

Mearsheimer: Iran Inflicting MASSIVE Damage on US, Trump & Israel LOST the War

Prof. John Mearsheimer joins for the first time to evaluate the catastrophic impact of renewed US war on Iran and why Trump is caught is a strategic disaster. John J. Mearsheimer is the R. Wendell Harrison Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago and a leading realist scholar of international relations. A West Point graduate and former U.S. Air Force officer, he is the author of numerous influential works on U.S. foreign policy and power politics. LIKE the video and Subscribe for more in-depth geopolitical analysis Leave your thoughts in the comments below! Support the Channel: Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/dannyhaiphong> SUBSCRIBE ON RUMBLE: Rumble: <https://rumble.com/c/DannyHaiphong> Follow Me on Social Media: Twitter: <https://twitter.com/DannyHaiphong> Telegram: <https://t.me/DannyHaiphong> Support the channel in other ways: <https://www.buymeacoffee.com/dannyhaiphong> Substack: chroniclesofhaiphong.substack.com Cashapp: \$Dhaiphong Venmo: @dannyH2020 Paypal: <https://paypal.me/spiritho> #iranwar #iran #trump

#Danny

Welcome back to the show, everyone. As you can see, I am joined, and I am very happy to introduce John Mearsheimer. John Mearsheimer is the Wendell Harrison Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago. He is a preeminent realist scholar of international relations, the author of several books, including *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, co-authored with Stephen Walt. Professor Mearsheimer, good to have you on the show. Thank you so much for taking the time.

#John Mearsheimer

I'm glad to be here, Danny Haiphong.

#Danny

Amazing. Well, let's begin with the latest developments in the U.S. war on Iran. And I'll just pull up this summary here. The United States has been engaging in bombing campaigns—it seems like multiple each day. The U.S. has targeted much of southern Iran, the coastal towns, cities, and areas—Bandar Abbas, Qeshm Island, and the like—while Iran has been, and I've heard you talk about this on other programs, inflicting pretty massive damage on the United States itself, targeting overnight the air base in Kuwait, an early radar warning system in Kuwait, a gathering of U.S.

soldiers in Kuwait, as well as command and control centers and fighter jet maintenance sites in Jordan and Bahrain.

Also, we have mounting evidence that these losses might include U.S. troops. There's satellite imagery showing that at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Oman, a direct missile strike actually made impact there. It is known to exclusively house U.S. soldiers, this hotel. And the U.S. is not only blowing through air defenses, it is also having its air defenses blown up. We see here satellite imagery that a Patriot air defense launcher was blown up at Erbil in Iraq. Professor Mearsheimer, can you help us understand why the United States went to war? And what do you make of the actual situation as Trump touts that he's ready to finish off Iran?

#John Mearsheimer

Well, I think we went to war because we thought that we could win a quick and easy victory. It's quite clear that the Israelis—and here we're talking about David Barnea, the head of Mossad, and Prime Minister Netanyahu—invented this story that if we launched the war with a shock and awe campaign and we decapitated the regime, that would, in effect, bring the Iranians to their knees and we would be able to negotiate a good deal with them. And that good deal would involve getting not only regime change, but also putting an end to their nuclear enrichment capability, their long-range missile capability, and their support of the Houthis, Hamas, and Hezbollah. So those were the goals.

And again, we thought that this shock and awe campaign would allow us to achieve those goals quickly. This was a cockamamie idea. There was no good strategic reason to think that this would work. And of course, it didn't work. The Iranians have proven to be remarkably tough adversaries for the United States and for Israel. The end result is that on June 17th of this year, President Trump signed this memorandum of understanding with Iran that was, in effect, a surrender document. If you look at the 14 elements of the deal that was worked out, this memorandum of understanding, you see that it was a clear victory for the Iranians on almost every point.

But it looked at that juncture, this is around June 17th and immediately thereafter, like the war would end. But President Trump wasn't satisfied with the Memorandum of Understanding, and he thought that he could challenge the Iranians over Article 5 of the Memorandum of Understanding, which had to do with who controlled the Strait of Hormuz. It seems clear to me from Article 5 that it was the Iranians who controlled the Strait. Nevertheless, the United States was not content with that interpretation, and the United States said that we had a right to create a channel, a separate channel in the Strait of Hormuz that was outside the purview of the Iranians, in which we could, in effect, escort ships through the Strait.

The Iranians said this was unacceptable, and it's that disagreement which flared up into a fight that has put us in a situation now where we have this tit-for-tat set of bombing campaigns or bombing operations on a daily basis that you described before. I would just add to that, President Trump has also decided to reinstate the blockade of the Strait. And of course, the Iranians have reinstated their

blockade of the Strait. So in a very important way, we're back to where we were on the 16th of June, the day before the Memorandum of Understanding was signed.

