

# Anthony Aguilar: Netanyahu Orders IDF to Halt Lebanon Operations

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## #Nima

Hi everybody, today is Saturday, June 20th, 2026, and our dear friend Lieutenant Colonel Anthony Aguilar is here with us. Welcome back, Tony.

## #Anthony

Thank you. Thank you. It's good to be here. And, you know, it seems like in the last few days, a lot has changed and a lot hasn't. But some important things have, and they could make all the difference.

## #Nima

Yeah, exactly. And what's going on, just hours before, we had a very, you know, sort of, we had two sides fighting each other in Lebanon, in the southern part of Lebanon — Israeli forces, the IDF, and Hezbollah. The fight was so heavy. Looking at the footage and the pictures coming out of southern Lebanon, basically what Israel was trying to do was in the region close to Al-Tahrir Hill. Al-Tahrir Hill is so strategic. It's some sort of castle, if I'm not mistaken. And the importance of the location is, you know, this is the... They tried it five times before, and last night was the sixth. They failed to achieve the objective, the Israelis.

The importance of Al-Tahrir Hill is that this is a large Hezbollah fortress with dozens of underground tunnels and elevated shooting positions. It has the high ground — you go there and you can see all over the region. There are some reports that they have some sort of leverage even toward the northern part of Israel. They can see the northern part of Israel — that's the importance of Al-Tahrir Hill. And just moments ago, Iran was in communication with the United States, talking to each other, and they put a lot of pressure. Just two hours ago, we learned that they closed the Strait of Hormuz again to put pressure on the United States.

And the IDF, after receiving a lot of pressure from the United States, which came from the Strait of Hormuz — the Iranian pressure on the United States — announced that the ceasefire is coming

back. In the last 24 hours, I would say more than 10 times they said, we have a ceasefire, we don't have it, we're fighting. And Israel, by the way, just said 20 minutes ago that they were considering the ceasefire, but the problem is they're going to stay there if Hezbollah attacks them, and they're going to respond. This is the sort of situation they're facing, the two sides in Lebanon.

You can say, you know, as long as Israeli forces are in the southern part of Lebanon and these sorts of fights are happening, because Israel is there to achieve something. What is that? To destroy Hezbollah's positions, to destroy, you know, the southern part of Lebanon, the homes, everything, you know, the houses there, the villages, the cities. This is the agenda on the part of the Israelis. But when it comes to the situation and the way that the United States is trying to communicate with the Israelis, I know that you're aware of what's going on between the Trump administration and the Israeli officials. What is your understanding of that?

## **#Anthony**

Well, it seems that any effective communication or dialogue between the Israeli administration and the U.S. administration is certainly firewalled right now, I guess the best way to say it, between egos, between claims of sovereignty, claims of not agreeing with the memorandum of understanding for the deal that the United States would make with Iran. So I think that communication and diplomatic channels are strained because really, from Israel, from the U.S. perspective, we don't have an ambassador who is in Israel who is willing to have conversations with the Israeli government on behalf of the United States' interests. We have an ambassador in Israel who sides with Israel over the United States. So you really don't have that diplomatic balance of representing American interests.

And the truth be told is that this agreement, this memorandum of understanding with Israel, forges the path towards an agreement eventually—an actual treaty or armistice or official ending of the war—and the terms to it are in America's interest. When most Americans look at it, they say, well, this is a surrender, this is a loss. And that's true, it is. But at this point, for what the United States could have hoped to ever have achieved, this is in the United States' interest to end this war on the terms that are currently on the table, because the terms will only get worse the longer this goes on. Israel has a vested interest in continuing this conflict, keeping the United States and Iran in a military conflict.

It does not meet Israel's interests to have the United States and Iran in a ceasefire or a stalemate. Look at North and South Korea. North and South Korea have been in an armistice, a ceasefire, for over 70 years. They're still technically at war. So when you look at this, can a ceasefire still exist while a war hasn't ended? Well, of course it can. But that is not in Israel's interest. Israel's interests, based on their own political interests and their own geopolitical interests and their own Zionist interests, are that the war continues directly, kinetically, between the United States and Iran, which in a way allows Israel to continue its military operations in southern Lebanon with little attention or deflection.

So the United States doesn't really have an honest broker or a diplomatic representative in Israel to represent U.S. interests. In these negotiations, or in the 60-day planning for what the deal will be, we have Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff, highly underprepared and underskilled to conduct diplomatic negotiations with Iran. And then, in terms of, you know, the diplomat we have in Israel, they don't represent U.S. interests at all. So the United States is kind of in a position right now where we were a few days ago, where I said that the United States is at a point where it must make a choice.

