

Iran SMASHES F-16s as US Bases Burn, Yemen HITS Saudi ARAMCO | Mark Sleboda

Military analyst and international affairs expert Mark Sleboda discusses Iran punishing US bases overnight including a major hit on an F-16 hanger base as well as Yemen's retaliation to Saudi strikes that has left its biggest oil company on fire. <https://boosty.to/therealpolitick> 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/spiritofho> #iran #iranwar #trump #yemen

#Danny

Welcome back to the show, everyone. As you can see, I'm joined by Mark Sloboda to cover the latest developments, where we begin with no U.S. strikes overnight. Breaks a 13-day-in-a-row streak of U.S. CENTCOM bombing Iran. But Iran did launch strikes of its own against Jordan, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia. The sirens went off, but we ended up finding out that that was because of Yemen. More on that later. Iran says that it struck again U.S. troop quarters, aircraft at the Muwaffaq Salti Air Base, where 100-plus F-16s and other aircraft are based. Patriot system was also destroyed, as well as other installations in Iraq. Here's satellite imagery of a fuel depot in Jordan that was destroyed last night. And the big news has come, Mark, that after Saudi Arabia last night decided to bomb Hodeidah Airport in Yemen, Yemen launched, they say, three ballistic missiles.

I've seen reports of at least five at Aramco, which is the largest oil-producing company, I believe, in the world. The state-owned Saudi company was struck five times. There were fires reported. And of course, as I said before, no U.S. strikes last night. And now we are hearing, Mark, that Trump wants to return to the MOU. And he said he might want to make Yemen part of it now. These are not verified just yet. There's also reports that Iran believes this is just a calm before a bigger storm. But I'm curious what you make of these developments. The streak is broken by the United States. Iran did hit Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait again. And Yemen really, I think, shocked a lot of observers by going directly, very quickly and rapidly after Saudi oil sites too.

#Mark Sleboda

Yeah, so I think actually both are probably true. It's not a contradiction that the U.S. is both planning for escalation, such as they're capable of in a big way, right? And at the same time, they

have been pushing, requesting, pleading, begging Iran for a ceasefire, as far as I can tell, at least three times in the last three days. And Iran has refused them because they're coming from a position of desperation where the status quo is completely unacceptable for them. So they're reaching to go back to the memorandum of understanding on one hand as one way to try to get out of this. And they're hoping that they could escalate their way through whatever delusional belief they have out the other side.

And I'm sure different people within the Trump administration are whispering different things to him, as are people like Netanyahu and the Saudis and other people on the outside. They're all telling him different things. And it's typical Trump. He changes his mind on something every 15 minutes and can't commit in one direction or the other. So the U.S. is probably both trying to somehow convince Iran to return to the memorandum of understanding and accept a new ceasefire. And they're planning at the same time for whatever big escalation of the conflict they can have, whether that is just some type of more kinetic strikes or some type of cross-border incursion into Iran from Iraq or some type of suicide squad amphibious landing at Bandar Abbas or Kharg or Qeshm Island or something.

None of these are good options. It's all bad options. And Iran has just laid down the hammer and finally used their other nuclear option: the Houthis of Ansar Allah, who have been chomping at the bit for months now, and finally they got the go-ahead to close the Bab el-Mandeb Straits, although specifically only against Saudi tankers or tankers carrying Saudi oil. Unless, of course, that Saudi oil is going to China, and then they get a pass through, which is part of the whole funny thing, of course. That's acceptable. But this all started at the end of last week when the Iranians sent a delegation to Yemen and the Saudis tried to hit the airfield in Yemen that they were supposed to land in.

I don't know what they were thinking, that that would somehow prevent them. Of course, they just then flew to another airport and landed anyway. And, you know, that led the Houthis to launch attacks at a Saudi airport, and then, you know, Saudi return fire. And then that gave Iran the perfect pretext they need to tell the Houthis, "Go ahead and do it. Close the Bab el-Mandeb Straits to the Saudis." And the Houthis, of course, are framing this, and it's an entirely valid framing, that Saudi has blockaded us for the last 11 years. Now we're returning the favor. And the first [unclear] attacks on at least two Saudi tankers in the past 48 hours, one of them at least spectacularly going up in absolute flames.

