

Iran WIPES OUT US Troops, Yemen SHUTS Red Sea | Alexander Mercouris

Trump is panicking as Geopolitical analyst Alexander Mercouris joins Danny Haiphong to discuss Iran's major escalation that has US troop losses spiking and the mounting crises facing US empire as Yemen closes the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. <https://www.youtube.com/@AlexMercouris> <https://www.youtube.com/@UCdeMVChrumySxV9N1w0Au-w> PATREON.COM/DANNYHAIPHONG Support the channel in other ways: <https://www.buymeacoffee.com/dannyhai...> Substack: chroniclesofhaiphong.substack.com Cashapp: \$Dhaiphong Venmo: @dannyH2020 Paypal: <https://paypal.me/spiritofho> Follow me on Telegram: <https://t.me/dannyhaiphong> #iran #iranwar #trump

#Danny

Welcome back to the show, everyone. Alexander Mercouris of The Duran is here with me to break down the latest news. We begin with the latest developments in the Iran war. The United States says it is teetering on all-out war with Iran, despite the fact that U.S. losses continue to mount. Now, according to U.S. officials, one additional U.S. troop—now two—were confirmed dead yesterday. One additional U.S. soldier was confirmed dead in Iraq from an undetonated drone, and the remains of another U.S. soldier on a U.S. base in Jordan were identified as dead as well. And this comes as ongoing Iranian retaliation continues to have, now we can say objectively, Alexander, far more impact than what the United States is doing.

Here are some of the reports that Iran has said it destroyed 20 hangars at the Al-Azraq base in Jordan and damaged a U.S. C-17 transport and a P-8 command aircraft at Aqaba Airport, which directly borders Israel. And as of today, Iran is firing at Kuwait and Bahrain. CENTCOM strikes, Alexander, reportedly are becoming more and more vague. CENTCOM is not giving amounts or details on how much they are striking. They say they're getting revenge for the dead U.S. troops that were killed by Iranian missiles and drones. But nonetheless, it looks like those are weakening, and there is some activity among mediators, especially Qatari, trying to force a ceasefire as things get even hotter, with Yemen announcing a blockade of Saudi Arabia — a full blockade, port for port — which has huge implications for the Red Sea. Alexander, help us understand what's going on. What do you make of these developments?

#Alexander Mercouris

Well, we are in a state of all-out war between Iran and the United States. I think we need to be clear about this. I mean, there was an article—I think it was in the Financial Times, but certainly in the British media—saying that the United States has essentially returned to its original objective in fighting Iran, which was regime change in Iran. The problem is they can't really come up with a plan

for how to achieve regime change in Iran. And of course, they're launching these attacks and strikes against Iran. But there is a fundamental difference between the way the two militaries, the Iranian and the American, are configured. The American military is configured exclusively for air attack.

It has no ability really to organize effective defense, because the United States has never really imagined itself in a situation where it is under attack from the air. It therefore does not have hardened bases. It does not have the kind of elaborate, well-developed air defense system which some countries like Russia, China, and to some extent Iran have. And the result is that its bases, its troops across the Middle East, are extremely vulnerable. By contrast, Iran has been forced to prepare both for offense and defense. So it's built up its enormous caves, its hardened shelters, its bunkers, which are all over Iran. And at the same time, it's developed a very powerful missile and drone capability, which enables it to strike against American targets across the Middle East, extending as far as Jordan.

And it seems even Israel itself. So that is the fundamental difference. And it's something that the U. S. never really imagined and never really planned for. The U.S. has never fought a war in its history in which it did not have overwhelming air superiority. It now finds itself in one, and it is completely unprepared for it. And its military is not really configured to know what to do with it. So it strikes Iran repeatedly, but the strikes that it makes have limited effect, whereas the Iranian strikes on American facilities, as you say, are much more effective, resulting in American soldiers being killed and in the Americans being forced to evacuate some of their bases. So it's a war, but not one which the Americans appear to have a plan for winning.

#Danny

Yeah, there's a good Fox News report that I think outlines the desperation of the situation. And I'll put it on now and play it at 1.25 speed, and it'll be about a minute, just to get an idea of how these deaths are being reported, because the United States also has far less tolerance when it comes to taking casualties. And now the casualties are mounting.

#Fox News 1

The Department of War just confirmed the identity of two active-duty soldiers who were killed in Operation Inherent Resolve. It's 25-year-old First Lieutenant Tyler James Feehan and 19-year-old Private Isabella Gonzalez. Meanwhile, the United States is retaliating with a ninth straight night of strikes on Iranian military sites.