#Danny

Yeah, well, there's evidence this is already having a pretty big impact, Professor Mearsheimer. We have, according to Reuters, no supertankers or any LNG carriers passing through the Strait in the last day. We also have reports that international shipping firms are shunning the Omani corridor now over failures to protect vessels. This comes after Iran struck two supertankers and reportedly also the port of Fujairah in recent days. What kind of impact will this have? First of all, the United States right now—every time CENTCOM puts out a report about it, it says this is all about degrading Iran's ability to control the Strait of Hormuz or to endanger shipping in the Strait of Hormuz. What do you make of this? Is this at all possible? Is the United States succeeding in this realm?

#John Mearsheimer

Well, it is clear that the United States has not been able to wrest control of the Strait from the Iranians. The Iranians clearly control the Strait of Hormuz. And if they decide that no ships will be allowed in or out of the Persian Gulf, they can pretty much make that happen. And there's not much we can do about it. I think that's quite clear. What has happened here over the past few months that's very important to understand is that the Saudis and the UAE have opened up pipelines that are designed to get oil out of the Gulf but not go through the Strait of Hormuz. So everybody says that 20% of the world's oil and gas comes out of the Strait. There's no question that that was true on February 28th when the war started.

But what's happened since then is, I would estimate, about 7% of the world's oil that had been coming from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates is still coming out. So a huge chunk of that 20% is coming out through pipelines. There's a pipeline that goes across Saudi Arabia to a port called Yanbu, which is on the Red Sea. And then that oil leaves Yanbu, goes through the Red Sea, and out into world markets. And then, with regard to the UAE, the Emirates, they have a pipeline that goes to Fujairah, which you were talking about. And between Fujairah and Yanbu, I would say about 7% of the world's oil continues to flow. So we've not cut off 20% of the world's oil from the Gulf; we've only cut off 13%. Now, what's happening is that it appears quite clear that the Iranians have shut down Fujairah, that there is no more oil coming out of Fujairah.

And furthermore, the Iranians have just told the Houthis that it's getting close to time to shut down the Red Sea, which means that the Saudi oil that comes out of Yanbu will not come out of Yanbu or will not come out of the Red Sea anymore. And this is all, as the article you just put up on the screen shows, Iran asked the Houthis to close Bab al-Mandab. That's the strait at the end of the Red Sea if the U.S. attacks the power network. Well, President Trump has promised to attack the Iranian power network next week, and that means that the Houthis will shut down the Red Sea. So that 7% that has been getting out through the pipelines in Saudi Arabia and the UAE will not get out

anymore. And that 7% really matters for preventing the international economy from going off a cliff. So what is going on right now is very consequential.

#Danny

Yeah, most definitely. And I pulled up the report from Reuters, shared by Middle East Eye, about the potential closure of the Bab al-Mandeb Strait. And here is the report. This is the Times of Israel. Reuters is behind a very strong paywall. Trump said that he's leaning toward expanding a military offensive against Iran, saying it better behave. And this includes briefs on hitting energy infrastructure as well as possible ground operations, Professor Mearsheimer.

Now, this was Iran's response from the headquarters of the Iranian military, saying that any infrastructure that's hit will be responded to with infrastructure hits of their own on the Gulf and the region. Infrastructure for infrastructure, as the Iranian military is putting it. So, Professor Mearsheimer, help evaluate the trajectory here. The United States says it is on the way toward victory against Iran with these renewed strikes, but Iran is showing a pretty strong capacity to respond defensively, as it says, against these attacks. What do you make of this growing situation?

#John Mearsheimer

Let me make a couple of points, Danny. First of all, the United States and Israel represent an existential threat to Iran. So the Iranians are not going to cave here. They're going to fight to the last person. The idea that the Iranians are softies and a little bit of American military power here or there will get them to throw up their hands is delusional. It's just not going to happen. These are really tough-nosed, hard-nosed individuals in charge in Iran, and they're going to fight to the finish. So they're not going to give up. But let's talk about the possible strategies that we have for winning the war. Let's accept the fact that they're not going to give up, but maybe we can win the war. It all started with a bombing campaign that lasted four days. It was a strategic bombing campaign.

And it was waged by the Israelis and the Americans on one side and the Iranians on the other side. Why did we quit after 40 days? We quit after 40 days on April 8th because we could not win the war with that strategic bombing campaign. Very important to understand that. The strategic bombing campaign failed. Then on April 13th, we went to a blockade. The blockade lasted until June 17th, when we signed the Memorandum of Understanding. The blockade failed. Not only did the air campaign fail, but the blockade also failed to get the Iranians to dance to our tune. Now, we used air power. We used naval power. Then there's the possibility of land power. People talk about an invasion of Iran. This is not a serious argument. I can't believe anybody pays attention to it. How many combat troops do we have in the Middle East or in the Persian Gulf?