Israel first or America first? To stick with this deal that the United States has made with Iran in the eyes of the world, or violate it, not follow it, and continue in conflict, whether it's kinetic or cold, with Iran, with the Strait of Hormuz always in question, with sanctions and releasing of assets and all these questions going back and forth in this, which could be a cold conflict or a hot conflict, to choose sides with Israel. So the United States has to make a choice. I think we're now seeing clearly, and I said this a few days ago, and I said it last night on another panel, another interview, that Iran doesn't have to respond with missiles and bombs.

They have something much more powerful and much more effective than a hypersonic missile or a ballistic missile, or even, quite frankly, a nuclear weapon — the leverage through the Suez or Hormuz to shut it down at will. And there's nothing that the United States Navy can do about it without high-intensity conflict, which is not in the U.S. interest either. So we're seeing right now, with what's happening today, Iran using its leverage. Okay, fine. Israel was continuing its fighting in Lebanon. We are not going to meet you in Switzerland. We're not sending our team to meet you in Switzerland to start talking about this deal when you aren't even meeting the first steps of this deal or this framework.

Continue, and there'll be further consequences. Okay, continue. In this moment, what were Iran's options? Conduct strikes in northern Israel, conduct strikes at the headquarters or central government buildings in Tel Aviv to send a message? Sure. All of those things are on the table. But what is really going to compel the United States to compel Israel to stop? Strait of Hormuz. So Iran has clearly understood the assignment and understands what has been learned in these previous 108 days of conflict, kinetic conflict, as to where the critical factor is, what's the lever, and they figured it out. And if the United States doesn't make a clear choice soon, there are multiple levers that Iran can manipulate here.

There's the Strait of Hormuz. There's kinetic strikes. Maybe not against Gulf nations, because most of the Gulf nations, I think, at this point are like, yeah, we're done with the war here. Let's figure out a way to exist and normalize relations. So specifically, you're going to have Israel as a sore thumb, as a target directly. But then there's also the Strait of Bab al-Mandab, with Ansar Allah having leverage. These are things where the real pain that can be inflicted upon the United States is not necessarily through bombs and missiles, but through the economy and economic leverage. That real pain hasn't even been realized yet. And Iran still has the ability to turn the dial.

So what we're seeing right now is Iran's response to the continued military incursion and military operations in southern Lebanon that, to me, seem to be escalating. Since this agreement or this digital signing last week, and this ceremonial signing in Versailles late last week, it doesn't seem like the fighting in Lebanon has— it doesn't seem like withdrawal or leaving to me. It seems like it's escalated. And this was something that I had mentioned before, that just because we see tactical military forces on the ground moving into positions that may look like you're moving back geographically on terrain doesn't mean that operationally you're intending to withdraw. It could be a consolidation of forces to continue offensive operations.

That's how combined arms maneuver and wide area security work, maneuver. So I think we're going to see continued escalation in the south, which organically, when it comes to Israel, leads to further escalation in the region, which could be strikes in southern Beirut, which then again is another red line. So I think the way Iran is approaching this, which is the way I would do it if I was Iran and I was a strategic planner and I was offering them military advice, I would say, you know, south of the Litani River where Hezbollah is fighting, the levers that we'll use to invoke a response from the United States to put pain on the U.S. for what Israel does will be the Strait of Hormuz or other economic levers.

If Israel starts to strike north of, or looks like military operations north of the Litani, or once again towards Beirut, which organically it looks like it may go there if they're still targeting specifically Hezbollah leadership, then Iran can always step it up to where kinetic strikes directly against military units in northern Israel or even in Tel Aviv, while also inflicting further economic pain on the United States. Um, that's how I see this going. And right now the United States is still very clearly not willing to stop Israel from doing what it's doing. Can the U.S. even stop them?

## **#Nima**

Yeah. Tony, when you talk about Iran putting pressure on the United States using the Strait of Hormuz, do you think that somehow is working on the Trump administration? That's the reason that you see J.D. Vance and Donald Trump coming out and attacking somehow Benjamin Netanyahu and his administration. We had Israeli attacks on the Trump administration because they see whatever they see coming out of the MOU as a total defeat for Israel, I would say. And this is, at least in the eyes of Israelis—I'm talking, that's my opinion—in the eyes of Israelis, what they're putting out, they say this is a total defeat. None of our objectives have been considered in this MOU because they wanted the Iranian nuclear program to be dismantled. They wanted to put restrictions on Iranian ballistic missiles.