#Fox News 2

Alexandria Hoff is at the White House with the latest for us. Good morning to you. Nineteen and twenty-five years old — it is a hard pill to swallow this morning. But the current air campaign against Iran right now, this is really punishment for the specific IRGC factions that have targeted U.S. air

bases, including that base in Jordan that proved to be so deadly. A circulating video of what is believed to be those strikes was released by the Associated Press, the Pentagon confirming this weekend that the two U.S. service members were killed, leaving a third missing, though unidentified remains have been found. That person is still unidentified at this time. The President, though, is expressing profound grief for this.

#Donald Trump

Well, we feel very badly. But, you know, those great people, those great patriots are out there fighting so that Iran cannot have a nuclear weapon. But we hit them very hard again tonight, and we did that in honor of the probably three — it's probably three as opposed to two — great patriots.

#Danny

So even Trump is acknowledging now that at least three, and just these single attacks, this only happened within a matter of a couple of days. But Alexandria, you know, Trump is acknowledging these losses. There are talks now of mediation happening. Qatar is trying to, I believe, push through some kind of ceasefire, which Iran has already rejected. But we heard that Trump was going to open the gates of hell. That has not happened. Why do you think this is, despite the thoughts about escalation dragging on in the way that it is? Because at this moment, U.S. officials are telling the Washington Post that the United States neither has the logistics to send troops to Iran in order to conduct some kind of ground invasion, nor the supplies militarily to conduct even larger-scale offensive operations.

#Alexander Mercouris

Well, I think this also points to something else. I mean, I spoke about how the U.S. military is designed, is configured for offense, not really for defense. So they're not really in a position, they're not organized to defend themselves against the kind of attacks that Iran has been conducting. But of course, we come back to the underlying problem of the entire American military procurement system. American lives are taken very seriously in the United States. They don't like to lose their people. They are obviously very profligate in the number of people they kill on the other side. If they kill hundreds or thousands of people on the other side, that matters less.

But if a few Americans are killed, that matters a great deal and has a political effect. On the Iranian side, they are prepared to take casualties because for them, this is an existential war. It is about the survival of their country and of its political system. And of course, they have religious beliefs which, in some cases, actually welcome death. So it's again a difference. But we also have the procurement issues. And here again, it's something which perhaps President Trump has never really quite understood. The United States has always had overwhelming force against all of its adversaries. It's never faced adversaries who could hit back or who could sustain a long war against it.

Now the United States finds itself in a long war, and its entire industrial procurement system is not designed for it. They're not designed to produce hundreds of missiles a day or thousands of precision-guided bombs a day, and their aircraft are expensive and complex to operate and require heavy maintenance in well-protected and well-provided bases. This is not the kind of war that the United States is really prepared for—one which is grueling, which is a long war of attrition where the enemy just doesn't give up but goes on fighting day after day, week after week, month after month, potentially year after year. This is not something that the United States is ready for or has ever really planned for.

#Danny

Well, if there's one thing about President Donald Trump of the United States, it's that he never appears to be, how should I say, unrattled. He always appears to be rattled. And he is definitely rattled. Today, right before we came on the show, he put on his Truth Social: every time Iran kills an American soldier, they will pay for that killing many times over. This directive has been passed on to the Secretary of War, Pete Hegseth, and Daniel Cain, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and every leader in the military. So this is Donald Trump's reaction to these losses, Alexander.

But as you just noted, there are limitations to this. And what we've seen—maybe you can comment on this across the board—is that actually the U.S., despite saying it's going to strike deeper and harder, has actually remained in these nine days strong in a very particular area, striking the southern coast. Iran has even objected that these targets are legitimate at all, that they are mainly civilian, in large part because Iran had planned for this contingency. They planned for the Strait of Hormuz area to become a battleground, especially when they declared control over it when the ceasefire fell through.

#Alexander Mercouris

Your thoughts on this? Well, a few things. Firstly, I mean, what President Trump has just said is another example of President Trump leading by tantrum, directing a war emotionally and without thinking it through. I mean, what kind of an order is that? I mean, it's an absurd order if you think about it. You know, they kill one of our people, so we must kill ten of them. I mean, that isn't the kind of order that a rational commander gives to his military. A rational commander gives orders which are intended to achieve victory. This is seeking revenge in a war which, of course, ultimately Donald Trump himself started.

It shows his frustration that the Iranians are resisting and that they're able to hit back and that they're inflicting casualties, which is clearly not something that Donald Trump ever really believed that they would do. Now, to the extent that I can see a plan behind what the United States is doing, it seems that they're trying to soften the territory around the Strait of Hormuz, around the coastline of Iran, in order to break Iranian control of the Strait of Hormuz. I'm told that this coastline makes that all but impossible, that it is extraordinarily easy to defend.