I can't imagine the environmental catastrophe that that's causing, and many other hits. And ships are diverting all over the world. The Saudis are diverting now their second bypass, because their first bypass from the Strait of Hormuz was using the East-West Pipeline across the desert to Yanbu on the Red Sea. Well, now they can't go south in the Red Sea either, so they're now sending their oil north, unloading it to go through pipelines through the other side of Egypt, then sending their tankers through the Strait of Hormuz, re-pumping the oil back into the ship, then going all the way around Africa to try to get their oil to Asia.

That's what they're reduced to. And of course, that's adding millions of dollars and months to the timeline. But that's what they're going to have to do for the time being, because ships are not willing to go into the Bab el-Mandeb Straits quite quickly. And they have launched return fire on Hodeidah, and the Houthis, according to their reports, they went after not only Jizan, but also Yanbu. And I saw one other target as well. So they launched ballistic cruise missiles and drones at at least three different targets in Saudi Arabia. So I don't know what all of that damage is, but it is going to be pretty significant.

#Danny

Yeah. Yeah, I mean, and here is, to follow up on the Iran situation, which now I feel like Yemen—the reports are it's very plausible that Yemen's strikes on Saudi Arabia, now on Aramco, very well could have caused some, maybe some consternation, some fear, some hesitancy among the Trump administration to go for another round of strikes. This is from Itay Blumenthal of Kan 11 Israeli media. He says Israel prepared for a powerful American attack on Iran on the night between Friday and Saturday, last 24 hours, a step that could have led to an escalation of the campaign across the Middle East and the possibility of Israeli involvement in strikes on Iran if the Iranians were to lose their temper and launch missiles toward Israel. An Israeli source told us that it seems Trump decided to postpone the deadline out of a desire to give Iranians another chance to return to the negotiating table.

#Mark Sleboda

Danny, what did you have for dinner?

#Danny

What I had for dinner last night? I had Ethiopian food last night.

#Mark Sleboda

No, you had tacos. You had tacos.

#Danny

Oh my gosh. Yeah. Talk. Yeah. Yep. That's Trump. Trump delivered them straight to us. Um, so, um, yep. Yep. Taco Friday, which is kind of a shock, because I think a lot of people, given what Trump was saying, given the pattern, markets close and the United States ends up bombing, and then stops bombing and talks about negotiations a day later. But that pattern seems to be a bit broken now. I'm curious why you think—some people have speculated it could be actually the ammunition problem—but at the same time, I'm curious what your thoughts are on that.

#Mark Sleboda

Yeah, so, I mean, this one caught me by surprise as well. I would have predicted the escalation this weekend, like you said, after the markets closed on Friday. All the signals were there. But I think it just tells us what a weak position the U.S. is in, right? Both in their ability to continue a kinetic strike war of attrition, the terrible geoeconomic position they're in with regards to U.S. petroleum reserves and the global economy, the price of oil, the upcoming midterm elections, right? You know, it's all factoring together. And I don't think, as always with one thing, I mean, in terms of understanding, people always want to boil it down to one thing, and unfortunately it's rarely just one thing.

It's usually multiple things happening at the same time that just happen to overlap and reinforce each other. So all that, and the shortage of munitions, and now the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, and the Saudis yelling about this and what's going on, Chevron and Texaco yelling about their problems with the regime attacking the Caspian Sea pipeline and Kazakh oil being shut off in the Black Sea. It all compounds and rolls together at a certain point. And yeah, it's making Trump hesitate. It's making him second guess. And like I said, I'm sure he's got different people whispering different things in his ears. And, you know, his great orange head is swiveling one way and swiveling the other. And he's got himself in a very bad situation, and he doesn't know how to spin his way out of it.

#Danny

Well, let's look at this. This is Barak Ravid. I call him our favorite Unit 8200 Mossad reporter for Axios.

#Mark Sleboda

That's exactly what I do.

#Danny

So he's always in on the mix. And he replied to Mr. Blumenthal, saying the Americans did not prepare yesterday for a broader operation in Iran, but rather for an attack identical in scope to the one carried out every night over the past two weeks. So that is where the taco is, not necessarily on the extreme, more intense operation that was supposed to be bigger than Operation Epic Fury, which none other than Barak Ravid reported on just the day before. Now he said, nope. It's almost as if he is inside, as we've seen over the past several decades of so-called journos, really operatives, basically planting themselves inside and reporting, leaking out, maybe even making things up in some cases.

