

Elijah Magnier: Israel's Endless War: A Political Suicide Mission?

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#Nima

Your latest article about what's going on, because basically the MOU, the Memorandum of Understanding between Iran and the United States, is totally dependent, in my opinion, on the situation in Lebanon, between Israel and Lebanon. As was emphasized, we had the Iranian foreign minister talking about this, and the head of the Iranian parliament. They were very insistent on their position vis-à-vis Lebanon. And here is your last piece that you wrote about: can Lebanon be separated from Iran? I think, what is the importance of your latest statement?

Your latest article that you said you published today is about the situation where Donald Trump somehow feels that he can bring Syria in. He says that Israel should back down a little bit, and maybe a new front from the northern part of Lebanon against Hezbollah. But the whole concept of Syria and the fall of Bashar al-Assad is basically about disconnecting Iran from Hezbollah, which hasn't happened so far from what we've seen. How do you see the current situation with the MOU and the way Donald Trump is talking about Israel backing down a little bit—not withdrawing from Lebanon, but backing down—and Syria coming in?

#Elijah

There are too many questions you put in one line, and it requires a whole day to explain them. However, I'll try to be as brief as possible. Now, first of all, let's take Syria. In Syria, Iran backed President Bashar al-Assad at the request of the Damascus government. It did not land in Syria just because it wanted to be part of the war. However, allies can sometimes be enemies depending on the war theater. And here I mean Turkey and Russia. When Russia started being involved in Syria, its involvement was against the jihadists, but not in favor of Bashar al-Assad.

Therefore, Iran had a different objective: to respond to the Syrian government's request to support the government against the jihadists, but also against the Americans and the Israelis who were playing on Syrian ground. However, for Iran, it was important because it was a direct lifeline to Hezbollah. Hezbollah and Iran have an organic relationship. They're not only simple allies, and they're certainly not the definition that is used by the West and academia, unfortunately, that Hezbollah

is a proxy. And I don't need to say it; I need to prove it. First of all, Iran went to war on behalf of its ally, Lebanon—Hezbollah in particular. It did not happen vice versa, the other way around.

Hezbollah did not go to war on behalf of Iran. Hezbollah did not intervene to support Iran, but to impose a new rule of engagement in Lebanon that Israel violated. But Hezbollah was engaged in Syria for so many years against the jihadists, including the current president, Ahmed al-Sharaf, who landed in Syria after being released by the Americans from prison because he was with ISIS. And ISIS leader Emir Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi at that time sent him to Syria as his representative in the Levant. And when he became powerful, he decided to go solo and pledge loyalty to Al-Qaeda leader Sheikh al-Zawahiri.

This is when the fight between Al-Qaeda and ISIS happened. But then again, Ahmad Sharif went to Turkey and then became a very close ally of Turkey. This background is important to answer your question. So, will Syria go to Lebanon and attack Hezbollah? Certainly not, for many reasons. First, the jihadists, the previous jihadists now in control of the government, have tasted the meaning of confronting Hezbollah and the way they were defeated. The jihadists managed to defeat the Syrian army that refused to fight during the days when Bashar al-Assad had fallen, and because the conspiracy was much bigger than him.

Secondly, because Turkey heard from Benjamin Netanyahu several times that when we finish with the Shia, we will start against the Sunni, and he mentioned Turkey and Qatar. It is impossible for Turkey, an ally of Iran on so many levels but not with Bashar al-Assad, to accept the defeat of Hezbollah, which is fighting Israel out of ideology and for the liberation of the Lebanese occupied territory, and allow Israel, an ally of Turkey, to go and defeat Hezbollah. That is impossible. But let's assume the answer is yes, and then clear the road for the Israelis to go against Turkey. So, the impossibility of President al-Sharaf to go against Hezbollah militarily.

Secondly, it is not a favor that anyone will give to Israel and America. President Sharaf told the Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam, do not talk to the Israelis and make our mistake because they don't want a deal. He tried to strike a deal with Israel, but Israel refused because any deal would lead to the return of the Golan Heights and Quneitra and all the area in Syria occupied by the Israelis. So we have so many reasons why this is kind of an imagination or wishful thinking of President Donald Trump, who is not really knowledgeable about the dynamics of the geopolitics in that part of the area.

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But when it comes to Lebanon today, we know that for Israel, they really felt that the assassination of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, together with the assassination of the Iranian leaders, then the fall of Bashar al-Assad, then this sort of delusion, this sort of regime change that the United States has done in Syria and Venezuela — the outcome of all these events could come to some sort of new equation against Iran, which has failed, which has totally failed so far. But do you think the way that

Israel sees Hezbollah today is realistic, or are they having this sort of rhetoric? Because when it comes to Israel, we are so much blind, in my opinion, about what is happening in the minds of Israelis vis-à-vis Iran, vis-à-vis the region, because it's all about occupation. It's all about grabbing land. It's all about death and destruction.