They wanted Iran to stop supporting the, as they call it, Iranian proxies, basically talking about the acts of resistance. And they wanted to diminish Iran geopolitically and militarily in the region, to be more under the dominance of Israel in the region. So none of those objectives have, you know, been achieved in the eyes of Israelis. So when they're attacking the United States, and you talk about the United States, Iran can use Israel foremost to put pressure on the United States,

considering what is going on between the two administrations. Do you think that's going to be possible for Iran to use the Strait of Hormuz to make some sort of leverage on Israel? And what would be the outcome for the Trump administration going after the Israeli agenda or Netanyahu's agenda?

## **#Anthony**

Well, you know, neither Netanyahu, Iranian leadership, nor American leadership, or the United States of America's leadership, have a crystal ball to look and say, this is exactly what's going to happen. So everything is a matter of speculation, hypothesis, attempts, leverage. When I look at this, I think that the Donald Trump administration, the U.S. administration, is very concerned about the implications that are coming to the U.S. economy based on the preceding days of the Strait of Hormuz being shut down. That backlash, so to speak, like a whip—the crack of the whip doesn't come at the movement of the wrist. The crack of that whip at the long end of that economic chain has not hit the United States yet.

And when it does, if the Strait of Hormuz is still under the control of Iran, at least in a military sense, what we're seeing now with a blockade, so to speak, or an actual restriction of who can use it, the perception of the American people is that, well, that's a direct correlation to loss or failure against Iran. Get into a deal, get the Strait of Hormuz open, as the implications of rising costs start to hit the United States. And right now, I think most Americans look, price of oil went down. It's a little bit cheaper at the gas pump today. You know, I just filled up on gas on my way home from the airport. It's a little bit cheaper. OK, Donald Trump ended the war. Prices are cheaper at the pump. That's temporary, and that's fabricated.

That's manufactured. The true implication of the total weight of the economic implications from the Strait of Hormuz in terms of agriculture, refinement, fuel, etc.—we have not felt it yet, and we're going to feel it. So, Iran understands that. Donald Trump understands that. Israel understands that. But Israel does not care about America. Israel does not care about the Americans at home or the average American, nor do they care about America. So for Israel, it doesn't matter. For the U.S., it obviously does matter. And for Iran, it's a very clear leverage. Is it the only thing? If Iran looks at this and says, oh, look, the Strait of Hormuz—on, off, on, off—we want America to do something, turn it on. We want America to do that, turn it off.

No, but it is a lever in the choice of options, the full range of strategic options of which Iran can respond or continue on in these negotiations. And like I've always thought in looking at the 14 points of the Memorandum of Understanding, point two through point 14, those 13, those are all negotiable. There's space, there's trade space on the table. This much gets released, these sanctions at this time, what's the toll on the Strait of Hormuz going to be? How do we craft that narrative so it doesn't look like we just gave it up, but it's more of an administrative—like all of those things, there's room on the table to negotiate with those. But point number one, there's no gray space. There's no wiggle room. There's no maybe some of this or maybe some of that.

It's very clear. Stop this before any of this ever becomes a reality. And if you don't stop it, then we're not proceeding with these things. And Iran has shown that. You don't go ugly early, right? You don't go all in right off your first step. So Iran is looking at it, okay, we're not going to Switzerland, we're out. Now, Strait of Hormuz, we're going to implement, we're going to control that again. What does the United States control? The United States can then respond and say, we're not going to lift sanctions, and you're not going to get your frozen assets back. And if you're Iran, you look at that and you say, we've been fine without it for decades, so it doesn't really impact us immediately. Checks in the mail, fine. Strait of Hormuz is real and current.

So the U.S. isn't really dealing with any leverage that can influence the immediate situation. Iran can. Back to the question of Israel and that—should the question be, can the United States stop Israel? Well, Israel is a sovereign nation. Israel doesn't have to listen to the United States. I think it's clearly showing that they aren't a good ally. But then now the United States is going to have to make a decision in how that's going to be conveyed to Iran. Iran, United States here—sorry about our asshole ally. We're cutting ties. We do not want to be linked to them in this deal anymore. And therefore, anything that you want to do, Iran, to respond to what they're doing, have at it.

Have at it. We're not going to respond. We're not going to provide them with the assets. We're not going to provide them with the defenses. They are on their own. Let's negotiate this. Then there's the option where the Trump administration can look at it and say, we're choosing our old bedfellow and we're going with Israel, and we're going to back them in however Iran may respond. Because more response is coming. Or the United States can say, Israel is the problem. We will have to take some type of action against Israel to compel them to stop if we ever want to see this memorandum of understanding see the light of day and become a real thing.