And besides, as the Iranians have demonstrated, most of their missile and drone capabilities are long-ranged, so they don't need to maintain missile batteries on the coast to fight and to stop ships, indeed warships also, entering the Strait of Hormuz. So as a military strategy, it appears flawed. If it's intended to soften the ground in advance of an American ground operation against Iran to try to seize this territory, I would have said that was also incredibly difficult to do and would take a very long time. I don't think the United States has the time, and I don't think Donald Trump has the political credibility and the political credit in the United States to begin such a ground operation.

#Danny

Now, I wanted your comments, Alexander, on another part of this war, which is now, you know, Ansar Allah, what many in the West call the Houthis. They declared a blockade today. They announced that there was going to be war, a major move made in the next 24 hours yesterday. And they declared that this blockade is an eye for an eye. It's a response to the siege. Of course, this siege escalated dramatically over the last week or so, with Saudi Arabia bombing Sana'a Airport.

Now, this has huge implications, though, because a big part of Saudi's oil transit at the moment, Alexander, is through the Yanbu port and into the Red Sea and then back out to the world market. Ansar Allah said this is port for port. This is every single pathway for Saudi oil. Trade and oil transit will be blockaded. And we have a few vessels burning in the Strait of Hormuz after Iran hit them. So there's obviously big moves to choke off these choke points by Ansar Allah. What do you make of it? What do you make of the potential impact of this and where it's going?

#Alexander Mercouris

Well, I think this could have potentially a very great impact. Now, what we see is that the United States talks escalation but has up to now not been able to escalate. It's got limits on what it can do. Its inventories are depleted, and they are depleting. It doesn't want to use ground forces. By contrast, the other side does have the ability to escalate, and that is precisely what they're doing. They've now effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz again. There's this interesting intrigue between the Houthis and the Saudis. The Saudis, as you rightly say, bombed Sana'a Airport — a very reckless, unwise, foolish thing for them to do. Apparently, they got permission to do it from Trump himself. I wonder whether it was actually permission that Trump gave them or whether maybe he urged them to do it, that he was angry because an Iranian delegation or some kind of Iranian aircraft was flying to Yemen.

Anyway, we now see the result. The Houthis closed the Red Sea last year. The United States deployed a fleet to try to break that Houthi blockade. It proved unable to do it. There is no reason why the Houthis cannot do this again. If they really do close the Red Sea to this kind of shipping, to Saudi shipping, and the Saudis can't export their oil, then this is a crisis because the oil that Saudi Arabia has been exporting has been part of the reason why the headline price of oil has not gone

above \$100 a barrel. If the Saudis can't export it, if all oil exports from the Persian Gulf area and from Saudi Arabia stop, then, well, again, it's difficult to see how we're going to avoid further increases in the price of oil and greater oil shortages coming.

#Danny

Yeah. Yeah. And the price of oil is already going up. It came down very briefly today because of those reports of mediation. And I believe it was Marco Rubio who said that Iran wants to talk. That, of course, is almost always market manipulation in an attempt to bring down the prices. But there is no indication of that, as I showed earlier, as you were talking, Alexander. There are ships burning in the Strait of Hormuz right now. There is obviously no interest by Iran to let go of this control. And the United States doesn't seem poised to settle this on Iran's terms either. So it is quite the dilemma. Your final thoughts on this before we move on from it?

#Alexander Mercouris

Well, I think this is the key thing to understand, because, of course, what happened was this: the United States attacked Iran with Israel on the 28th of February. The policy that Iran had in the first three weeks of the war was that there would be no interim ceasefire, that there would be no cessation of hostilities unless and until there was a full and complete agreement between Iran and the United States covering all outstanding issues, and which took the form, as I remember, of a treaty — a final agreement. That was the Iranian position. The Iranians were talked out of that position by Pakistan and by China and by other mediators. And this was very controversial in Iran.

But anyway, they were talked out of it. They agreed to a memorandum of understanding with the Americans, which is exactly the kind of temporary ceasefire they'd previously said they would not agree to. The memorandum of understanding set out various steps and concessions which the United States would make. The United States did not make those steps or concessions, so those people in Iran who said that the memorandum of understanding was a mistake, that the initial policy of refusing any interim deal and of insisting that the only deal Iran is prepared to do is a full, final, complete deal ratified as a treaty or whatever between itself and the United States, they feel vindicated.

They will come back and say, well, all of these requests for a ceasefire from countries like Qatar, before long, no doubt, Pakistan — we've already been there, we've already done that. What happened? The Americans tried to get shipping through the Strait of Hormuz. They took advantage of the steps that we took, but they gave back nothing substantive in return. So this time, the Iranians are saying, this time it's for real. We're going back to our original policy, the policy we had in the first three weeks of the war, and this time we are not going to be persuaded again to part with it. The memorandum of understanding episode has destroyed what little remaining trust there was between the Trump administration and Iran.

