

Richard Wolff: How The War United Iran?

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#Nima

What has happened last night, all of a sudden, two sides, Iran and the United States, have published that 14-point MOU, Memorandum of Understanding. And Donald Trump, on the part of the United States, and Iranian President Pesachian, have signed it — signed the document. It was digitally signed. It seems that on Friday they're going to have some sort of meeting. It's not all about the signature, because they have already signed the document. It's going to be about the next step and how they're going to implement those points in that memorandum, that MOU. Looking at the memorandum, before coming up to this slide, you said you looked at the points briefly. What is your understanding of that?

#Richard

Well, I believe it is a historic document. It is well worth reading, no matter what happens from now on. However, we should keep in mind it is just an MOU. It is a statement about mostly what they intend to do. It is not binding on what they will do. Many of the points are worded in a way that they're conditional. And in addition, Mr. Trump has added more conditions already in the hours since he signed it, talking about Iranian behavior. He likes to use the words, "Do they behave themselves?" clearly suggesting that elements of that memorandum will or will not be binding on the United States, depending on the United States' judgment about how Iran is behaving.

I'm going to presume—I haven't read statements by Iranian officials—but I'm going to presume that they are taking the same position. They will do whatever. And so, as you read through it, you begin to understand that there are two or three things that seem to be going to happen right away, pretty clearly, and then a great many things that may or may not be part of a final deal, may or may not look then the way they look now in the memorandum. So it is very important for people not to get carried away and imagine that this is a peace agreement. This is not that at all. Trump decided to do it in Versailles. For those who know some history, that's where the end of World War I was signed. This is not the end of a war. This was not that kind of signing. This is not that kind of document.

Having said that, it does appear to me, as I believe it does to a majority—not just of the world, but of Americans across the political spectrum—that this is a loss for the United States and a gain for Iran. Even Mr. Trump's Republican supporters are, at the very least, badly split on that subject, with

a significant number of people representing significant parts of his base looking at this and not quite believing it, which I need to say right off the bat for people to understand. Their opposition, which is now being mobilized, has in the past led Mr. Trump to go backwards and undo or try to undo what he has done. Is that a possibility now? Absolutely. It would be naive of people not to see that process unfolding. And it goes to an old American tradition—much older, by the way, than Mr. Trump.

He's using it, he's writing it, but it predates him. Here it is. In the United States, with its origins in a kind of Protestant, religious, theocratic way of thinking, which bumps up against the Islamic version of that in Iran—but put that aside for a minute. Here in the United States, we tend to demonize an adversary. If there's a Stalin in Russia, or today a Putin in Russia, if there's a Saddam Hussein, if there's a Muammar Gaddafi, if there's an Ayatollah in Iran, they are evil, monstrous. You develop a kind of religious notion of God on one hand—the good and the beautiful—and the devil, literally the opposite. Okay, when you do that and you mobilize your people to see in an adversary not someone you have a difficulty with, not someone whose interests diverge from yours...

No, no, no. You're seeing—I'm going to quote now from our highest officials—"Iran is a monstrous evil." That's a quote. "An evil monster." Well, you can't make a compromise with an evil monster. You don't make a deal. We have literature—Mephistopheles—the ironic disaster for a person who makes a deal with the devil. It's an old theme. You don't do that. So Mr. Trump rides on the demonization of Iran, and now he makes a deal with Iran. And if you watched his press conference, because he's so self-unaware, he talks about how, well, you can't really deny the missiles because other people in the Gulf area have missiles. And you can't really deny—what is he doing? He's trying to convince people how to be reasonable with people you're trying to make a deal with.

If you want a deal, you've got to give if you're going to get. But it's too late. He can't do that. He's been riding on it, so he splits his base. Half of them will see, "Oh, he's reasonable," and they want to support him, and they will. The other half, or whatever the proportions are, will be horrified. He is making a deal with the devil, which we good people... And you get into a really crazy... And out of that, I don't know what comes, and I don't think anybody does. Predicting the future is dangerous always, and in this situation, twice as dangerous. But here is what will happen. As best we can tell—and all of this, I'll come to in a moment—is conditional on Israel and on the American relation to Israel, which is becoming more important, I think, with every passing hour.