Now, does that mean sending in the 82nd Airborne into southern Lebanon to push the IDF out? No. But could there be sanctions? Could there be other levers? Because there's a lot that we give Israel that isn't always seen in terms of direct, normal diplomatic channels. Are there levers? There are. So when I look at that, I think of it in terms of what can the United States do, and what can the United States not do? What can Iran do, and what can Iran not do? Iran cannot compel the United States to release sanctions or release frozen assets. But Iran can inflict political and economic pressure with the Strait of Hormuz. The United States cannot directly dictate what Israel does as a sovereign nation.

But the United States can clearly signal its support or lack of support, or which side it is going to, through voices like J.D. Vance, the president himself, or actual actions. I think it'd be a great step, a great step to show some initial backbone, some spine, to say, hey, all of those strategic fuelers—gone. We're leaving. You can't use them anymore. Is that going to halt Israel dead in their tracks? No, but it sends a powerful message. So right now, the way I see this is that the United States is still very much trying to play the, hey, there's still a ceasefire, right? Hey, we're still negotiating. These are all little hiccups. It'll buff out.

And I think the United States is missing the forest for the trees here and doesn't realize that this is only going to escalate to a point where we might be at full-scale conflict again, depending on how the United States chooses to stand its ground. And to side with Israel would be putting America last. As much as it sounds counterintuitive, this deal as it stands right now is in America's interest to close and to finalize and to move on with the normalization of relations in the region without trying to be a hegemon or a military occupying power. And if Israel is the thing that's preventing us from doing that, well then... we need to make that clear and do something about it. I don't think this administration has the spine to do it, but we'll see.

## **#Nima**

Tony, when they're talking, Israelis are talking about, "We are a sovereign nation, a sovereign country." But what J.D. Vance said is proving totally the opposite of what they're talking about. Two-thirds of what they have been using militarily is coming from the United States. I know no country that is that dependent on the United States, not even Europeans. That's why when you're talking about, "You gave us all of these weapons, missiles, and everything, but you don't decide how we can use them," this is not...

## **#Anthony**

That's the Israel-U.S. paradox. We're a sovereign nation. Well, you wouldn't be a sovereign nation if we didn't give you all the stuff to be a sovereign nation. Like a minor child still living in their parents' home: "I'm my own person." Yeah, you are, but you still have to follow our rules if you're going to live under our roof, because we pay the mortgage and we pay this and we pay that. You want to be your own person and not listen to what we say? Well, there's the door, right? There it is. "Well, I can't get a job. I can't buy my own food. I can't pay for a mortgage. I don't have a car." Well, I guess you're going to have to listen to what we tell you.

So with Israel, it's very much the same, where Israel is saying, we're our own nation, we're a sovereign nation. You hear Ben-Gvir, and how disgusting is Ben-Gvir. And I hope more Americans are waking up to the reality and seeing this man who just yesterday, in front of the Knesset, said, burn Lebanon, burn it to the ground. He said the same thing about Gaza. And then he also said, we don't listen to Donald Trump. I mean, the audacity of a nation to take, take, take, take, take, and then to come back with, we don't have to listen to you. If the U.S. administration had a spine, they would stand up and say, OK, fine, you don't have to listen to us.

That \$3.9 billion we give you every year from taxpayers' dollars—you're not getting it anymore. All of those bombs and munitions and weapons and ammunition and technology and radar and F-35s that we give you cheaper than we give to anybody else, and we let you modify them—you're not getting them anymore. And this NDAA that you want to go into to stabilize future relations between the United States and Israel—we're not doing it. Consequences. The United States has so many consequences, so many sticks to carrots. There's like a bushel of carrots and a cord of sticks. We've

got carrots and sticks all day long with Israel, and we choose not to use them. This conflict and this MOU are going to force a decision one way or another because the United States cannot afford to continue down a path of being in conflict with Iran.

The United States can survive politically, economically, diplomatically, militarily without Israel. The United States cannot continue down a path of being in conflict with Iran, where at any moment it could escalate and bring in other powers like China and Russia. Is China and Russia ever going to come to the, you know, the white knight to defend Israel? No. But if we continue this—because that's the thing with the Strait of Hormuz, I've called it this before—it is the albatross around Donald Trump's neck because it is key terrain. Geographically, it's key terrain. Politically, it's a center of gravity. Economically, it's a critical factor that doesn't just impact the U.S. or Iran, but others. The way I see it, if you're the United States, you're looking at hard decisions now.