#Danny

Yeah, well, given what you just said there too, your reaction to this — I found this report to be very shocking because what we are hearing now from Iran is, well, I don't necessarily believe this may be imminent, but there are obviously conversations happening about something as serious as an Iranian ground incursion itself. Iran, according to a prominent Iranian journalist and former Iranian foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, is saying that Iran could launch its own kind of ground incursion into Kuwait and seize military bases like Camp Buehring or Ali Al Salem Air Base. Now, both of these bases have taken enormous damage since the war began, but especially in the last week, nine days of restarted hostilities.

Kuwait is considered one of Iran's principal political options for a potential ground incursion aimed at seizing two U.S. military bases in the country. I mean, that's a major... Even if it's not happening inside — we don't know if it's happening inside the government — we know people very close to the government are raising it. That almost makes me believe, Alexander, that even the attempt at a ground operation by the United States carries far more risks than just, let's just say, what Iran has been doing up until this point, which would be, of course, drone attacks, missile attacks on U.S. troop positions if they were to do this. Your thoughts on this? It's very unconventional from the standpoint of history. We don't often hear of a country the U.S. is bombing, or it's waging war against, take this kind of measure in response.

#Alexander Mercouris

Well, indeed. And can I just say, I don't actually think Iran really does plan to do this. I think what they're doing is they're telling the Americans, look, we hear all this talk about ground operations against our country. If you start doing that kind of thing to us, then be aware we can do the same to your allies. And we can seize your bases. And your bases are not that far from our territory. And we have soldiers and troops who are there in much larger numbers than yours, and this would be a debacle for you. The reason I don't think the Iranians would do this is because I don't think that Iran's friends around the world — China, Russia especially — would want to see something like this happen. So, you know, I may be wrong, but I think this is more a warning to the Americans.

Don't even think of a ground war. If you go down the route of a ground war, don't imagine that we're just going to be there on the defense, just as we've gone on the attack following your air attacks on us. So if there is a ground war, a ground invasion of our country, we will retaliate by launching ground invasions of your allies. And don't for a moment think we don't have the capability to do it.

#Danny

Yeah, and it may not be necessary either, because I want to pull this up — this is the U.S. air base in Jordan. Satellite imagery shows that Iran's missile and drone attacks are incredibly accurate and

have done major damage to drone hangars, aircraft hangars, and of course the troop barracks, which led to these dozens of U.S. casualties and at least three U.S. soldiers killed. So it may not be necessary, especially if it's on Iranian territory, to waste manpower on some kind of ground operation. But nevertheless, Alexander, one thing that's been impressive — I want your comment on — is how quickly Iran has rebuilt after these strikes. And I think this is understated.

For example, when the bridge — not the bridge, the railroad that was connecting Iran to China through Turkmenistan — was bombed, I believe Iran got that back up within days, you know, a day's time or within hours. And recently, as the United States has bombed bridges and even a desalination plant in southern Iran, that too has been restored within days, a few hours. So what do you make of this development? It appears the contingencies of Iran's preparation — I find this quite impressive — have also included what you do after strikes hit the country. And I'm curious if you know any historical precedent for this, especially given the fact that we're kind of at unprecedented times where the U.S. is having to trade fire with an adversary.

#Alexander Mercouris

Well, a good precedent was what happened in Vietnam, by the way. During the Vietnam War, there was very, very heavy American bombing of Vietnam. But North Vietnam was always able to keep its roads and its industrial facilities running, at least to some level. And, of course, they kept the Ho Chi Minh Trail operating despite enormous bombing by the United States of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. But Iran — coming back to Iran — is a much more sophisticated and much better organized society than I think many people in the West give it credit for. It has a lot of engineering depth. It has large numbers of very well-trained, very dedicated engineers. It has a very substantial construction industry.

One of the things that has happened in Iran since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 is that they carried out a massive program to upgrade and build up their infrastructure. So they are well positioned to repair damage, and because they've planned for this, because they've always expected sooner or later that there would be an attack of this kind on their country, and because they've also got the experience of the Iran-Iraq War, when their infrastructure, their cities, were also attacked by the Iraqis, the Iranians know how to do this. They know how to organize to do this. And as you rightly say, they do it very fast. As soon as something is destroyed, they get it back together again. It's, again, a capability which in the West we have, to a great extent, lost.

#Danny

Yeah, and I'll just pull up what I found while you were speaking. Here it is. This is from Iran's energy minister. So it's the Banji desalination plant in Jask. It was completely restored to normal in less than 48 hours after a missile strike hit it. And that supplies 10,000 people across 20 villages in that county with water. So, yeah, very, very rapid response to U.S. strikes, which, first of all, that's civilian infrastructure, but it counters the narrative that the United States always says — degrading Iran's

capabilities to control, or they don't say control, to degrade Iran's ability to attack and hit activity in the Strait of Hormuz. But it doesn't seem like that's actually what's happening here.