I guess that we have at the most 6,000. The idea that we can do anything in terms of invading Iran with 6,000 troops is laughable. People use the number 50,000. They say there are 50,000 American troops in the region. The question is not what the overall number of troops in the region is. The

question is how many combat troops do you have? How many Marines and how many Army infantry do you have? How many trigger pullers do you have? That's the question you have to ask yourself. We don't even have 10,000 of those. We're talking about a country, Iran, that has 93 million people, that has a formidable military capability, and that has terrain that is forbidding.

The idea that we're going to invade this country and conquer it, or conquer significant parts of it, with a small force like that—again, it's not a serious argument. So we have no land option. The sea option, which is the blockade, failed. And the strategic bombing campaign failed. So what are we involved in now? We're involved in tit-for-tat strategies. This is not a strategic bombing campaign. And in fact, if you listen to what President Trump is saying, he, in a way, is threatening to go back to the strategic bombing campaign next week when he talks about going after bridges, power stations, and so forth and so on. That's the strategic bombing campaign. But that's not what's happening now. What is happening is that both sides are engaged in a tit-for-tat strategy.

These are limited strikes on the other side. Now, the question you have to ask yourself is, do you think this is going to work? Do you think a tit-for-tat strategy is likely to bring the Iranians to their knees? It's not going to work. If a massive air campaign like the one we launched during the first 40 days of the war didn't work, please explain to me how a tit-for-tat strategy is going to work. And by the way, and we can go into this in some detail, I think the Iranians are doing more damage to U.S. assets than the United States is doing to Iranian assets. And if I'm wrong, that just means it's a wash — that both sides are beating up on the other side and neither side has an advantage. But I think the Iranians have an advantage in this tit-for-tat set of exchanges.

#Speaker 1

So what do we do to win this war?

#John Mearsheimer

Again, you want to remember that the Iranians are tough hombres. We are up against formidable adversaries, number one. Number two, strategic bombing doesn't work. Number three, a blockade doesn't work. Number four, we have no land option. And number five, tit for tat is not going to work. All of this tells you we are playing a losing hand. And by the way, this is why President Trump signed the Memorandum of Understanding on June 17th, as I said before. That was a surrender document. Why? Because the Iranians had won the war. He then decided he was unsatisfied with the Memorandum of Understanding, and he was going to figure out some sort of clever way to obviate it, to win, to get a better deal, whatever. And he's now engaged in this tit-for-tat strategy. He's reinstated the blockade. But I do not see how this is going to lead to a success for President Trump. And he's ultimately going to have to reach a deal with Iran where Iran wins.

#Danny

Professor Mearsheimer, maybe we can get into some details about what exactly gives Iran the advantage here in this newest iteration of the United States' attempt to defeat Iran through war. Because there are some who watch this program, others I've seen comment, talk about their concerns about Iran's approach, and some concerns even that they've lost leverage. But I'm curious what you see as Iran's advantage here in light of these concerns I've been seeing and even receiving messages about.

#John Mearsheimer

I've long argued that the longer the war goes on, the better off Iran is. If you're talking about the balance of coercive leverage, the longer the strait is closed and the less oil that gets out of the Middle East, the more damage that does to the world economy, the more damage it does to the American economy and to President Trump's political fortunes. And he's going to reach a point at some time where he has to reach an agreement. This is what happened back on June 17th. Remember, President Trump said, "I signed the Memorandum of Understanding because I thought if I didn't, we would face"—and these were his words—"an economic catastrophe." That's what he said. And he also said explicitly that he didn't want to be Herbert Hoover.

He said that in the context of signing the June 17th agreement. Well, the basic dynamic that led him to sign the memorandum of understanding and say those things still applies. So all that's to say he's going to have to reach some sort of agreement with the Iranians sooner rather than later, because the economic consequences of not doing so would be disastrous. And that would be especially true if he ups the ante next week and goes after Iranian power plants, and then the Iranians, working with the Houthis, shut down the Red Sea. This would be disastrous. Right. So Trump is going to have to cut a deal. There's just no way around that. He has no way of winning. What's the leverage that Trump has? The leverage is that he can do great damage over time to the Iranian economy.

I think there's no question he can do real damage. But the point is that the Iranians have been suffering enormously under American sanctions, and they've been suffering enormously in this war. And all that tells you that they're used to suffering, and they have figured out all sorts of clever ways to minimize the amount of suffering that they undergo. And furthermore, as I said to you before, they're facing an existential threat, and when you're facing an existential threat, you're willing to absorb huge amounts of punishment. Just think about the bombing of Japan and the bombing of Germany in World War II. We, with that massive strategic bombing campaign in Germany and that massive strategic bombing campaign in Japan, could not bring the Japanese and the Germans to their knees.