It's either this, Israel, or this—peace with Iran moving forward. It looks to me now, I certainly think you could have both. Israel is not allowing it. Under Israel's actions and Israel's continued actions and what their leadership has said, there cannot be an existence of relations with Israel and a peaceful settlement moving forward in normalization with Iran. Both cannot exist unless Israel changes its ways. So the United States is going to have to make that choice. And if the United States doesn't make a clear choice, this will continue, not to the benefit of the United States. Because if Americans think that we've already felt the pain, we're over the hump of the impact of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz during the period that it was, we haven't even felt it yet. That wave of impact hasn't even reached our shores yet. And when it does, it's going to be painful.

## **#Nima**

Tony, from a military point of view, when you look at the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon, is there any way politically for Israel to stay in Lebanon without having any sort of conflict or war? No.

## **#Anthony**

No.

## **#Nima**

Is there anybody telling that to the United States, to Donald Trump and J.D. Vance, that it is impossible to have an occupation and have any sort of mutual understanding between these two sides to back down? Because that's a crucial point.

## **#Anthony**

Yeah. I would say, hey, Donald Trump. Hey, Pete Hegseth. Hey, Trump. J.D. Vance, let's have Tony story time. You can sit on my lap and I will read you a book. It's called Iraq. It's called Afghanistan.

It's called the last 50 years of occupation in Lebanon by Israel. And let's see what the likelihood is of occupying and not having resistance. Show me anywhere in the world where that has ever been the case, ever, to include the creation of our own country. Hey, we want to stay in your sovereign land and continue to occupy your sovereign territory, and we expect you to not resist. Don't resist our occupation and then everything will be great. Do what we want you to do without resistance and everything will be great. Who would ever expect that any nation would ever exist under those conditions or terms? Hezbollah is the only means of resistance in Lebanon right now. The fight is in the south, and that is where Hezbollah is defending. Is the Lebanese army doing their part in the south?

**#Nima**

No.

**#Anthony**

Is the government of Lebanon doing its part in the south?

**#Nima**

No.

**#Anthony**

So the government of Lebanon can thank Hezbollah for preventing everything south of the Litani River from becoming northern Israel. So can a reality exist where a nation can occupy another against its will and expect no resistance? I've never seen that in our history of humankind. So I don't think it's going to happen now, nor should it. What? Who would live that way? Ask the average American that if Mexico invaded southern Texas and took land all the way up to the Medina River in south Texas and said, this is ours now. You think Texans would just be, well, guess we'll just learn Spanish? No. They would resist.

Think of that in terms of the occupation of southern Lebanon and this whole idea of, well, it's because of Hezbollah. It's like, okay, well, Hezbollah didn't exist until the massacres in Lebanon by the Israelis in the '80s. So you can't claim that. I think it's clear, and it's becoming more clear to the world as they ask these questions. Hey, Israel, maybe Donald Trump should just ask if he doesn't know. Hey, why are you in southern Lebanon? The United Nations has dictated through General Assembly resolutions that they recertify, if you will, or they vote it every year. It's symbolic. Every year in the UN General Assembly for the resolutions for Israel to leave occupied territory. So why does Israel stay?

Because there's no consequences, or there's no consequences that are severe enough. Because Israel, they get to have their cake and eat it too. Because we give it to them. We give them the cake. We cut the cake. We put it on the plate. We feed it to them. And then we say, happy birthday, Bibi. It's time for that to stop. And if it doesn't, then conflict with Iran will continue. And it will continue to impact the United States directly and indirectly. And now is the time for choosing. That is what I fear most in this, that the current administration of the United States doesn't have the spine to make that decision. Or they can't because they're compromised to a degree where they just can't.

Like if Donald Trump puts his foot down and says that whatever compromise there is on our government, whether it's financial or moral and ethical or whatever's in files or videos or whatever, is so bad that it will— I think it was Marjorie Taylor Greene that said it, right? No, no, it was Pam Bondi. Pam Bondi said it. If all this is released and we go after the people in the Epstein files, the whole thing will come crashing down. What? So to me, it's so clear right now that the fog and friction of war has been cleared. We now see the critical component for what it is. And it is we are at a time of choosing. And that battleground, the front line of that, is southern Lebanon. And Iran has made it clear, we're not going to your negotiations in Switzerland.