#Mark Sleboda

He's just blatantly being used for signaling, right? Barak Ravid is very useful because we want to know what Israeli intelligence says the situation is. That's it. It's useful in that regard, what Israeli

intelligence wants us to believe about any given situation. It's not even a question. I don't think anyone takes Barak Ravid seriously as a journalist. I mean, not even other journalists.

#Danny

Not even other bad journalists, or worst of all, I don't think they take him that seriously either.

#Mark Sleboda

I mean, I can see them at the bar. How much does Israeli intelligence pay for a story? Yeah, not that I'm asking because I want to write for them. I just want to compare it to what U.S. intelligence is paying me to write a story.

#Danny

Yeah, exactly. And maybe compare the salaries for those two things. Mark, I want your comments on the actual—you know, of course, because of the nature of this conflict, because most of the time we get confirmation by satellite imagery maybe days later, sometimes longer, we mostly have reports coming from both sides of the war. Iran, according to Tasnim News, is reporting very hard damage done, very harsh damage done: fighter jets, F-15s, F-16s, reconnaissance drones, spy planes, just refueling planes in general, in terms of what's been targeted even in just the last 24 hours. But we also have Patriot systems, HIMARS systems, across the board. This is what Iran is reporting.

Now, we know some of it is true, given that the United States had to acknowledge and then stop acknowledging the fact that, uh, you know, there was three—two U.S. troops in Jordan, uh, or is it three? Yeah, three because of the incinerated troop. And then, of course, the troop in Iraq, but they were taken off the rolls. I don't know if you saw that. They were taken off the rolls by the Pentagon a day later because it was during the MOU period. But nonetheless, I wanted your comment on the damage that Iran is doing versus the United States, because the United States has gotten more and more vague with how it characterizes its own attacks and strikes.

#Mark Sleboda

Yeah, we really don't know. So I think we can go on, you know, where... the last several months of claims, if we go back to the 40-day period or the last two-week period. Generally, Iran is hitting what they say they're hitting, and we know from complaints in the Western mainstream media, from the Wall Street Journal and other outlets, that the Americans are really upset about the accuracy, the precision that Iranian missiles are hitting. So there's no question that they're hitting the bases. There's no question that they're hitting specific buildings and infrastructure and installations. So when they're hitting, you know, hardened-place targets like radar and everything like that.

And they make those claims. They're almost invariably true, and we later find that out from satellite data. Now, when they're making claims about aircraft being destroyed, or even potentially air defense systems, there it's been a bit more mixed results. And that's understandable because they may hit a hardened shelter that an aircraft is in, or they may have launched a missile towards a location that satellite tells them U.S. planes are vulnerable out on the tarmac. But there is a window there for the U.S. to put those birds in the air once they get signals and they start to see things moving around and missiles being fired.

It may not be an extremely large window, but it is a window. So we don't know if they fired at shelters and if there was something in those shelters, or if they managed to get some of their planes into the air once they detected where the missiles were launched. We don't know. But generally, they've hit the bases, they've hit the hardened-place targets, and then they've gotten a bit more mixed results. So somewhere in between what the Iranians are claiming they hit and what the Americans are claiming they didn't hit, you know, when it comes to specific aircraft, I'm sure they managed to hit or damage some of those.

But we're going to have to wait, and we might have to wait a long time because we just saw news info out in the last 24 hours that the Americans were requesting European Sentinel satellites to refrain from showing images from the whole area, the Persian Gulf area and the Gulf of Oman, so that we can't properly judge what has been hit or what hasn't been hit and how bad it was hit in the last 24 hours, not at least until they get some cleanup done. So, you know, well... When we're talking aircraft, that's something that will have to be admitted in the fullness of time. It may take weeks. It may take months. But they're going to have to admit that at some point. But we're not going to know for sure.

