait of Hormuz — and how that is much more powerful in many ways, and certainly much more usable than a nuclear deterrent.

#Nima

Mark, sorry for interrupting. There are two points. One of them is the Iranian frozen assets. The other one, Iranian sanctions. What we've learned so far from just last night, one of the members of the Iranian parliament, who was part of that delegation that went to Islamabad, said two points. One of them, the Iranian frozen assets — upon signing this memorandum of understanding, the United States is gonna release 50% of Iranian frozen assets via the Qatari government, and the Qatari government would be in charge of releasing that. The second point is they're going to have some sort of energy waivers, as we've seen on the oil and petrochemical products of Iran. But when it comes to the sanctions, they're going to be down the road, not right now. It's going to be 60 days or down the road. This is what we've learned last night.

#Mark

Yes, that is. And it must be said that the Americans are saying exactly the opposite — that there will be no return of frozen funds and that the nuclear deal is up front. And again, what they're talking about or texting about through intermediaries may be different than what Trump and others are screaming about publicly. There is that possibility. But it seems to me that there's not actually a lot of agreement or understanding about the memorandum of understanding that they are supposed to be digitally signing off on. So this is all very skeptical. And the Israelis are making it perfectly clear that they don't accept any of it, and that, in fact, the Iranian foreign minister, Bagheri Kani, went a bit further.

Not only is the cessation of hostilities, the ceasefire, supposed to be extended to Lebanon, but also that Israel is supposed to withdraw its military occupation of South Lebanon. And I don't believe, I certainly don't believe, that that is in the cards at all. So either Iran is going to back down from that point, or there will be no deal, right? Because there's no way that Israel — I mean, even if you could trust the U.S., and you can't — you certainly can't trust Israel, and they're going to do everything possible within their power to sabotage this. Because, as Netanyahu has pointed out, he spent 40 years trying to get the U.S. to fight Iran for Israel, and they've achieved that, and they're not going to give it up so easily. And, you know, if this ends like it is now...

That ends Netanyahu and all of his cohort's political careers, right? I mean, they'll be gone. I mean, not that they'll be replaced by anyone much better, you know, in geopolitical terms. But, you know, they have a personal interest as well as a geopolitical interest in making sure that no real peace deal ever occurs. However, I will note that Trump appears to be trying to arrange a rather interesting plan B for dealing with Hezbollah. For the second time, on, I believe, the 14th — so tomorrow, Friday — the al-Qaeda leader of what used to be Syria, the new Islamic State in Syria, al-Jolani, or al-Sharah as he's now known, will be visiting the White House. This comes, I think, two weeks after Trump sent him a refill of his own Trump brand cologne — a refill because evidently Jolani had said that he liked Trump's gift of cologne so much the first time.

I mean, this is just absolute, this is surreal. These little details of the surrealness of this. The U.S. president is giving his own brand of cologne as a gift to the al-Qaeda ruler of what used to be Syria.

That is just—anyway, it has to be remarked that this whole thing would have never been possible, the last two years of attacks on Iran, without the overthrow of the Syrian government by Western-backed, Western and Turkish-backed al-Qaeda. That has to be noted. But one of the things that they're quite openly going to discuss, and this was openly said by Trump, is that he wants to get Damascus, meaning al-Qaeda, to fight Hezbollah for him and for Israel. So that may be part of a plan B that Trump is trying to sell Netanyahu on.

#Mark

We'll promise them something now. We're going to sic al-Qaeda on them.

#Mark

As we already have sicced al-Qaeda on Syria. Now we'll sic them on Hezbollah. And of course, eventually, if that works, we'll sic them on Iran as well down the road. But that may be part of what Trump will try to sell to Netanyahu to back down for now, because I'm going to sic this mad dog on a leash here, al-Qaeda in Syria. If Syria and, you know, meaning al-Qaeda, Jolani, and Turkey, who has real ownership over the al-Qaeda regime in the Islamic State of Syria, agree to that, which is not clear, but it's certainly not impossible.

So that is an interesting point, possible branch of all of this. I think it's kind of a plan B that Trump might be trying to sell. First, he's got to sell it to al-Jolani in Turkey, and then he's got to sell it to Netanyahu. But it is certainly something to watch, and I'm going to be watching that with some nervousness and caution in all of this. But I have to say, if at least publicly they're not agreeing at all on the most basic provisions, even to get the BS memorandum of understanding that is a pre-agreement digitally signed off on, what real reason is there to believe that any of this is going to be followed through and that there is going to be some deal and some type of real, at least temporary, cessation of hostilities between at least the U.S. and Iran?