We inflicted massive punishments on both societies, but the people were willing to suck it up and go on. And the same thing will happen here with regard to the Iranians. They're not going to quit, not at this point in time. And for anybody who has any doubts about that, all you have to do is watch the film footage of the funeral of Ayatollah Khomeini, right? The Iranians are not going to quit this fight. So we don't have real coercive leverage. They have coercive leverage because they can do

enormous damage to the international economy. And you might say, well, President Trump can go up the escalation ladder and we can beat them that way.

On the contrary, if he goes up the escalation ladder, if he attacks power plants and bridges next week, they're going to work. The Iranians are going to work with the Houthis to shut down the Red Sea. This will be disastrous for us. And furthermore, if he begins to go after the oil-producing facilities in Iran, the Iranians will retaliate against the oil-producing facilities and maybe even the desalination plants in countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, and so forth and so on. The Iranians are playing a very strong hand here, a much stronger hand than the United States is.

#Danny

I've heard, Professor Mearsheimer, that the United States—because, and the Trump administration says this all the time and was saying this in the middle of the most recent crisis, especially in the middle of the 40 days of hostilities you referenced earlier—was saying something to the effect of, well, we don't need the Strait because we're an independent oil producer. And there are even some critics of U.S. foreign policy who look at this and say, well, the United States is willing to sacrifice the Strait. It's willing to even sacrifice energy in the Gulf in order to, you know, bring down Iran and even corner energy markets on its own. What would you say to this argument? Because I'm seeing it more and more, especially the longer this war goes on—I'm seeing it more and more being talked about and argued by even those who are critical of what the United States is doing here.

#John Mearsheimer

It's belied by American behavior. Let's go back to Article 5, that Iran controls the Strait and the future of the Strait will be negotiated between Oman and Iraq. That's what it said. The United States is not mentioned in the discussion of the Strait in Article 5. Well, if the Strait doesn't matter to the United States, why did they care about Article 5? Why was the United States so interested in undermining the memorandum of understanding, which is what we did, by contesting the Iranians over the Strait? We wanted to have real influence on who got into and out of the Strait.

We were the ones who went to great lengths to open up the Omani channel that ran along the Omani coast. We put enormous pressure on the Omanis to side with us against the Iranians. The Omanis, by almost all accounts, were inclined to work with the Iranians to negotiate some sort of deal for monitoring traffic through the Strait of Hormuz. We were the ones who undermined any possible deal or negotiations between the Omanis and the Iranians, because we cared greatly about the Strait, and we cared greatly about having a channel in the Strait that we effectively controlled. So all this rhetoric you hear bears little resemblance to reality.

#Danny

Now, I want to ask you more about Yemen, because not only is the Bab al-Mandeb Strait situation a possible focal point for both Iran and maybe what we call the axis of resistance in retaliation against further U.S. escalation, but also there are reports, and we've seen earlier this week, that the United States gave a blessing to Saudi Arabia to attack Yemen, to attack its airport. And then Ansar Allah, the Houthis, responded quite forcefully against Saudi Arabia on their own.

Now, they're saying that they are going to attack vital Saudi facilities if Saudi Arabia continues its aggression against Yemen. So my question to you is, why did Trump give a green light and a blessing for Saudi Arabia to engage in this aggression with, of course, U.S. help? And I'm curious what you believe the play is here. Why do this, especially at this very sensitive moment where there are obviously plans or at least thoughts of escalation, which could lead to the very outcomes that you've described here?

#John Mearsheimer

Well, I think the even more important question, Danny, which is not to say your question's not an important one, but the more important question is, why did the Saudis attack the airport in Yemen, the Houthi-controlled airport in Yemen? Why did the Saudis pick a fight with the Houthis, who not only can strike back at Saudi Arabia, but who basically can shut down the Red Sea because they live right next door to the Bab al-Mandeb Strait? It would just seem to me crazy for the Saudis to pick a fight with the Iranians—excuse me, with the Houthis, who are allied with the Iranians. If anything, at this point in time, what the Saudis should be interested in doing is staying out of the fight.

You know, being as nice as possible to the Iranians, being as nice as possible to the Houthis. But what happened here is that a plane came from Tehran with a delegation, filled mainly with Houthis who had been at the funeral of Ayatollah Khomeini, and they landed at this Houthi-controlled airport, or they tried to land at this Houthi-controlled airport, and the Saudis shot up the airport before they could land there, forcing them to divert to another airfield. Why would the Saudis do this? Then, of course, what the Yemenis or the Houthis did was they automatically retaliated against Saudi Arabia and began to talk about shutting down the Red Sea and preventing all that Saudi oil from getting out into global markets.