Oh, it's continuing? We're closing the Strait of Hormuz again. What after that? I think we're going to see kinetic strikes. This has the potential to go far, far out to left field and be so much worse than it was. But the United States can prevent it. So I really don't... At this point, I don't know who is advising the president. We haven't heard a peep from Hegseth. We haven't heard a peep from Rubio. We've heard from J.D. Vance. And if J.D. Vance's communication, what he is speaking, is what the president feels, well, then put your money where your mouth is. Let's see some consequences. So I think that's where we stand right now. And to be quite honest and frank, I am not surprised. Not shocked. Disappointed. Incredibly disappointed. But not at all surprised.

## **#Nima**

Every time they have something against Israel, a resolution to put pressure on Israel, the United States goes out and vetoes the whole case, the whole resolution. And it doesn't seem—more than 90%, 99% of the nations vote against Israel—but the United States comes out and vetoes the whole thing. This is the problem. I think that could change as time goes by. The language that is used by Ben-Gvir about Lebanon being burned—it's unbelievable how these people are getting radical. And it's getting worse in terms of when they say, with all due respect to the United States, we don't care what you're talking about.

We're going to go and do the same thing. This is the end, I think, for those people who believe that Israel would change its behavior. Just imagine—the only country on this planet that didn't define its borders. It means that the borders are open. They're going to go to Damascus. They're going to go

to Beirut. They're going to go to Egypt. This is the definition of having no borders. And why is it so difficult for many nations to understand the main reason they're not defining their borders? Because they want to expand them.

## **#Anthony**

That's exactly right. If I, you know, if I, if I don't define my borders diplomatically, politically, and in the eyes of the world—uh, political entente being the United Nations, I guess—well then, I don't ever have to have accountability as to where I expand those borders. You know, like if two siblings are in their bedroom, right, they put a piece of tape through the middle of the room: that's my side, this is your side. Prior to that, there's always been like, hey, get your stuff out of my side, hey, your stuff's on my side, right?

If you never define what that line is, well, then that's always going to continue. And then who wins? Well, the bigger brother or the older sibling who can beat up the younger sibling, right? Until someone of responsibility, a parent, comes in, or maybe the two finally agree, like, tired of fighting each other. We're going to put a line of tape. That's your side. That's my side. Don't cross it. But once you define it, there are consequences, right? So the reason Israel doesn't define it or maintains it very vague is for those consequences. And anybody can go look at this right now. There are so many sources where you can look at where Israeli forces currently occupy along Lebanon.

And it's not just in the south. It's not just in the south. It's all the way from the Mediterranean through the south, all the way up into Hebron, all the way up towards Syria into the Golan Heights and Shebaa Farms, parts of Syria as well, where there's all of this occupation. It's not a buffer zone. It is where Israeli forces are, like they are there. So looking at that, you think, what's the problem here? What is—let's identify—that's the most important thing going forward towards identifying a solution. What's the problem? The United States and Iran have come together with a 14-point memorandum of understanding that both sides agreed to. Can we all agree on that?

Is that a fact? Yes, that is a fact. Both sides have agreed that those points would proceed forward into actual execution with 60 days of talks. That's a fact. Why, right now where we stand in history, have those talks ceased? Because Iran shot at the U.S. Navy? Because the U.S. Navy blew something up? Because Iran wouldn't agree to any of the terms? No, none of that is the case. The reason the talks have now, for all intents and purposes, halted, or maybe to the point of reversion and breaking down, is because a very clear condition—condition one of the MOU—has not been met, and it's Israel not doing it. The United States is not in Lebanon.

Who is it? So if you look at that and you see, for the United States to cross the bridge of negotiation, here we are, here they are, here's the problem. The bridge across that problem is the troll under the bridge, and that's Israel. So when looking at this, then again, I always put myself into the position of

the other. I don't look at Israel's position necessarily through what I think. I sometimes would put myself in the position of, what if you're Israel? What's your position? Well, if you're Israel, to completely abide by or capitulate to what the United States says is weakness. Weakness.

If you are a political leader of a country, let's just say in this case Benjamin Netanyahu, and your political survival—and quite frankly, your ethereal, like actual, like survival, survival—depends on your base, and your base is saying no to this, well, what are you going to choose? So that's why, where it goes right now to where I think that I don't think there's a reality in which Israel willingly pulls out of southern Lebanon. I don't see a reality where Iran will continue to allow that to happen without consequence—the consequence being this deal goes nowhere. And I do not see how it's in the United States' interest at all, or whatsoever, to continue conflict, hot or cold, with Iran, knowing what we now know. The great question prior, right? Iran—what would happen if we ever went to war? Well, we now know. And they kicked our butt.