The two positions are still too incredibly far apart, and too much of what Iran wants, the U.S. cannot force—regime change or their demands on Iran. They obviously do not have that power conventionally or with Iran's asymmetric leverage. And for all the power, asymmetric in particular, with control of the Strait of Hormuz that Iran has in this situation, they can't politically force the United States to do a lot of what their 14 points—which supposedly the memorandum of understanding still follows—either. And where does that leave us? With some type of semi-permanent state of hostilities and armed presence in the Middle East going on possibly for years, at least until Trump is out of office. That's entirely possible. I mean, that actually is the more likely scenario out of this.

While the Arab states and much of the rest of the world will quietly come to some type of terms or arrangement with Iran, accepting their at least temporary control of the Strait of Hormuz and paying off on service fees to resume some level of normal trade. And we have word that two of the Arab

states, the UAE and Qatar—again, this is coming from the Western press—have been, according to the New York Times and others, cutting deals with Iran through the last weeks.

Qatar, from the very beginning, evidently trying to get some degree of protection for their own gas fields and coming to some agreement with Iran that Iran wouldn't hit them, which evidently was given up after either Israel or the U.S. hit Iran's own South Pars gas field. And then they felt the need to, you know, obliterate that arrangement with Qatar. But also the UAE, which by all of their own statements has been the most hawkish of the Gulf Arab states against Iran this whole time, participating—we now have confirmed—quite actively in strikes on Iran. But now, in the last week, supposedly cutting some type of deal with Iran, including even possibly returning some of Iran's stolen money from the UAE, which is, of course, a global financial center, as part of their own coming to terms with Iran and restoring some level of their normal use of the Strait of Hormuz in the foreseeable future.

So I think we see this already, that even if the U.S. can't come to grips with Iran, ultimately, no matter how much Trump tries to spin it, if he agrees to some of Iran's demands and tries to spin it as a victory, he's only going to be able to do that so much because, again, it leaves Iran in control of the Strait of Hormuz. So if he can't do that, then he's just going to, I guess, quietly fade into the background. Some potential for low-level flare-ups of hostilities in and around the Gulf of Oman and the Strait of Hormuz for the foreseeable future, while the Gulf states cut their own modus vivendi with Iran and return to something approximating a new normal of economic and relations activity in the Middle East.

I think that that is a lot more likely than any real deal being reached between the U.S. and Iran. Now, they may publicly agree to something, but I also think that if they do, it's also far more likely that that itself will collapse in 12 months, if not weeks or days as well. Ultimately, their two positions are too far apart. And if the U.S. was acknowledged as giving in to Iran in this situation, that would be tantamount to signing off on the obituary of U.S. hegemony. And they're just not willing or capable of doing that. No U.S. president can do that. So they will maintain a bad, very bad status quo rather than do that—far more likely.

#Nima

Just moments ago, a senior Israeli official on Channel 12 in Israel said, "This is a shitty agreement." For them, it is. I have no doubt about that.

#Mark

I have anything, you know, at this point that leaves Iran as a functioning, you know, country capable of hitting back at Israel, as they've certainly demonstrated in the past few months—past year, actually—that is going to be shitty for them. There's no question there. But they will, of course, try to salvage and spin the situation as much as they can, much like Trump will. But at this point, if

you'll remember, Trump has twice now addressed the issue of the nuclear dust, as he calls it—the enriched uranium issue—and talked about how it's necessary for the U.S. to get it, while at the same time he says we don't actually need it. It's mostly PR, or another time he called it mostly psychological, right?

Admitting that there really is no real belief that Iran is about to, or has any intention down the line, of developing a nuclear weapon. That's just part of, one, their justification for launching regime change operations on Iran—a fallback way of declaring a victory that is absolutely no victory at all, because Iran never had a nuclear weapons program to begin with. That's the surreal level that the U. S. is operating on here. I mean, where even Trump has twice admitted it would be mostly PR, we don't really need it, it's mostly psychological. And it is. And that was one of these rare moments where Trump actually said something frank and honest in between all the bluff and bluster and threats and whining and complaints and megalomania that come out of the man.

#Nima

I really feel increasingly...

#Mark

As an international relations theory and security specialist dealing with this whole situation, because Trump has so much agency over all of this, understanding that man really requires a degree, I think, in psychology or psychotherapy or dealing with mentally disadvantaged people. I think that might actually be far more useful than a postgraduate degree in international relations theory in this particular instance. How do you feel about that?