It's certainly possible. It's certainly possible. And we know, we do know for a fact that the Americans are extremely upset about the precision, the accuracy that the Iranian weapons are using, about the increased speed that they're hitting, and also about how well they have adapted, supposedly, to air defense interceptor systems, to the Patriot, the THAAD, the David's Sling, whatever it is that they're firing at them. I'm not so sure whether they've actually made improvements on that or whether the Patriots just always sucked at intercepting ballistic missiles, as Ted Postol, I know, has been quite insistent about for many years. But anyway, we've all seen the pictures in Bahrain, seeing 12 interceptors fired at one ballistic missile. That's \$48 million right there.

\$4 million a pop of something that we know they're already scraping the barrel in terms of munitions. So, I have no way of assessing, when it comes to aircraft on the ground, how much was hit and how much wasn't. But we can easily judge by what the Iranians are claiming they hit in terms of the bases and the structures on those bases. They have been extremely accurate and precise, and the satellite data has borne that out time and time again. And we might as well, you know, call up one of those CENTCOM fact checks, right, and get Grok to call them on their bullshit

again and again, because CENTCOM is, I mean, I think, Elon, hear me. We know you played these games before. Could you change the name of CENTCOM to Baghdad Bob, right, just for us? Just that one thing.

#Danny

Oh my gosh, yeah, take away their blue check while you're at it. Here's the—here's something that, you know, an example of what you're talking about. This was last night, an interceptor going up in Bahrain and then coming down, malfunctioning. Lots of—I mean, we could literally, for the course of this war, Mark, find one of these for nearly every day that Iran fired or misfired any missiles.

#Mark Sleboda

Not only this war, this has been going on for the last five years in Ukraine, and all of their claims about their interceptions. And every time a residential building is hit in Kiev, invariably it's later, you know, quietly admitted at some level, even if only on social media, actually it was another interceptor that went wrong and crashed or something, went crazy. And particularly when they're using older missiles or PAC-2s, they're often now reduced to using older stocks of older versions of the Patriot interceptor, the PAC-2, rather than the PAC-3, and they have an even greater failure rate and often dramatic failures. So it happens, and it happens quite frequently.

#Danny

Why? I mean, what is the—you know, it's one thing to be ineffective, like to miss the target. I could understand that. I'm not an expert, but I could understand, you know, fire one up, miss the target. But the fact that they constantly come down, malfunction, crash into areas that, you know, they don't detonate. I believe, you know, some of them are supposed to detonate in the air if they don't hit the target, all of this. But why? What is this malfunction? And then, um, I just—yeah, your comments on this first.

#Mark Sleboda

Yeah, so, I mean, I'm gonna say a little bit about what I've heard, because my experience in the military was in a nuclear reactor, not as a, you know, rocket scientist. But, again, a lot of these missiles that they're using now are older. They're literally past their sell-by date, even if they're PAC-3s, or even worse if they're older iterations of the PAC-2. So firing these, you know, launching the system is actually quite complicated. And it's very easy to lose lock on the targets as they're coming in, to mislock when they're fired away, or for the system to then, you know, to lock on to something that it's not supposed to.

At the same time, the ballistic missiles are coming in, and supposedly some of the more advanced Iranian missiles are doing high-speed erratic maneuvers towards the end, and they're firing up

decoys at their terminal descent to also throw off the interceptors. And so the interceptors could momentarily lock on something else that is going in a random direction off over here, and then they'll spin off and try to follow it that way. There's all kinds of problems. So that comes from a variety of operator error, problems with the interceptors, and Iranian countermeasures in their more advanced missiles. Those are all options for why things are going so dramatically wrong. And it's very possible that multiple of them could be having an effect at the same time.

#Danny

Now, usually the narrative—what's so interesting is that with Ukraine, the United States, NATO, they'll frame it as Russia targeted a civilian residential complex or whatnot. With Iran, they haven't done that so much. I'm not so sure why. At times, they'll say, okay, yeah, Iran's missile supposedly hit this area near a residential...

#Mark Sleboda

They just don't want to admit to anything it's hit. Yeah, I think that's what it is.

#Danny

That might be your thoughts on this, because it's like, yeah, they're not going for that narrative with Iran, surprisingly.

#Mark Sleboda

For a lot of it, right, when these missiles come down, they're not coming down in residential areas because quite often these military bases are pretty big. So when they come down, they're often falling somewhere down on a military base or in the surrounding area. And again, if they are coming down in a civilian area, they don't want to panic the populations in these countries. So they don't want to draw any more attention to the fact that these interceptors or anything is coming down and actually hitting anything, because we're all supposed to believe in this fantasy that the U.S. and Israeli air defense is some kind of force shield that is stopping everything from getting through.