So that is, I find, hard to explain. I just don't know what they were thinking. And then your question is, why did the Trump administration give the Saudis the green light? That's hard to understand as well, because the United States has a vested interest in not picking a fight with the Houthis and keeping the Red Sea open. By the way, you remember, we picked the fight with the Houthis in March of 2015. Remember, President Trump comes into office January 20th, 2017. Two months later, he decides he's going to go in and beat up on the Houthis and put them in their place. Sleepy Joe Biden couldn't do it, but he'll do it.

By May, he realized the Houthis were tough hombres and that he was not going to win, and he backed off. He should have learned then that you don't want to pick a fight with the Houthis, especially since they can shut down the Red Sea or traffic coming out of the Red Sea. Nevertheless, it appears that President Trump gave the Saudis a green light to pick a fight with the Houthis, who are closely allied with the Iranians, which from a strategic point of view, as you and I both know, makes no sense. So if you're asking me to explain why the Saudis did what they did and why President Trump did what he did, I have no good answer.

#Danny

And if we remember that period during that war that the United States waged on the Houthis, we saw the USS Harry Truman. I believe one of the big reasons why they stopped was because the USS Harry Truman aircraft carrier had to make evasive maneuvers several times during that period to evade Yemeni Ansar Allah Houthi missiles and lost a few F-18 fighter jets, which are quite expensive, actually. So that was a big deal.

#John Mearsheimer

Can I make one other point there? Of course. What you say is obviously very important, but there's another dimension to that conflict against the Houthis that bears mentioning because it has relevance for what's going on with regard to these tit-for-tat attacks between Iran and the United States. Another reason that we put an end to the war against the Houthis is that we were using huge amounts of precious weaponry, or precious munitions, in the campaign against the Houthis. And we began to realize this was not a smart thing to do, especially since it did not look like we were going to win the war against the Houthis.

And by the way, this is just like the 40-day bombing campaign. One of the principal reasons that the 40-day bombing campaign came to an end is we were expending huge numbers of precious munitions, similar to what happened with the Houthis. Fast forward to the present, where you have this tit-for-tat set of exchanges taking place, and where President Trump is talking about going up the escalation ladder next week. This same logic is at play again. As I said to you before, the dynamics, the underlying dynamics that produced the 17 June Memorandum of Understanding have not gone away.

And the last thing we need is a protracted tit-for-tat war where we end up basically using up all of these precious munitions that we need in other contingencies around the world, especially East Asia. So this set of considerations involving munitions is another important factor pushing President Trump to put an end to this war as quickly as possible. In other words, it's not just the international economy. It's not just the damage that might be done to the Gulf states. It's also the fact that we are using up so many weapons that are in our inventory, and it will take forever and a day to replace.

#Danny

I wanted to ask you, Professor Mearsheimer, about Israel's role in all of this. Interestingly enough, despite being incredibly passionate about restarting the war, Israel was never in favor of the MOU, was never in favor of talks with Iran, wanted the war that lasted 40 days to continue on with no pause. But they have been sidelined almost in many respects in this tit-for-tat that you describe. There haven't been many reports, if any, of Israeli involvement in these strikes. And I'm curious what you believe Israel's role is right now. What is its current situation, given the fact that Netanyahu has said they're not going to withdraw? There'll be no withdrawal from Lebanon, from Syria, despite reports that Trump has wanted this. And, you know, they have been the preeminent champions of this war, yet appear to be, at least for now, looking at it from the sidelines.

#John Mearsheimer

Yeah, this is a great question. This is an issue that doesn't get a lot of attention these days. The Israelis, in a way, have been sidelined in terms of the discourse about the ongoing conflict between the United States and Iran. And it's paradoxical because the Israelis played such an important role in getting the United States involved in this war, and they played such an important role in the 40-day bombing campaign. But now they don't seem to matter much in terms of the U.S.-Iran conflict. A couple of points. One is, I think the Israelis understand that if they get involved in the fight, they then become a target for Iranian ballistic missiles and Iranian cruise missiles.

And it's very important to understand that if you go back to the 40-day war, although the Israelis went to enormous lengths to hide the fact that their country was really clobbered by all of those Iranian missiles and drones, the fact is they were clobbered. We now know that. So the Israelis are not anxious to get back in the fight and become a giant magnet for Iranian ballistic missiles and drones. From their point of view, it's much better if the Iranians are firing at Bahrain, Kuwait, and Jordan and not at Israel. And it's better from an Israeli point of view if they can pass the buck to the United States to do the heavy lifting in terms of damaging or weakening Iran.