#Nima

Yeah. I actually, when I look at the situation between, I don't believe that any of these things that they're talking about would remain the way that they're talking about, because there is no good record of the Trump administration. Nothing, nothing is out there to say that this time they were honest in the way that they were talking about, for example, that part, that particular little part of the war. They were honest. Nothing.

#Mark

Not even about the war, about everything. Whether we're talking tariffs, or kidnapping the Venezuelan president and claiming it was drug ops, or ripping up deals that were previously agreed to with the Europeans or others, they are honest—honest about nothing. And they are incompetent at diplomacy. I mean, they're not even using the State Department. Trump uses his slimy New York real estate buddy Witkoff and his twink son-in-law, Jared Kushner, whom a British diplomat has openly said are essentially Israeli assets, rather than even his own State Department. It tells you the

level of incompetence that not only the Iranians, but every other country in the world—the Russians and everyone else—has to deal with. So when we get statements coming out of Russia and Iran and China saying that not only is the U.S. agreement incapable, they are diplomacy-incapable under Trump.

#Nima

Exactly. I think that's the key. Yeah, there is no diplomacy.

#Mark

All that leaves is a position of strength in dealing with Trump. You need to keep your jackboot on that orange mofo's neck, or you can't count on anything.

#Nima

Mark, I can promise you that Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff, they implemented something like ten rounds of negotiations with Kirill Dmitriev and other people, with Iranians. They know nothing about what has happened in Ukraine, what the main problems in Ukraine are. I don't know. Or Iran, for that matter. They know nothing about the nuclear program and the complexity of that issue. And they're not willing to have any sort of technical teams.

#Mark

Hey, you out there watching this show, you know more about the situation—the real situation—than Jared Kushner or Steve Witkoff do. How does that make you feel? You, audience out there, you know more about it. And that's what Iran has to deal with. And that's what Russia has to deal with. And that's what China has to deal with from this administration.

#Nima

Mark, what do you make of this new section in the United States that they're trying to put out, 224, merging the U.S. military with the Israeli one? We had the other, you know, some politicians in the United States are asking for the same section for Ukraine as well. So it means, I don't know what that means in the long run, because it's a huge trap for the United States if they decide to go that far. We know that the politicians are totally dominated by Israel and the Zionists.

#Mark

As John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, the two foremost realist political scientists of our day—and John Mearsheimer, maybe the foremost realist IR theorist of all time—have written about extensively, the lobby and the pernicious effect of Israeli influence over U.S. foreign policy in

particular, but politics, of course, in general. I think it's fabulous. I think it's great. Is there anything that will hasten the end of the U.S. even more than they're already doing than doing that? Because it will tie them down to fighting Israel's wars against all of its neighbors in the Middle East.

Which, of course, will be very unfortunate if you're one of Israel's neighbors in the Middle East in the short term. But sitting in my armchair from Russia, you know, as a geopolitical IR perspective, that is disastrous for U.S. foreign policy. So, wonderful. Go for it. I'm all for it. Sorry, I've long since left America and taken Russian citizenship, so I don't have America's best interests at heart. And I see them as just, you know, one more step closer to the precipice of U.S. hegemony, if we can even talk about that at this point. So, fabulous.

#Nima

I think nobody can deny that the outcome of the war is that U.S. hegemony was shaken and was somehow... Oh, yeah. There's nothing of that. We can argue that the United States still has influence on GCC countries, but that hegemony... it's less than it ever was. Those days are gone.

#Mark

Yeah, I mean, there's no question. No serious Arab leader can say that the U.S. in any way provides a security guarantor, you know, any type of security relationship. It actually makes them less secure, makes them targets in conflicts. And now it's more like just their unfortunate relationship with a mafia-style organization that they're still stuck in to some degree, while looking for other multi-vector options now, which, to be fair, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have already obviously been trying to do for some time, even if they got sucked back into this whole affair.

But yes, Iran's position in the Middle East will almost inevitably be far greater as a result of this. We've even had an article in the New York Times calling Iran now—and I'm not necessarily completely agreeing with this—but it's at least a possibility that Iran emerges from this as the fourth great power in the world. Right, maybe a step below China, the U.S., then Russia, then a bigger step down to Iran, but certainly much more so than, say, India or Europe or something else on that scale, largely due to their influence or control over the Strait of Hormuz and, through Ansar Allah, through the Bab al-Mandab Strait as well.

