

Alastair Crooke: US-Iran Deal EXPOSED: Israel Left Alone?

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#Nima

What's going on between Israel and Lebanon? Last night, Israeli Channel 12 reported that four Israeli soldiers were killed. They say Iran was behind the killing of these soldiers because they want to provoke Israel to attack Beirut. Then we had more than 100 attacks on the southern part of Lebanon, in Nabatea. The intensity was high — most of these attacks were close to Nabatea and those areas. And before coming to this live, Iran announced that the Strait of Hormuz is closed right now. And they also announced that the ceasefire has come to a new ceasefire. I don't know what that means anymore. They announced that in two minutes, in five minutes, the ceasefire is going to happen between Israel and Lebanon. Your understanding — what do you make of what's happening there?

#Alastair

Well, first of all, I mean, from my perspective, it's called a memorandum of understanding. But from my experience with doing these sorts of things, they should be called a de-escalation framework, because it's not an agreement on really anything, or an agreement that has components of punishment if it's not done. This is a framework, and it was a framework that was put into place. And the Supreme Leader said, I think it was yesterday or yesterday evening, and it was a very important statement, because he was saying that although this has been given, if you like, permission to proceed, in fact, he did not wholly agree with it.

He had some reservations about it. But given the stance of the Security Council and President Ebrahim Raisi, it was decided to go ahead. I think his statement was important, I mean, for two things. I mean, but basically it was a statement, first of all, to put on notice the negotiating team to say, you know, you have been given permission on the condition that you stick by the agreements and you don't agree to any further concessions to the United States in this period. And it was also, I think, directed more widely to the Iranian public in saying, look, we know that there are reservations.

There is skepticism in Iran that Iran is moving back into a sort of JCPOA-type stranglehold. There will be a sort of trap that will trap Iran, just as the JCPOA imposed a stranglehold of sanctions and

tariffs and resolutions and the IAEA on it. And I think this was the message. The message really was a reassuring one coming from the Supreme Leader to say, no, we're not going to do that. Now, there are two other things that he said. I mean, not necessarily in this particular statement, but for him, he's made it clear that the most important, if you like, asset for Iran is control of Hormuz. That's absolutely clear. The second thing is Lebanon.

And Iran has clearly stated now that Lebanon is not just one of the resistance allies, but is a part of the security needs of Iran, that it is strategically part of Iran's security posture. So those two things are really important. Now, going to what's happening now, the reaction to this framework in Israel has been hyperbolic in its rejection and antagonism to it. I mean, strong words. I mean, you know, from the usual suspects like Ben-Gvir. He said, after the killing of these four military men, one of whom was a lieutenant colonel, by the way, and the commander of the 23rd Brigade, after the killing of that, Lebanon must burn.

It's got to burn as punishment for that. Now, not all of the comments have been as extreme as that of Ben-Gvir, but many of them, most of them, and not just on the right but right across the board, have said, you know, we have to avenge the killing of these four soldiers in Lebanon. What was going on? The soldiers, I think, were trying to take this ridge, which is just close to Beaufort Castle, the old Crusader castle in Lebanon. It's a strategic ridge, and it's not clear to me whether they were trying to increase because the ridge extends.

I mean, it's not just at Beaufort — this is the highest part of it — but it extends. Were they trying to establish, if you like, a semicircle of containment for Hezbollah in the region, or, as others suggest, that possibly under that ridge near Beaufort Castle is a deeply buried tunnel system, which no doubt would contain Hezbollah's troops, probably its longer-range missiles? In other words, is there a missile city buried under or near Beaufort Castle, which they're trying to get at before they withdraw from Lebanon, if they're compelled to withdraw from Lebanon? So this has triggered a huge response.

And I think I've said to you before, you know, the change in the security doctrine in Israel to that of permanent security, away from the Ben-Gurion security doctrine, has created a situation that for Israelis, they want preventative security as well as the security of today. In other words, they want to prevent a threat arising in the future that could become—because after the 7th of October they called that a Holocaust. It was not, but they call it a Holocaust. And think of it psychologically, emotionally. Somehow Israel experienced a Holocaust on the 7th of October, from the 7th of October, and that they therefore are saying that they must take prevention at the root to ensure that doesn't happen again.

So the net effect of this is really on its psyche more than on its rationality, but on its psyche is prevention. There's no way we can allow Hezbollah to exist in a place where they can threaten the northern settlers, the settlers that are there in their settlement towns from the border with Lebanon going down to the Galilee. And this is where Hezbollah has, in reaction to these Israeli military

incursions into Lebanon, been firing their missiles, and their new drones with fiber-optic control have been very effective. And the Israelis haven't got any real answer to it. They've been buying up, currently, some fishing nets to hang on things, but I don't think it's the answer. So they're very concerned about this, but they don't know what to do now. So this is almost certain to draw some sort of response from Israel, I think. And it was predictable that this would happen because, as I say, they were never really—it was never likely that they were just going to—they were never likely to agree that Hezbollah could just exist there. They have been shocked at the potency. They thought that they had weakened Hezbollah and that it was a shadow of its former self, and they have been really shocked by its capabilities, by its military efficiency. And that has given rise to this sort of sense that, you know, we have to do this. And during these talks, I mean, obviously, Israel was pressing the United States to say you have the right to self-defense and therefore you can fire into Lebanon and whatever.