So what the Israelis are doing is sitting on the sideline, and they have passed the buck. And this is in the context of the U.S.-Iran conflict. The next point I would make is that what they really care about at this point in time is Lebanon and, to a lesser extent, Syria. And they want to fight against Hezbollah and badly damage, if not defeat, Hezbollah in southern Lebanon. And by staying out of the Iran-U.S. fight, or staying out of a direct fight with Iran, that frees them up to concentrate on dealing with Hezbollah. And as you know well, Danny, they are up to their eyeballs in alligators in terms of dealing with Hezbollah in southern Lebanon.

Hezbollah is another formidable adversary, so the Israelis prefer to concentrate on Hezbollah in southern Lebanon. And of course, they're also interested in taking territory and consolidating their position in southern Syria as well. Now, let me make one additional point on this whole subject. Going back to the Memorandum of Understanding, we've talked a lot about Article 5, which deals

with the Strait, but Article 1 deals with Lebanon. And you want to remember, this is the first article in the memorandum. It's quite clear that the Iranians wanted this to be the first article. It deals with Lebanon, and the Iranians maintain that the fighting has to stop in Lebanon, and they also maintain that the Israelis have to get out of southern Lebanon.

And of course, the Israelis have made it clear they have no intention of getting out of southern Lebanon or getting out of southern Syria. I think, Danny, when we get back to negotiating again, when President Trump gets back to negotiating again with the Iranians, the Iranians are going to play tougher this time on the southern Lebanon issue than they did last time. I think after the 17 June Memorandum of Understanding was signed, it looked like the Iranians were willing to look the other way on the issue of Israel abandoning southern Lebanon. I think that was the one issue that the Iranians did not appear to be committed to defending. I would imagine the next time you have a negotiation, what you're gonna see is that the Iranians are gonna play hardball with the Americans on the presence of Israel in southern Lebanon.

And I think the Iranians are likely to say, we're not gonna negotiate until you get the Israelis out of southern Lebanon, period, end of story. Now, I'm not saying that's axiomatically gonna happen, but my sense is that the Iranians are gonna be tougher customers to deal with moving forward than they were when we were in the process of putting together the June 17 Memorandum of Understanding, which is consistent with my argument, Danny, that with the passage of time, the coercive leverage that the Iranians have increases. In other words, the balance of coercive leverage between the United States and the Iranians moves in Iran's direction as time goes by. And that, of course, is what's happening. So I wouldn't be surprised if next time we see the Iranians acting in a tougher way with regard to southern Lebanon and the Israeli military presence in southern Lebanon.

#Danny

I wanted to ask you about what you believe the trajectory for the United States' hegemony is, as well as Israel's dream of hegemony—they call it Greater Israel—in the region. I wanted to ask you this question in light of these comments made by Donald Trump today about his reaction to the fact that he's claiming NATO and many U.S. allies are refusing to help in the latest iteration of this war.

#Speaker 1

This just in: President Trump on Truth Social saying, "We no longer need or desire the NATO countries' assistance. We never did. Likewise, Japan, Australia, or South Korea. In fact, speaking as President of the United States of America, by far the most powerful country anywhere in the world, we do not need the help of anyone." News nations joke on this, um...

#Danny

So that was his reaction to the fact, and he made other comments at this defense forum, a defense industry forum in Pennsylvania, saying something to the effect of South Korea not helping us despite U.S. troops being stationed there and in danger from North Korea and Kim Jong-un and all of this. More importantly, to the notion of, you know, how is this war impacting the United States and Israel, who both have ambitions to be hegemonic, to be all-powerful, to expand their power? Is that what's happening here?

#John Mearsheimer

Let me just start by saying that the argument that the United States doesn't need allies is ludicrous. I mean, the United States considers China to be the principal threat on the planet. The United States is deeply committed to pivoting to Asia for the purpose of containing China. The idea that we don't need allies to do that? I suppose if President Trump had been the head of the United States in the late 1940s and 1950s, he would not have created NATO because he didn't think he needed allies to contain the Soviet Union. This is not a smart argument. In fact, it's nonsensical. So it's just another one of those statements that President Trump has made that makes you really wonder what he is thinking about how the world works.

With regard to the U.S. and Israel, I think there's no question that Israel was bent on being the dominant power in the Middle East and doing everything it could to weaken all its potential adversaries, or if not weaken them, make them dependent on the United States. As we know well, both Egypt and Jordan, and even now Syria, are heavily dependent on the United States, which works to Israel's advantage for sure. We also know that Israel would like to see countries, big countries in the region, greatly weakened. There's no question that Israel was not simply interested in regime change in Iran. They really wanted to break Iran into pieces. They wanted to greatly weaken Iran so that Israel was militarily much more powerful than Iran.