That's why you don't see the foreign minister of Israel. Nobody knows him. And it's all about the, you know, the head of, you know, the military. It's all about the Israeli defense ministry. It's all about that. What do we know about their understanding of Hezbollah today and the capabilities of Hezbollah, since they're fighting Hezbollah and they're seeing how Hezbollah, even after the assassination, after all those attacks in the southern part of Lebanon, they're fighting back with their drones, with their rockets, ambushes, and the casualties that they're, you know, they're having in the southern part of Lebanon are part of their calculation. We had the Israeli ambassador to the UN saying how these drones are becoming some sort of strategic problem for Israel. Your understanding of that and the way Israel sees Lebanon.

#Elijah

You tackle a topic that I've studied for 35 years as an academic and also as a journalist. Hezbollah is highly misunderstood by all players, including Israel. Generally speaking, they understand the military aspect, and I will explain. During the war, Benjamin Netanyahu, after the Pagar attack and the assassination of Hezbollah leaders, said that he received a book from the intelligence services, 80 pages, and read every single page to understand that Hezbollah was actually the driving force in front of Iran and not behind Iran.

He was right in many aspects, but bottom line, Hezbollah had its own agenda, but it's an organic relationship with Iran and an ideological one. Nevertheless, the Israelis, and certainly the Americans, never understood that assassinating leaders will not change anything in ideological hybrid actors, because Hezbollah cannot be defined as a non-state actor, since it is present in the parliament, in the ministry, cabinet, in municipalities, everywhere. So it is part of the state, but it is a hybrid actor. Therefore, if you remove a leader, these organizations have horizontal leadership, not vertical. You remove one, there are others who would replace them.

The assassination strategy that Israel adopts is a tactical one because Benjamin Netanyahu taught Israeli society to be more theatrical than political. To reach the essence and strategic outcomes, he can reach tactical outcomes. That's why he brags about "we've killed that leader, we killed that leader, we assassinated this person, we have a long arm, we can reach anywhere." Of course, he can reach anywhere when he has half of the world supporting him with false passports and supporting the Mossad wherever they operate, even if they are arrested. And they were arrested in Cyprus, in Switzerland, in Europe, in many places, and then in Jordan, but then released. So having all this support and this facility, you can go and kill anyone and get away with it because there is no accountability.

However, the Israelis, after the 7th of October, have switched doctrine. Today, they understand the necessity of creating a buffer zone in the territory of the enemy, not in their territory. This is why they went and occupied 53% of Gaza, that is 60% now, and Netanyahu instructed the army to go to 70%. This is why the Israelis went to Lebanon and occupied more or less seven to ten percent of the Lebanese territory, or at least they are operating in this territory, making it difficult for the people to return because they want to create a buffer zone in the Lebanese territory. And they did the same in Syria, in the Golan Heights, in Quneitra, and they adopted the same doctrine.

In the West Bank, the West Bank used to be 20% of Palestine; today it's 10%. Because again, they have created this buffer zone inside the Palestinian territory, but not the Israeli-controlled territory. The doctrine today with Iran has failed for a very specific reason. The Axis of Resistance did not have a common command and control center until June 2024. It was just a deterrence by narrative. It was something that was used but never had a common operations room where they all fight together, coordinate, and mount attack and defense at the same time. When Iran was unlawfully hit in June 2024, this is when Iran understood the necessity of supporting these allies that had received a setback because of the Israelis and the Americans and the rest of the West's support, because everybody supported Israel after the 7th of October.

So when we see Iran in June 2025 retaliating after 17 or 18 hours, and Iran retaliating after 15 minutes, the first in June 2025 and the second one in February 2026, we understand that Iran prepared for the battle as it is preparing today. Because Iran was attacked twice during negotiations, and now it is going to sign a framework. It is another negotiation, and Iran believes the U.S. is untrustworthy, and Iran can be attacked before, during, or after the negotiation. So the Israelis today are caught because Donald Trump is asking them to leave the buffer zones. Iran is very clever; it is asking to halt all the wars on all fronts, and that includes Gaza, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and Iran. And the Israelis are saying, we want to have freedom of action, and we want our buffer zone.

And this is when we hear the criticism coming from Donald Trump against Benjamin Netanyahu, who is directing Channel 14 and his ministers to attack Trump. But he's saying, I need to deal with the president wisely. He doesn't want to come out and attack him. But Benjamin Netanyahu will never accept that in the next six months he has to withdraw from what he calls a buffer zone, because that means going to jail, since he has three corruption cases, and he will fall in the prime ministership elections unless he confesses, and then he needs the president of Israel to pardon him. But that would, in any case, be the end of his political career. So for the Israeli prime minister today, it's a matter of an existential issue for his political career, but not for Israel.