#Alexander Mercouris

People in the West continue to have a very exaggerated idea of what bombing and strikes can actually do. This is something, either way, I've studied. But I mean, even during the Second World War, industrial facilities were shown to have enormous resilience to bombing. This proved to be the case in Germany. It proved to be the case in Japan. It proved, by the way, to be the case in the Soviet Union as well, provided you have a strong cadre of engineers and skilled workers who are prepared to come in and repair the damage quickly, and provided you build in redundancies into the system, which we don't tend to do so much in the West anymore, but in other countries they still do.

Absolutely. You can get industrial facilities repaired and back up and running very, very quickly. The same is true, by the way, about the refineries in Russia. I've been saying this for over a year now that, you know, attacks by Ukrainian drones on Russian refineries don't mean that those refineries are knocked out of action for any significant length of time. You can see smoke, you can see fires, but the fires can be put out and the repairs can be done. And the Iranians show that they have at least the same level of skills, perhaps even more, because they have been living under the threat of war for decades, which, of course, the Russians have not.

#Danny

Well, I guess that's a good segue into, Alexander, what is going on when it comes to the Ukraine conflict? Because there was a pretty big—this is the Moscow Times, so a very opposition-laden to the Russian government—news outlet, if we can call it that. Essentially, there were about 400 or so drones launched at Russia yesterday by Ukraine, including at a retailer—I did not know this—a privately owned retailer, Wildberries, which killed eight people and injured 70 others, with possibly 100 billion rubles, or \$1.3 billion, in economic damage. This is a regular occurrence now, Ukraine sending hundreds of drones, especially after Russian strikes, which Russia has started on Odessa and Kiev in recent days. Talk about what is happening in the conflict and maybe any parallels you see in what's happening in these two wars, because they're often disconnected from each other.

#Alexander Mercouris

Indeed they are. Well, first of all, let me just explain what Wildberries is. Wildberries is a Russian analogue to Amazon. In fact, Russia has two. There's a company called Wildberries, which is the one we're talking about, and then there's its rival, which is called Ozon. And they are present in every village, every town, every city in Russia. They're extremely well organized. Russia has gone into e-commerce on a massive scale, a fact which is not very well known in the West. And of course, like

Amazon, they have these big warehouses where they keep lots of goods, and this is a particularly big warehouse in the Moscow region. Now, the Ukrainians are saying that these warehouses have been used by the Russian military for supporting logistics in the war.

I'm unable to say whether that is true or not, definitely, because obviously I have not actually visited these warehouses. But I personally think that is extremely unlikely. The Russians have their own—the Russian military has its own logistics system, which is going to be very hardened. I don't understand why they would be using warehouses in the Moscow region to support operations in Ukraine. And if you know anything about the way Wildberries works, you would feel, and I do feel, that this is extremely unlikely.

Now, what has been happening in the war in Ukraine over the last few months is that as the Russians press forward on the front lines, and they've now reached the line of the fortified cities in Donbass, we are coming close to what could be a final apocalyptic battle for those cities. The Ukrainians have tried to put emphasis on a sort of drone offensive that they're conducting themselves against Russia. The trouble is, the Russians have a very, very advanced and very effective air defense system. Most of the drones, when they've attacked installations like refineries and military facilities, tend to get shot down. The attacks on the refineries themselves do only a certain amount of damage.

But Ukraine, having invested so much in this drone offensive and having talked it up so much to the Western media, now needs targets for its drones to be able to show that it is continuing to do damage. So what I suspect is happening is that they're coming after soft targets, and these big warehouses owned by companies like Wildberries are obvious targets. So I think this is what's happening. I think we're seeing a drone offensive which started as an attack, an offensive against the road linking Russia with Crimea, and then evolved into attacks on refineries, and then evolved into attacks on ships in the Sea of Azov and then the Black Sea, as each of those campaigns has gradually been countered by the Russian air defense system. They're now attacking Wildberries' warehouses instead.

#Danny

And what does it say, Alexander, about the conflict in general? Why is Ukraine investing so much in these drone attacks? What's happening on the battlefields? How does it relate? Because we're not hearing so much from the collective West anymore about territory. Or if we do, it's only scant references to Russia not having gained a lot or losing the initiative, but very little on Ukrainian territory moving toward any kind of victory. So, very far less of that and more of, well, bringing it home to Russia — the war, this economic pain, the inconveniences, the danger and the fear of drone attacks will rattle internal Russian society and lead to a favorable outcome for the collective West. But I'm curious what you have to say about what's happening on the ground.