And as many people have observed, the Israelis are now talking about Turkey as a major threat. Well, Turkey is another one of those big countries in the greater Middle East. And unsurprisingly, the Israelis have their gun sights now on Turkey. And this is all part and parcel of Israel's interest in becoming a regional hegemon dominating the Middle East. This is not going to happen. And if anything, the Iran war has done an enormous amount of damage to Israel's pursuit of that vision, because Iran is going to come out of this war much more powerful than it was on February 27th. From the point of view of Israel, this war—the war between Iran on one side and the United States and Israel on the other side—has been a strategic disaster.

No goals have been achieved. Um, Iran now controls the Strait of Hormuz. And if a final deal is worked out, Iran will get all sorts of economic benefits that will help it grow its power in the future. So the idea that Israel is going to be a regional hegemon is no longer even possible. And of course, the Turks are not going to let that happen either. The idea that Israel is going to weaken Turkey, do great damage to Turkey, I believe, is not in the cards either. With regard to the United States, I

think the interesting question is whether or not the United States will stay in the Middle East, and specifically, will it stay in the Persian Gulf once this war comes to an end?

The question is, will we think it makes strategic sense to rebuild our bases in places like Bahrain and Kuwait, and so forth and so on? And moreover, will those six GCC countries want us there, given that we created this war that has led to a tremendous amount of destruction in each of their countries? It's not clear they'll want our bases there. So it remains an open question what happens to America's bases in the region and America's alliance structure in the region. Well, this is a way of saying that from an American, and especially from an Israeli, point of view, this war has been a disaster.

#Danny

Now, there is an audience member's question I did want to ask. People have been very curious about your opinions on what the role of China is right now in the U.S.-Iran war. There have been many theories about what China is doing. Some have said that China is even pushing Iran to lay off certain targets, to not escalate, to maybe be more amenable to negotiations. I haven't seen any evidence of that. I know you've traveled to China several times. I've been several times. I've never seen any evidence that that's something that would be necessarily in their interest. But nonetheless, there are interests here for China in terms of stability. So I'm wondering what your opinion is, if you have any insight into what China's role in this conflict is right now, if any.

#John Mearsheimer

Yeah, well, I don't know exactly what Chinese policymakers are thinking about Iran. But it does seem clear to me that Iran, Russia, and China are all mortal enemies of the United States. I'm choosing my words carefully here. I think that the United States is interested in seriously damaging all three of those countries. And I think when you're in a situation like that, a situation that Iran, China, and Russia are in, you have a deep-seated interest in working together to make sure that you stymie the United States. China has a deep-seated interest, for example, in making sure that the United States does not defeat the Russians in Ukraine.

Furthermore, both Russia and China have a deep-seated interest in making sure that the United States loses in its war against Iran. It would be to their advantage, for sure. And therefore, you see all sorts of evidence that the Iranians are receiving important kinds of intelligence from both the Chinese and the Russians. There are all sorts of reports of Chinese and Russian weapons being sent to the Iranians because, again, the Chinese and the Russians don't want to see Iran lose. And, of course, Iran has a deep-seated interest in working with China and Russia as well.

To take this a step further, because the question had mainly to do with China, if you're China and you're worried about having the United States in your backyard, having the United States in your face, if you're worried about the United States pivoting to Asia to contain you, the idea that the

United States gets sidetracked by launching a war in the Middle East that turns into a protracted war is wonderful news. The war in Iran has caused the United States to pivot away from East Asia so that it has sufficient forces in the Persian Gulf to fight against Iran. This is manna from heaven for the Chinese. So the Chinese, in a very important way, have a vested interest in not only seeing the United States lose the war, but seeing the war go on and on because it pins the United States down in the Middle East. So I think the net effect of this war is a win for China.

#Danny

Yeah, yeah. Which always made me curious about, you know, some have noted that perhaps, you know, China has a very good relationship with Pakistan. And some have noted that maybe it would be China, through Pakistan, pushing for negotiations and pushing for an end to the war. But at the same time, Pakistan itself has a deep interest in not having this war spiral out of control, not least because it's balancing relations with Iran, and the fact that even just today there were top military leaders saying that if Iran attacks Saudi Arabia, for example, if this energy crisis, tit-for-tat, the infrastructure-for-infrastructure actually goes through, then Pakistan may actually be compelled to follow their military-to-military agreement that Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have.

So I think, you know, I'm curious about your response to this, that sometimes I feel like people maybe dismiss the role of even these intermediaries like Pakistan, which has interests of its own and is actually in the region, unlike China, which is still not in the region despite its interests, as you said, a deep interest in ensuring that, or at least a deep interest in allowing the United States to continue on its foray and endless war in this part of the world.