I mean, no matter how ridiculous it is, they hardly ever admit that anything has ever been hit, you know, until the press brings it out weeks afterwards, and then they just kind of shuffle their feet: no comment, you know. And that's been the story from the beginning. So we should not, as a rule, we should not expect any veracity from official statements at all, right? Certainly not from Trump, but not even from an official military, whether that's coming from the U.S. military, the Israeli military, or the vassal state officials of the Gulf Arab states. Again, I don't implicitly trust everything that the Iranians say either, particularly about what they hit and they don't hit.

But the satellite data comes out. We're able to get a good judgment after the fact, right? There is a way—and Danny, you are very well familiar with this—that you don't trust the mainstream media, certainly not in terms of narrative and story, but you're able to sift through the rubble to find nuggets of knowledge, facts that do emerge with the dross, and separate it out from the propaganda. You know, in order to build a more accurate picture, that's something that we all, you know, have to do as journalists and analysts in the media. In fact, it's probably the principal thing we do.

#Danny

Right. Well, CENTCOM has certainly elevated Iranian stock incredibly over this period because, as you said, satellite imagery eventually reveals the accuracy of Iranian strikes. While the Pentagon engages in actions like this, Mark, lowering U.S. troop death toll, like literally lowering it right after it happens, right after the dignified transfer that occurred, saying that the four members who were killed in these latest strikes in Jordan had to be taken off because the president declared it happened after the ceasefire. I feel like I've heard that before, too. It felt like *déjà vu* almost, but nevertheless, these kinds of actions show funny business. I mean, and it's not like CENTCOM's.

#Mark Sleboda

It's not even funny business, because it's not even being, you know, it's just headlines. It's all just headlines, right? You know, it's, no, tell me again how great the clothes that I'm wearing are. They're not purple. They're yellow. Can't you see that? Journalists looking at him wearing no clothes. Yes, I'm so sorry I said they're purple. They're yellow. Like you said, they're beautiful yellow clothes. It's just absurd that they're being asked. It's pathetic. I don't know what to say. The fact that the military either has to or is playing along with it, it certainly doesn't say anything positive about the direction of the U.S. military in the past decades either.

#Danny

Well, we're getting more confirmation as we talk, Mark, about what we began the program with when it comes to these ceasefire talks now once again. So according to reports, Iran has already rejected—now this would be the third request by the Trump administration during this two-week period of renewed strikes. But it says Israeli media now is reporting Donald Trump has reportedly asked for another ceasefire, including Yemen. In the Oval Office, Trump said, "I haven't decided. Look, we're talking to them right now. I think they're getting more and more serious as the days go by."

And this, I guess, this would be the fourth time, because three previous U.S.-backed ceasefire proposals this week have been rejected, delivered by Qatar, Iraq, and Pakistan. Now, the Iraq ceasefire has been put under question, this idea that the PM came to Iran with, like, an envelope

and said, "Here you go," to, you know, the foreign minister and president. But anyway, your thoughts on this? Because we go through this over and over and over again, Mark, this notion that the U.S. escalates and then pulls back. I just don't know how we can believe any of this at all. Your thoughts? Yeah, we don't know. I mean, I...

#Mark Sleboda

Frankly, it's a matter of, "Honey, could you please get me an order of tacos? Tacos. Great, thanks." Because, I mean, that's what we're looking for. That was not what I was expecting coming into this weekend. But it also makes sense. The U.S. is capable of trying to escalate this further, but they also realize that at least some of the people—and Trump is obviously in the worried category—realize that another escalation may not improve their situation at all, or certainly not significantly. So they keep asking for a return to a ceasefire. And obviously, the same phenomenon where different people within the administration are divided and are telling Trump different things.

The same thing is occurring in the Iranian government. And we know this. Just this week, we had further news that Pezeshkian is being sidelined even more by the Supreme Leader, by Mojtaba, and that we keep having the Iranian Foreign Ministry still insisting that they can achieve their goals diplomatically, while the IRGC keeps trying to blow things up and insists that their entire strength at this point comes at a point of military leverage, and that they keep losing leverage whenever they return to this diplomatic dance. And how could you trust the U.S. at this point? I mean, anything you agree to is only going to be a temporary situation until they feel they're in a better situation to return to it.