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Yeah. Today, the Israeli Defense Minister, Israel Katz, said anyone who raises a hand against the State of Israel in Gaza, in Lebanon, Syria, or anywhere else knows there is a price to pay. And, you know, first of all, they lose the land, then they lose their home. This is the strategy on their part. I

think the war against Iran has broken the whole picture of Israel in the Middle East, because Israel, before this war started, thought that it would influence Lebanon, would influence Syria. They thought that they had destroyed acts of resistance. You remember those days before the war started, before June 2025 — I'm talking about the first round of attack on Iran — because Israel started the attack on Iran with the green light of the Trump administration in those days. So this is what's going on. Right now, how do you compare Israel, the way it was before June 2025, and the way it is today, and how it is perceived by public opinion in the region?

#Elijah

Israel thought in June 2025 that it was capable of fighting Iran on its own. According to what Donald Trump said after the war, Benjamin Netanyahu begged him after five days to stop the war, which means when Benjamin Netanyahu understands that his objectives are impossible to reach, he uses destruction of anything because he has the Air Force to destroy and the American bombs to use very generously. And then he wants to stop because he can't cope with the Iranian missiles. Now, for Benjamin Netanyahu, according to U.S. Congressman Van Hollen, it was an opportunity. Van Hollen said after 40 years, Israel found a stupid American president to drag him into a war against Iran. These are his words, which is true.

It is very unique for Israel to drag the Americans to start and finish a war on its behalf and invest all its military might. However, I think, I don't want to be cynical, but that was the biggest favor that the Americans and the Israelis did to Iran in February 2026. Iran was afraid of a war with America. After all, America is a superpower, the strongest army in the world, and has 780 military bases and can bomb from anywhere. Iran went to the deal with Barack Obama in 2015 because it wanted to avoid the war. When the Americans and the Israelis crossed that threshold and then went to war, Iran accepted what was imposed on it, defended itself, and managed to prevent the Americans and the Israelis from achieving their objectives. Then Iran has taken another position of power.

And what Benjamin Netanyahu told us, that he is going to be a superpower in the Middle East — these are his words. In fact, Iran has become the power, the regional power in the Middle East. And we are returning to the position of Iran in the Middle East, similar to the one of the Shah, but with the Islamic Republic. So before 1979, Iran was the strongest country in the Middle East. Today, after 47 years, all the Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, who asked Donald Trump, if you want to go to war with Iran, finish it off, because they understand what that means — that Iran is coming out as it is today. Iran bombed all the Gulf countries according to UN Article 3314 because these Gulf countries used their territory as a platform and a theater to attack Iran.

Today, these Gulf countries will pay, like, I mean, it makes me laugh because Saddam Hussein used to assassinate and execute people and then send the body to the parents and ask them to pay for the bullet. Iran today will receive reconstruction money from the same countries it has bombed, the Gulf countries, because they allowed the Americans to use their bases in the Gulf, and it is going to receive compensation for that. That is a position of strength. Benjamin Netanyahu today

understands that with his narrative that after the war with Iran, he will wait for the Arabs standing in line to come and beg for a relationship with Israel — that has crumbled. There's no longer anyone begging for a relationship with a loser, because a loser doesn't have many fathers. It has only one father.

And the Gulf countries today understand the necessity to have a deal with Iran, and particularly a security agreement, because they don't want to be bombed again. And they don't want an American president to use their territory, drag them to war without asking their opinion, and then they have to pay the price. So the balance has shifted dramatically, and this is what Benjamin Netanyahu is feeling, not Donald Trump. Donald Trump said, okay, I'm a gambler, I was told that in three days I will finish it off, this is another Venezuela, a very quick victory, and then I can claim the Nobel Prize because I managed to stop nine wars in the Middle East in a word. And then he said, I want to change the regime. Yesterday he changed his mind. He said, no, no, this is not what I want.

And he said he wants to contribute to the election of the Wali al-Faqih, which is the leader of the revolution. That is an indication of his ignorance of the Iranian system of election and what happened. He believes it has no consequences. And then he said he will shake hands and go and meet Sayyid Mojtaba Khamenei, not realizing that he's the one who killed his father and his mother and many members of his family. So all that lack of understanding increased the distrust of Iran but forced Iran to impose a very harsh agreement on the Americans, where in 2015 Iran had to prove its goodwill by implementing everything first. And now Iran is demanding from the Americans to implement everything first themselves. The Americans have to implement everything first, starting from the most difficult one, which is stopping the war in Lebanon and withdrawing all the Israeli forces within 60 days.