#John Mearsheimer

Well, I think the question you have to ask yourself, Danny, is what would Pakistan gain by coming into a fight between Saudi Arabia and Iran? Let's assume the Iranians attack Saudi Arabia and the Saudis retaliate, and you have a significant tit-for-tat campaign between the two of them. There's no question the Americans are going to side with the Saudis, so it's not like the Saudis are going to be left out in the cold. The Saudis will have American support. What's the value added, from Pakistan's point of view, of getting involved? I mean, are they going to tip the balance against Iran?

I don't think so. Are they going to matter very much in terms of who wins the fight? I don't think so. And are they going to cause themselves a lot of headaches in the sense that they're going to alienate the Iranians? I think the answer is yes. And therefore, I think if I'm playing Pakistan's hand and a fight breaks out between Saudi Arabia and Iran, I do not want to get involved. It's not in my strategic interest. And I'm talking here from a Pakistani point of view. So I don't see that happening.

#Danny

And given you noted that Iran, Russia, and China are very connected here in terms of U.S. ambitions and aims, I'm curious about your thoughts on how this current iteration of the war on Iran affects the other flashpoints in the world, in particular Ukraine, because the United States has rhetorically, seemingly, turned an eye away from it, but that war is still very much raging. And the trajectory of it, I don't see having changed all that much, or at all, despite the fact that there's been, I think, a massive media spin attempting to frame it as now Russia on the back foot. So I'm curious if you believe that this ongoing Iran war will impact what's happening with Ukraine and other parts of the geopolitical map.

#John Mearsheimer

Well, I think when you talk about the Ukraine war, you have to separate what's happening on the battlefield from this long-range drone campaign that the Ukrainians are waging against the Russian homeland. I think if you look at what's happening on the battlefield, the Russians are winning. I think the Ukrainians are in trouble. And I think there's no question that the Russians are not winning quickly. It's a slow victory. There's no question about that. But the Russians are slowly rolling up the Ukrainians. The Ukrainians have huge manpower problems, which is affecting their performance on the battlefield.

And all evidence tells us that they're not able to solve the manpower problem, which is just getting worse, because the draft resistance problem is increasing inside of Ukraine itself. So I think in terms of the battlefield, the Russians are on the march. It's the long-range drone war that Ukraine is waging with help from the Europeans and the United States against the Russians that most people in the West and in Ukraine see as Ukraine's ace in the hole. This is how Ukraine can get a favorable outcome to the war. And if you look at what President Trump said and how he acted in France in mid-June at the G7 meeting, and then you look at what he said and how he acted in early July at the NATO meeting in Ankara, it looks like President Trump has recommitted himself to trying to do great damage to Russia with this drone campaign.

President Trump seems to be very enthusiastic about this long-range drone campaign that the Ukrainians are waging against Russia, and he wants to support it. You know, if you look at the declaration that the G7 issued, this was on June 17th after the meeting in France, what the G7 countries said, and of course this includes the United States and President Trump, was that what we're going to do is we're going to accelerate—just think about that word—we're going to accelerate our efforts to help Ukraine wage the long-range drone war. Furthermore, it said that we were going to continue to push hard to do more damage to the Russian economy.

This clearly signifies to me that President Trump is still in the fight against Russia in Ukraine. Remember last August, August 2025, this was during his first year in office, he went to Ankara, where he met Putin. And it looked like Russia and the United States were going to have some sort of major rapprochement as a result of this meeting in Ankara. And that continued to be the case

through most of 2025. But if you look at what's happened in 2026, especially what's happened at the G7 meeting, at the NATO meeting, it looks to me like President Trump has done pretty much a 180-degree turn.

And this tells you that this one is going to be settled on the battlefield. And there I think the Russians are going to win. And that then leaves open the question: what happens if the drone war really begins to have a serious effect on Russia, the Russian economy, and on Russian public opinion? What will the Russians then do? Will they escalate? How will they escalate? This is a huge question. And all of this just tells you that we have two ongoing wars, one in Ukraine and one in the Middle East, that could have disastrous consequences.

#Danny

Yes, indeed. Well, I think that's a great place to end the program. Do you have any final words before we wrap up the show today?

#John Mearsheimer

I just hope all my analysis is wrong and that, for reasons I just didn't see, everything works out swimmingly in the Gulf and we get a negotiated settlement there, and we get a negotiated settlement in Ukraine. But I'm sad to say I don't see how you can tell a plausible story as to how you end up with meaningful peace agreements in either one of those regions. I think what you see is trouble for as far as the eye can see. And this is thoroughly depressing.

#Danny

Well, I want to thank everyone who gave a super chat. I want to thank everyone who viewed today and all the moderators who helped out with the chat. And just quickly, tomorrow I'll be back at 12 noon Eastern time, July 17th, with Pepe Escobar. Professor Mearsheimer, it was great to be with you. We can head out together. Everyone, hit the like button — that will keep the stream boosted after we are done.