But the framework paper says very clearly it's about sovereignty, the sovereignty issue. And one of the things that was quite striking about it is it treats Iran as a sovereign state, and one in which the U.S. is engaging. So it's engaging with a sovereign state to discuss certain issues in dispute. But that's a very different approach than we've seen before, and it's quite important. It is the actual Rubicon that Trump crossed by prioritizing, if you like, relations with Iran over the Israeli security claims that it needed to continue the war in Lebanon. The prioritizing of, if you like, that framework agreement over Israel's claimed interests in Lebanon has been a shock, a huge shock to Israel.

Israelis haven't got over it. They see this as an enormous defeat because, put simply, their objective, which they say they've not stopped, was always to destroy Iran and to destroy the state. But they know that they can't do it without the facilitation of the United States, their full support. It's not possible. They can't even refuel their aircraft to launch air attacks over Iran without the assistance of the United States. So they realize that their grand strategy of imposing, flying as they put it, wingtip to wingtip with the United States to attack Iran and destroy its missile bases, and so on, has failed.

They appreciate that's failed. It's failed completely. And also they don't have a strategy for Lebanon. What's their strategy? Buffer zone. They're destroying the houses and saying, you know, very proudly, you know, when the residents return, they'll find there's nothing there. There's nothing. We will have destroyed it all. There was a sort of sadistic tone to it all. And some of that is true. It's been completely flattened. And this is not an answer. And even the military say, you know, buffer zones may have made sense 20 years ago. They don't make any sense in today's world with the drones that have a range of 22 kilometers.

They're not Katyushas of 2006. They're quite different. And so a buffer zone just exposes your troops to continual harassment and to guerrilla tactics and loss of life, which is what's happening. So Israel is in this huge conundrum. On one hand, they understand from my reading—and I was reading the translations of the Hebrew press today—on the one hand, they understand that the

Middle East will never be the same again after the signing of that document. They understand that the great victory that Netanyahu posed is finished. It's over. They see that Netanyahu's political standing is collapsing. They see that they've got no solution to Hezbollah.

And they have been very struck also by Trump's language, particularly the press conference that followed the G7 meeting, when Trump was saying very clearly, look, there's no need, why are you doing this? You go into Lebanon, and because you're chasing one person, you take down tower blocks and people are living in them. And how do you expect them to live like that, in this way? You're heavy-handed, he was complaining. And then he made an incredible sort of statement that was intended as a rebuke. He said, you know, you just, you kill too much. He said this, you kill too much. And he said, maybe we should turn it over to Jolani, Shara in Syria. I mean, you know, I mean, he effectively was saying, listen, I mean, an ex-ISIS person would manage the situation better than you Israelis, because they would know how to do it in a more sophisticated way.

I mean, it was unreal to say that. You know, even an ex-ISIS person is a better bet for Trump than what he sees from Netanyahu. I mean, they've never heard language like this from an American senior politician, let alone the president, saying this sort of thing. And he said more than that. I mean, he said, well, you know, you have to stop these attacks on Lebanon. And he made other comments about Netanyahu, I mean, beyond calling him crazy or whatever. But also, what is interesting in the Israeli press is two observations that come from this. First of all, if you take, like, Chit Brinovich, we've had what he's writing, and you'll find it in our Substack shortly with the details so you can read them for yourself.

But what he's saying is it's very clear from some of these strange statements from Trump, for example, saying that, you know, Iran should join the Abraham Accords, or saying that he wants Shara to take over the management of Lebanon from Israel. All of these things, he says, look, they don't make sense. But they do suggest something is going on in Trump's mind, that he wants to try and create enough room for maneuver so that he can have a relationship and create a relationship with Iran, and that that will not be damaging to Israeli security. He says that. And the Israelis have picked that up, and they say, you know, this is a very significant thing — that he is seeing Iran as being crucial to the security of the Middle East, that Iran is an essential component of stability, and that he wants to try and move in that direction. Now, everyone will say, is that realistic?

Can this be done? Time will tell. Who knows? I mean, all the auguries point against it, probably. You know, we all know the likelihood that this framework will not last even maybe beyond today. But, I mean, this seems to be what the Israelis have picked up, which is quite interesting and significant. And the second thing they picked up, quite widely across it — don't forget, this is all in the Hebrew press, not in the English-language press. In the Hebrew press, they pick up the fact that Trump seems to be moving towards imposing costs on Israel if they continue action. They don't say what, and they say, we don't know. But it looks as if Trump is serious. He wants to protect the framework. He wants to try and make it work, and for very obvious reasons.

Because, as he said at the G7, he said, you know, we were on the verge of economic collapse. The reserves have run out. And I saw today someone giving the figure for Cushing, the big strategic reserve — it has only 20 million barrels of oil in it. Well, that's sludge. You know, that's like when you get to the bottom of your oil tank — it's useless stuff. It doesn't actually, you know, you can't use it. I mean, even if they pump it, it has to be treated before use because it's all separated and it's got sediments and things in it that form. I'm not an expert on the chemistry of oil, but I'm told, you know, this is it. So, I mean, it wasn't weeks away, as he said in that statement, but probably it was today.

I mean, the crisis was there, and he needs it. So he needs this very much. He needs, if you like, Hamas open to the extent that Netanyahu needs the war in Lebanon to continue to stay in office. Both of them have opposing needs to survive politically. Netanyahu needs to show that he's tough and that he is not, if you like, an honorary public president that has to take the word of President Trump. I mean, he says these things: we're not like that, we're not some subordinate place. We're a sovereign nation, and we will make our own decisions. We're not bound by his framework. So there is really a huge, if you like, turmoil in Israel concerning it. But it's interesting that, you know, the juxtaposition of the wide acknowledgment...