#Alexander Mercouris

What has happened over the last couple of months is that we have had what I suspect was a very organized campaign to try to create a sort of sense of euphoria that Ukraine was somehow holding back the Russians on the front lines and successfully bringing the war home to the Russians in their own country. And that for that reason, the Russians were on the back foot and that the Ukrainians had regained the initiative. Now, every part of that narrative was wrong, in my opinion. On the front lines, the Russians have continued to advance. I mean, they've recently captured Kostyantynivka, which was a big city in Donbas.

It's the second biggest city that the Russians have captured since the start of the special military operation, and it's one of the important cities in this line of fortified cities in Donbas. And the Russians have been advancing significantly in other places. And perhaps most worryingly for the Ukrainians, they've also been expanding significantly now the territory that they control in northeastern Ukraine, which, though not exactly close to Kiev, does potentially put the Russians in a position where they might decide that they have a place from which to launch an attack towards Kiev.

So on the ground, things have been going badly for Ukraine, very badly this year. And in fact, recently there was an article in a Ukrainian newspaper where Ukrainian soldiers were actually coming out and saying this drone offensive that we're hearing about isn't helping us, and our own situation on the front lines is becoming increasingly difficult. So that's the front lines. As for the drone offensive, you have to remember one thing about Russia: it is the world's biggest country. It has an enormous territory, there's an enormous territory to defend. But the very size of the country, while that makes it vulnerable to the fact that some drones will always get through because you cannot defend everything over such a huge territory, also gives it immense resilience. Because a drone strike on a town like Tambov, where one of those Wildberries warehouses was located, is not going to have much impact in another city in the Urals or in Siberia or in Moscow or wherever. Now, as it happens, a month ago, I was in Moscow.

I was in Moscow at a time when Ukrainian drone attacks against Moscow were taking place. I was in another town in Russia called Pskov, which is a military town where an airborne division is garrisoned, and where a lot of the people, the men, joined the military, which has also been a target of Ukrainian drones. I didn't see any sign of drones. I didn't see any nervousness among people about drones. They were not having any significant impact on the economy at all. This was before the big attacks on the refineries. So afterwards, after I left Russia, there was talk of gas queues in some places — not entirely uncommon, by the way, in Russia in summer, where there are always shortages of gasoline because Russia doesn't have many refineries that refine gasoline — but nothing that I saw suggested that this drone offensive was having an impact.

And since the last couple of days, I've been speaking to some people in Russia, and they tell me that in Moscow, in the big cities, the gasoline situation has abated, that gasoline is available again, and the problem there has been resolved overall. So if you launch hundreds of drones against Russia,

some are bound to get through. But the amount of damage they do is going to be very small. And it is certainly not going to change the calculus of the Kremlin. It's not going to make them change their policy, and it's not going to frighten the Russian people into opposition to the Kremlin either.

#Danny

Yeah, yeah. And, Alexander, in the last 15 minutes or so that we have, you know, in both wars, the ultimate immediate conversation about any kind of cessation of hostilities is a ceasefire. But now, not only has there never really been — I mean, there never really has been — a ceasefire in the Ukraine conflict at all, other than very brief ones to observe certain holidays and things like this. But with Iran, of course, there's been now the MOU period and, of course, what happened after the 12-day war in June.

But is the era of ceasefires over when it comes to these conflicts? Yes. And then how do wars, especially when they involve the United States, which is at least still the hegemon in so many ways—what does an end to the war even look like under the conditions of the United States being a hegemon and being pretty much 100% committed to war regardless of the costs? I think we're seeing this over and over. You outlined all the costs in the Iran conflict. You can outline the costs in the Ukraine conflict, I think, quite well too. But nevertheless, it persists.

#Alexander Mercouris

In the second part of your comments, you have identified for me what is the massive issue. Because the Russians and the Iranians both have the initiative in their wars, but what their ultimate plan for victory in each case is, is very difficult—very, very difficult—to say. Now, let's talk about ceasefires first. The Russians did agree to a big ceasefire back in 2015, and that, of course, took the form of the Minsk Agreement. And that ceasefire was, in effect, in place for seven years.

And the Russians feel that they were taken for a ride, that there was a ceasefire agreed when the Russians held the initiative and the advantage, and that the only effect of the ceasefire was that it gave the Ukrainians an opportunity to rearm and re-equip. And the Ukrainians never fulfilled their part of the ceasefire. I mean, they never did any of the things that the Minsk Agreement required them to do. Now, I happen to know, because I was told this whilst I was in Russia, that when the MOU was signed, the Russians told the Iranians, be very, very careful. To us, this looks very much like Minsk. You are going to be expected to fulfill your part of the deal by the Americans, but don't expect the Americans to fulfill theirs.