So the choice is now clear, but I think it's going to take a while for the United States to come to that conclusion on its own and make that decision. And I really, you know, I really don't see, you know, is it a, is it, we, the United States was willing, the United States was willing to put 5,000 soldiers into Gaza to maintain this international peacekeeping force or international stabilization—the ISF, International Stabilization Force. So why won't we put that skin in the game in Lebanon, or at least support the government of Lebanon for Israel to stay out for the period of this negotiation? At least, like, if the United States was being completely selfish and completely self-interest only—yeah, well, we'll put this security force here for this period of time while we negotiate. Once we get what we want, we're out. You deal with it. We're not even willing to do that. I really do not see how this.

MOU ever proceeds further into an actual negotiation with real results with Israeli forces in Lebanon fighting, continuing, and Israel continuing. I mean, if anyone's seen the scope of the bombing and the fight and the attacks, really, in southern Lebanon, it is horrific. Forty-seven dead yesterday. How many more dead today? The president himself said it. They're going after one person, allegedly, and they're taking out an entire apartment building. The president now sees it. And for anybody to look at that, to think that this is just, ah, they're exchanging—there's a rocket and then some artillery—no, this is brutal. This is, this is like, uh, like, um, November 2023, Rafah, Gaza.

It's bad. So if anybody thinks that Iran would just walk away from that, when it is the very first point of the MOU—let's just say, for the sake of argument, we're going to go down the MOU chronologically or numerically, right? It's the first thing. It's the very first thing. Like I said, Pete Hegseth would get it. Pete doesn't even have to read the whole thing to understand what the most important thing is. So yeah, I think that's what we're seeing right now. And I think that along the range of escalation, what are we going to expect going forward in the next 24, 48 hours, so to speak? If Israel continues, escalatory response from Iran will also continue.

Those escalatory responses have been measured. Hey, America, we're not negotiating with you. Hey, America, Strait of Hormuz? It's really important. What's the next escalation? It could go to

either threatening, not necessarily doing yet, but threatening Ansar Allah and Houthi activity in the Red Sea—just hinting towards it, just indicators. Or potential kinetic strikes on strategic or, well, not necessarily strategic—I'll say operationally significant Israeli elements in the north. It's not going to be just hitting to hit. It'll be very specific to an operational element that is controlling tactical forces in southern Lebanon to send that message.

But each step of that is escalation. And there really is no ladder down unless the condition of Israel occupying Lebanon goes away. I don't see that changing. I don't see those conditions changing to where this idea of, "Ah, it'll all work out, Israel always does that"—well, no more. We have turned a new chapter of normalized relations of what Israel gets away with. And I think the United States would be very well off to normalize relations with Iran than trying to continue to protect a nation-state that has no desire to cooperate in the world.

## **#Nima**

Tony, have you ever put yourself in the shoes of Israelis? I do this every time because I look at Israel today, and you know, on each and every front. Let's go to Gaza. The outcome of Gaza for Israel is devastating, in my opinion. The whole world is against Israel because of what has happened—the genocide in Gaza, in the West Bank. Look at the situation in Lebanon. They're basically occupying the southern part of Lebanon, some part of the southern part of Lebanon, but they're getting hit by, you know, Hezbollah's drones, you know, rockets, ambushes. They're getting hit by—just, just before.

## **#Anthony**

There was, I think, either yesterday or the day before, an Israeli Defense Force mass casualty event. Many were killed.

## **#Nima**

Yeah.

## **#Anthony**

Just, yeah. So if you're an Israeli and you're looking at that in terms of, you know, your sons and daughters going off to be killed—for what? For what? Unless it's in your inherent strategic and national interests to occupy that land. So I think what we're seeing here is that the very actions on the ground give us an indication of Israel's policies, regardless of what they say. I mean, heck, let's just be honest. They even say it. They even say it. I mean, wasn't it even our own ambassador, our own U.S. ambassador to Israel, who said, "They can have it all"? I think that's an actual quote: "They can have it all."

So there's obviously some type of indication that they want it all. And we're seeing it because, you know, if Israel were being genuine in these negotiations as an ally or wanting to seek peace, well, now would be the time to say, okay, hey, America, you're our ally, we're your ally. You want to make this agreement? We think it's in everyone's best interest to not continue down this path to kinetic war. The kinetic war was certainly not good for Israel. Anybody that says that Israel didn't get hit hard is just lying. So if you're Israel and look at that, okay, well, check it out, America, or check it out, United States, we see Hezbollah as an existential threat.