And simply, you know, having endured a full-scale war launched by both the U.S. and Israel, what we have been led to believe for decades had two of the most powerful militaries on the planet, and stood tall, right, and gave back at least as good, if not better, than they got. That has a certain geopolitical cachet and bragging rights and respect and fear that go with it, all of its own. So, I mean, when you look that the U.S. is at the same time losing a proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, that it is slowly trying to, at least publicly—yes, the CIA is still fully engaged and escalating—but at a public level, trying to disengage and disassociate, and at least in the public sphere, dump it off on the Europeans.

Meaning that they've lost to one degree or another, and then followed up immediately by this with Iran, where there's no proxy conflict here. They have directly launched a declared regime change war against Iran and failed immediately. And on top of that, Iran is now in a greater position of strength in the Middle East than before, as nearly every Western analyst with a lick of reality has admitted that I've seen now. How do we then talk about U.S. hegemony? We can only talk about the tatters of it, and Russia and China and Iran and others having to manage the screaming, petulant child that was the U.S. hegemon, as it slowly will fade into irrelevance and temper tantrums and screaming about the Monroe Doctrine from the Western Hemisphere.

#Nima

Hmm. I think it remains to be seen, but it's going to be the same, the same, and the same. As we've seen since day one of this administration, this is the same administration. By the way, those people who are so optimistic about the deal between Iran and the United States, just remember Donald Trump was supposed to put an end to the war in Ukraine in 24 hours. 24 hours. Where are we two years later?

#Mark

They don't even talk about peace in Ukraine anymore. They've completely given up on that. I'll just say again, I've said it before, and I know that other people on your channel have said the same thing. All wars are one war now, at least anything that involves the U.S. in any way. So the conflict in Ukraine and the conflict in Iran are really just different battlefields of the same war for the global order of the future, right? Multipolar, bipolar, you know, however it ultimately emerges. But Iran has, in part, been able to be so successful in this conflict because the U.S.'s air defense interceptors were already at such a low level because they wasted so many of them in Ukraine, and their standoff munitions and interceptors, both from Blinken and Sullivan and then Trump, trying to play whack-a-mole against the Houthis in the desert.

All of this is part of the same conflict. So Iran was, in effect, already dealing with an already militarily attrited United States from this proxy war with Russia in Ukraine. Then, coming out of this conflict, Russia is now going to be given a boost in Ukraine because they've wasted so much more of their standoff munitions and air defense interceptors and military capacity in general in Iran, to no result, only to a negative result, that now Russia is in the complete driver's seat in Ukraine, and they don't really even need to fear a conventional U.S. intervention at some point later down the line, in Kiev or something far down the line.

So we see that while Russia and Iran and the Houthis and Hezbollah and others, they're not fighting side by side on the battlefield—although in Syria they were actually doing that for quite a time—because all wars are one war, they're all effectively allied with each other and benefiting from each other's engagements and skirmishes that are depleting the U.S. in these situations. And that's important. Russia and China and Iran and the Houthis and Hezbollah and others may not have a

formal military alliance, but that doesn't make the de facto military alliance in dealing with the dying U.S. hegemon any less real.

#Nima

Exactly. That's the main point, in my opinion. That's one of the most important points of these wars. And before wrapping up, please go to boosty.to/therealpolitic. You can see it right below Mark's name here on the picture, on the right side of Mark. If you move your head a little bit, yeah, you can see the link there, boosty.to/therealpolitic. You go there and follow Mark. Go ahead, Mark.

#Mark

Yeah, just one more tiny little detail to punch home what I just said, because I get a lot of—there's always a lot of crazy comments in the—sorry, guys, for those of you who have those views—but that Russia is ruled by Zionists or some nonsense like that in the comments. But about a month ago or so, there was an incident at the Moscow airport when a number of Israeli citizens, and it must be said dual citizens of Russia and Israel, were transiting through and were thrown into interrogation and detention for hours. And this was reported in the Israeli press as well as in the Russian press.

And one of the things that the Russian security officials who detained them contemptuously said to them was that any enemy of Iran is an enemy of ours. This could not have happened without the signing off on it by the highest levels of the Russian government. And the fact that even mid-level Russian, you know, operatives, agents of the government, expressed that opinion so directly to Israelis and obviously believe it, tells us how tight this multipolar alliance really is and how much hope it should give us all for the future. And that's coming from me, the black-pilled cynic. It's moments like that that warm my cold, dark heart.

#Nima

Yeah, exactly, exactly. Thank you so much, Mark, for being with us today. Great pleasure, as always. Thanks for having me.