But before we get to that, quickly, number one, the Strait of Hormuz will open. Number two, oil tankers will now move through that thing. That will earn a good bit of money, as has been pointed out. Iran will immediately benefit by being able once again to ship and sell its oil. So will the other Gulf countries. They will all be grateful that the money is beginning to move again in a way that it didn't before. That seems to be what's going to happen. The blockade, if I understand, is already being withdrawn so that shipping can go. And that will make the stock market happy because it was nervous before. It's not good for the people who bought into the oil business, but there again, be careful because this could unravel. What could make it unravel? Well, number one, Israel.

It's crystal clear when you read the document—at least it was clear to me reading the document—that the two sides agreed that the territorial integrity of Lebanon is guaranteed by both sides. You can't do that if there are Israeli troops in southern Lebanon, which there are, and you can't do it if they are shooting rockets at each other, which they are, as best I can tell, continuing to do. So that has to stop. And that means the Israelis have to pull their troops back across the border into Israel. At least that has to happen. And then hopefully no more rockets sent across the border. Who's going to make the Israelis do that? Nobody can except the United States. So the issue becomes—and I don't see any way out of it—either the United States does that or it doesn't. How could it do it? Very easy.

You say to the Israelis, this has to stop or else no more weapons, no more money, no more support. Israel cannot survive under those circumstances. So the withdrawal of America becomes an existential threat, more powerful and more immediate than any threat from Iran. That's the reality. You may not like that, but that's the reality. What might it mean if the United States doesn't do it? There are ten different ways that could be done. One way that Mr. Trump will no doubt try is to pretend in some manner that he hasn't got the power, or that he has said something, but Mr. Netanyahu, or if he's replaced by Mr. Bennett, his opposition in the internal Israeli elections, who is the same, who is another Netanyahu with a different name, that these people are not reacting properly. He'll put it on them. It really won't matter. This is a game. It stretches it out.

It gives Israel another week, another month to keep doing what it's doing before it knows what it has to do. Or the United States, under Mr. Trump, and under the pressure being—I can't imagine, and I don't think any of your audience can imagine—the intensity with which Israel and its supporters inside the United States are working to make sure that pulling back from Lebanon is not required. Then there is a final possibility, which I don't know if anyone has raised, but it seems clear to me. You might involve Israel in a deal: withdraw from Lebanon because you've made a commitment you have to, and go invade somebody else. Let's see if Israel can find part of Jordan, part of Syria.

Who knows where you might recommence a Greater Israel project the way you have before. But you are observing, because the United States insists on it, this would make it possible for the United States to support Israel in an incursion into another country, insisting that it has nothing to do with the Iran withdrawal from Lebanon, when that's what it is. And it's a way of giving Israel something to offset the cost. This is what people like Trump and the others do. How the Gulf states will react if that happens, how that part of the world will react, no one can tell you. But I don't want to lose the details. I don't want to lose the bigger picture.

The power Iran has shown to stick to its commitments, have a position, refuse to let the United States bully them to drop it—whether that's enriching uranium or controlling the Strait of Hormuz—it really doesn't matter. Doing things the United States, as a global empire, is opposed to. They did it. They did it for years. They outmaneuvered the United States, who did things inside Iran, as Israel

did. That's how they knew who to assassinate and all of that kind of activity. And then they were bombed by these two countries and missiled and everything. And they didn't collapse. And they ended up getting this deal. This is a demonstration of anti-empire power that really has no parallel. It's different in at least one important way that I want to put on the table so people think about it.

Yes, the United States lost the war in Vietnam. It lost the war in Afghanistan. It basically lost the war in Iraq. But in all of those three cases, huge amounts of American ground troops were used. They were shipped 10,000 miles away, landed in that country, moved across as a massive military army control. And it was decided in American military strategy that a land-based war in Asia is not a good idea. Well then, what in the end is your military option? Answer: air power—airplanes, bombs, rockets. So they didn't use ground troops in Iran. Never, not even one. They used airplanes, missiles, drones, all the rest of it. And they failed. They failed with a land army in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq. And now they failed without one. And you know what that adds up to? It adds up to an empire that is more a paper tiger than a real one.

And how ironic that just at the same time that we were figuring that out, the American War Secretary, Mr. Hegseth, gives a speech in Europe, whether G7 or meeting, in which he says to the British, you have a paper tiger, your military is not adequate. And the British—or rather the Europeans—Mr. Rutte, who's quite a trip. Watching a slavish mentality display itself that way is really ugly. But in any case, there he is, having nothing to say about this immense insult that he's just received. But he's being told that your European military is a paper tiger when the world is watching the United States fail over and over and over again with its military adventures, and nowhere more dramatically than here. These, for me, are the big initial takeaways from what we have seen.