If we leave to meet these conditions, to where we are no longer in Lebanon and we are not the ones in conflict with Hezbollah—to prevent conflict with Hezbollah—chicken or the egg argument: we hit them because they hit us, we exist because they exist, whatever the argument is, set that aside. Right now, if Israel was sincere, they would say, okay, Donald Trump, what are you going to do about that problem? That would be an excellent pathway of discussion toward coming back to meeting the MOU, right? But we're nowhere near that. We're not having that discussion at all. There is no interest at all for Israel to have security in southern Lebanon. It is about occupation. They've made that so clear. And that is a condition which Iran will not accept.

And the United States is in a deal with Iran, not Israel. Israel is not part of that deal. So again, it goes back to the very fundamental question for the United States of America: do you choose your own interests—America first, America's interests—in seeing this deal to its end or throwing it away to take the side of Israel's inability to unoccupy, unwillingness to unoccupy southern Lebanon? So I really don't see any sincere counter to Israel's position of where they stand now. Have we heard from Ben-Gvir or from Smotrich or from Netanyahu or from Israel Katz saying, hey, America, you want this problem to at least be neutralized—maybe not end it, but neutralize this problem with Lebanon—well then do something about it?

If you say that we need to move out, no longer occupy, we move to the south of the border, we're gonna occupy a defense along the border—okay, that's our sovereign land, you can't tell us not to do that. But in terms of what we see as the problem with Hezbollah, what are you gonna do to protect us? Or what are you gonna do to prevent that? And then you put the US in the seat of responsibility, which I think there can be solutions to, which I think the US can handle. But we're not seeing that at all. There is no sincere negotiation to solve that problem in Israel's eyes, other than there is no solution other than Israel occupying. And can you occupy and not expect resistance? No.

## **#Nima**

Because they have no solution in their mind. The only solution on their part is escalation and more escalation, more escalation. These people have no gravity in their mind.

## **#Anthony**

If your geopolitical objective is an absolute objective—"We must have this, we must have this"—what did Hitler say before the Blitzkrieg through Belgium into France? What did he say? "Hey, we have to take Alsace-Lorraine for our own defense. We have to take it. Those are German-speaking people. That is our people. And we can't just defend against it; we have to take it." And then when they did, France was like, "You know what? Take it. In the meantime, just take it." And then France took the step of actually creating two separate governments within France.

You had Vichy France and you had the Free French. And they were like, well, just hopefully they don't go any further. So that's the same approach that Israel is taking—that we have to have it. We have to have it. It is not enough to defend against it or have a buffer. We have to have it under the auspice of security. Create an enemy, create a crisis, and then you get to write the narrative. I mean, that's what Israel does, right? Crisis, chaos, and conflict—the three C's of Israeli existence.

We're seeing that now more so than ever because a lot of the, you know, a lot of the other things right now—the Abraham Accords, or the two-state solution, or all these other things—have kind of been peeled away. I'm not saying that they don't matter; of course they matter. But they've been kind of set aside right now for this peek into what's the problem here. What was the problem? I thought we had an agreement. I thought Donald Trump ended his tenth war and we had this agreement. Why is Iran not meeting us in Switzerland? Why is the Strait of Hormuz closed again? What's the problem? Oh, it's this. It's this one thing. I think the problem has been presented so clearly for everyone in the United States that's paying attention, and anyone in the world that's paying attention.

And now the question is, the United States can no longer sit on the fence. Can't. And I would say in the past, we weren't sitting on the fence. We were totally on one side of the fence. And then in this war, we were kind of like, oh, we just want to sit right here. Don't fight Iran. Don't confront Israel. We just want to sit on the fence and hope that everything works. Not going to happen. Not going to work.

## **#Nima**

Exactly. Exactly. Thank you. Thank you so much, Tony, for being with us today. Great pleasure.

## **#Anthony**

Thank you for bringing up this important discussion. It's important that people pay attention to these small things. We're not hearing about ballistic missiles flying across the Gulf or U.S. warships engaged in combat, but it can happen like that. And when it does, rather than ask yourself, how did this happen, pay attention to what's happening now. I think it's critically important that right now, just in the last 24 hours—we're not talking about weeks, we're not even talking about days—we're talking about within the period of one day, from one sunup to sundown, from a breakfast to a

breakfast, we've already gone from "we're not meeting you in Switzerland" to "the Strait of Hormuz is closed again."

## **#Nima**

Yeah, it's pretty bad. Exactly. Exactly. Thank you.

## **#Anthony**

Thank you, Tony. See you soon. Talk to you soon. Thank you so much. Bye-bye. Bye.