Now, the Russians never advised the Iranians to walk away from the MOU, but they did tell the Iranians to be very careful. This is not the end of the conflict; it's only a stage in the conflict. You must prepare for the next round. And in fact, we can see that the Iranians themselves very quickly decided that the MOU wasn't working, and the result was that we're back in a war situation. And the Iranians, like the Russians—the Russians very badly burnt over Minsk, the Iranians similarly burnt

over the MOU—are saying no interim ceasefires, no way are we going to agree to a ceasefire until and unless we have a final agreement.

The problem is, how do you force a country like the United States, a global superpower—the hegemon, as you described it—to a full agreement on your terms? You can't realistically defeat it in a way that would enable you to impose your terms on the Americans, like the Allies imposed terms on the Germans at Versailles in 1919. I mean, that isn't going to happen. So what do you do? Well, it's difficult to say.

I think that in terms of Ukraine, the Russians did hope and did believe that there was a chance that if they won Donbass and perhaps the other two regions, Zaporozhye and Kherson, that would be enough to get the Americans—to bring the Americans to their senses—and to agree to a long-term peace agreement about the security systems in Europe and in Ukraine itself, which is what the Russians have been wanting. I think the Russians have basically given up hope of that, and that then begs the question: what do they do once they've cleared Donbass and cleared Kherson and cleared Zaporozhye in the absence of an agreement?

And I think the consensus is now starting to grow in Russia, in Moscow, that they have no real option but to press on, to keep moving forward, to keep moving westward—to Kiev, to the Dnieper, perhaps, if they have to, beyond the Dnieper. Now, that was never, I think, their original plan, but they might decide that they have no real alternative. Now, with Iran, it's even more difficult because Iran is not as powerful a country as Russia is. So what does Iran do? Well, it can push the United States out of its bases in the Persian Gulf. It can push the United States to Jordan, and it can push the United States all the way to Israel.

But the United States is still there. It still has enormous naval assets. It still has huge resources. It can still impose enormous, crippling economic costs on Iran. So what does Iran do? And I think, again, the Iranians probably now are thinking to themselves, we are going to be involved in a very, very long, drawn-out confrontation with the United States. What we need to do once we've pushed the Americans back from our immediate region is we need to stabilize our economy. And that means we need to go and look to our new friends in China and Russia. We've been wary of doing that up to now, but that really is our only choice.

#Danny

Two things came up as you were talking. One, some have noted that Iran's approach to its own strikes against U.S. bases has been very calculated—not only in Kuwait and Bahrain, I mean, these are two countries that have literally been staging the attacks on Iran this time around by the United States—but also this attention on Jordan being this kind of principal layer of defense for Israel in the future, knowing probably that Israel, while it is not directly a party at this moment—although that could be a stretch depending on if you count intelligence—but nevertheless, in terms of strikes, Israel is not conducting strikes on Iran right now. Nevertheless, Jordan is a key hub for defenses

against any kind of strikes against Israel, and that has been degraded quite significantly, especially recently.

And then two, what came up as well is, as you were talking about Russia and China and Iran turning toward them, there has been a curious narrative I'm wondering your thoughts on in addition to this, which is that some have been saying that China might have been pushing Iran—through Pakistan—to come to an agreement and to maybe taper hostilities or even reduce the scope of their retaliation against U.S. attacks. I'm very skeptical of any kind of specifics in this regard beyond China supporting a kind of mediation process by Pakistan. But I'm curious about your thoughts, because while China definitely does have an interest in stability, it's very hard to find evidence of China really getting involved in military matters in any part of the world—not least directly, not least in this major conflict, maybe the biggest one in the world right now.

#Alexander Mercouris

I think it is well established that China did put pressure on Iran to agree to the MOU, to agree to the ceasefire that was reached in April, and then to go forward to agree to the MOU. And there are reasons for this. Firstly, there are economic reasons. China has good relations with Saudi Arabia, with the other Persian Gulf states, with Iran itself. It imports oil from the Persian Gulf. China wants energy flow to continue. Also, China does not like blockades, sea blockades. It doesn't like things like the Strait of Hormuz being closed, because if it is closed, that sets a precedent. Maybe one day the Strait of Malacca will be closed too, or the Strait of Taiwan will be closed.

And these are things, obviously, that China doesn't want to see. But at the same time, the Chinese know perfectly well that when the United States is coming for Iran, it's not just coming for Iran because it's concerned about Israel, but it also has a longer-term objective, which is to weaken China and to weaken China's overall global position. I was told recently—this was by somebody in Russia, by the way, who actually lives in Beijing—that every Beijing taxi driver talks about this, that this is something that every Beijing taxi driver, if you ask them, will say: this attack on Iran is ultimately about us. So the Chinese know this perfectly well.

And when Trump went to China in March and met Xi Jinping, it was absolutely clear that the Chinese were not prepared to help the Americans in the Persian Gulf. They were not going to put pressure on Iran to make substantive concessions, and they were certainly not going to pull any coals out of the fire for the United States. And I think that will remain the position. So I think that if this thing becomes long drawn out, you're going to see Iran initially, at least, work towards closer economic links with Russia because Russia is closer by. There are economic links already in existence. There's talk about setting up a north-south corridor across the Caspian to supply goods to Iran, and I think that as that develops, you're going to see the Chinese involved as well.

#Danny

Yeah, yeah, no doubt. You know, the MOU is such an interesting case because, on the one hand, there were reports that perhaps the Supreme Leader in Iran was not in favor of it, but nonetheless, he allowed it to go through. And there was significant support from not just the negotiators but significant levels of the government, the President, and those around him. So it's not surprising that China would then support that process, given that, one, as you said, it has economic benefit. China was the one to broker normalization between Saudi Arabia and Iran and doesn't want to see Gulf countries get pounded because the United States is forcing that to occur. But nevertheless, there's also the fact that China will always support stability in the region, especially if it has support from major levels of the government involved.

So it didn't come so shocking. I guess it didn't come as such a bombshell to me that China would be behind it. But there's also maybe your final comments as we close the show, Alexander. There's also a curious shift happening. I don't know if it was just a one-off, a single day, but none of these things happen on a single day. As the Iran war has been raging, Trump has been moving toward a kind of domestic shift, a political shift in the United States now toward a "Chinagate" kind of scenario, where he is blaming China for his defeat in 2020, which almost looks like, uh, just like what the Democrats did in 2016 with Russia, except perhaps a little less sophisticated and in a far different circumstance.

Now we're talking, you know, six-plus years past an election rather than right after, rather than the momentum of a narrative like, uh, Russia, Russia, Russia, Russiagate, so the elections having already been, um, built up during an election season, especially one as eventful as 2016. So your thoughts on this? It's a very curious shift, given that Trump has tried to make China less of a focus without really changing policy, but less of a focus, especially after the talk with Xi Jinping that you referenced.

#Alexander Mercouris

Yeah. Well, what happened, I think, was this. I mean, that speech which Trump made, which is an extraordinary speech, by the way, I mean, a very bizarre speech. It obviously had a domestic aspect. It was intended, I think, to strengthen Trump's domestic political position and to shore up support within the United States amongst his electoral base. Some of them still feel very aggrieved about the 2020 election, and some of them don't like China. But I also think that it shows that Trump's own attempt to win over the Chinese, as he expected, has not succeeded. He went to Beijing. He met Xi Jinping. The meeting was full of courtesies, as it will always be whenever foreign dignitaries go to China.

They're always treated very politely, but nothing of substance came out of that meeting. The Chinese didn't give an inch on anything. They didn't give an inch on rare earths. I read a big article in the Financial Times just the other day about the very tight restrictions that China has now imposed on exports of rare earths and the way they're trying to ensure that when they do export rare earths, those rare earths don't reach the military-industrial complex and don't enter into the process of military-industrial production. The Chinese didn't waver on that. They didn't make any big

economic concessions. They didn't sign any big contracts with the many American businessmen who went with Trump.

They gave no ground at all on Iran. They weren't prepared to put pressure on Iran to get Iran to make concessions to the United States, as opposed to the United States having to make concessions to Iran. They weren't prepared to put any pressure on the Russians over Ukraine. So Trump came back from that meeting obviously frustrated, and obviously it's weighed on him since. And you can see that some of his latest comments about China basically reflect his exasperation. Just as the Russians and the Iranians aren't doing what he wants, the Chinese aren't doing what he wants either. And if you're Donald Trump, you throw a tantrum when that happens.

#Danny

Well, Alexander, it was a great show. I want to make sure everybody knows to hit the like button before we go and to check out the video description where they can find your YouTube show as well as The Duran, which you also co-host and organize. Everybody on both channels is absolutely critical to understanding what's going on in Ukraine, Iran, and geopolitically in general. Yeah, so everyone hit the like button. Hit the subscribe button if you haven't. All the places to see Alexander's work and to support this channel are there in the video description. Alexander, do you have any final words for the audience before we head out of here?

#Alexander Mercouris

I think the most important point was the one you made during the program, that seeing a way towards ending a war with the United States or achieving a victory over the United States is very difficult for the Iranians and the Russians. And what that means is that, one, we're likely to be in this for a very long time. Both conflicts are not going to be resolved quickly. And secondly, the risk of greater escalation in both cases is there. I am certain we're going to see a lot more escalation in both conflicts over the next few months.

#Danny

Yeah, and we'll be here to cover it. Alexander, thanks so much again. Hit the like button, everyone. Check out his work in the video description and support this channel in the video description too. I'll be back tomorrow, and I'll let you know what is going on soon enough. All right, everybody, see you tomorrow. Take care. Bye-bye.