But then the question becomes, okay, then, if Iran refuses a ceasefire and refuses a return to diplomacy, then what are they actively working towards? What can they achieve strategically by continuing the conflict? Because they've got to have a plan. Now, it has been suggested in the last week, and I think the term was originally coined by the Substack blogger Amerikanyets, which is actually a Russian word for American, probably indicating that the writer is a Russian-American or an American-Russian. Take your pick. But that the Iranian strategy is de-Ba'athification. And that has actually been picked up by a lot of the top analysts on Iran in Western journalism, in Western outlets and think tanks.

And, yeah, it makes perfect sense. So, you know, what the Iranians have been trying to do is destroy the bases around them in the Persian Gulf to such an extent that the U.S. has been forced to retreat from them, first to Jordan. And they hit Jordan really hard, and that resulted in these casualties that we saw last week. And now the retreat is even further to Israel. And when they have to launch attacks from further back, that, of course, makes it much harder for them and, you know, reduces the amount and, you know, the possibility to do damage to Iran. So it is both an offensive and a defensive strategy. And we can see that, to at least some extent. We can argue about how much that strategy is working.

But that is, shall we say, a tactical strategy. It is not a long-term strategy for defense, necessarily, at the end of this. Well, we can talk about, will the U.S. ever come back to these bases after how much damage has been done to them and how vulnerable they've been proven? Okay, so maybe that has some strategic-level endgame results there as well. But if Iran continues, what do they want that they can achieve with military action? At the end of the day, the U.S. isn't going to magically disappear. They're not going to stop trying to exert influence in the Middle East. And even if they can't trust anything they say, you still have to deal with them.

You still have to manage them. That's a problem that Russia and China are both also grappling with. You can't trust in anything that you reach with the Americans diplomatically, that they'll actually keep to it. But at the same time, you can't not deal with them because they're not going to go anywhere. And they are still, you know, a fading hegemon, a failing hegemon. But, you know, they're still powerful economically and militarily. And their influence on other countries and, you know, their network of allies, even if they're all questioning, why the hell did we ever crawl in bed with these people.

#Danny

Yeah, I would say so. I'm sure some of them were the ones who were, you know, begging Trump to then get Trump to beg for a ceasefire. I'm sure that was a big part of it.

#Mark Sleboda

At the same time, we've seen all kinds of horizontal escalation from the Gulf states in the last year, right? That's true. Saudi has hit Yemen, right? Back and forth, right?

#Danny

That's expensive.

#Mark Sleboda

The UAE has long, we found out, been engaged militarily against Iran the whole time. And then we found out that Bahrain and Kuwait also attacked Iran in the past week. So we might—it's hard making assumptions about what's really going through the heads of the leaders of the Gulf states, because they are sending out contradictory signals, really in the same way that everyone else is in this conflict. The whole thing is a mess, right? We're hearing contradictory signals out of the U.S. the most, but also out of the Gulf states and to some extent also out of Iran, because none of these governments is a monolith, right? They're not always all on the same page and speaking with the same voice. And yes, that's complicating the situation. It's complicating not only for us to try to figure out what the hell is actually going on, but it's also complicating the actual events. So, yeah, it's a mess. It's a big stinking mess, the whole thing.

#Danny

Yeah. And I think one of the things that is clearest—the only thing that's clear—is that while Iran, as you said, is not a monolith, and there have been contradictory messages, especially around diplomacy versus military action at certain points, it's the only party in the conflict that has shown enough unity, especially among people and especially among its military forces, that its actions have been very consistent, especially since the MOU was eviscerated. But I think the big question that you posed earlier, Mark, it made me think about how, I guess, looking at this historically, Iran, in many ways, has already dealt very big blows and could be framed as having defeated, in many respects, the United States militarily.

However, the United States, as an entity that is literally invading the region, that's the offensive power, doesn't necessarily—and is, as you said, a hegemon, an empire—it still has anything. Even if it runs out of all of its missiles, can't fire back, it still has nukes. It still has sanctions. It still has these other tools. The U.S. empire doesn't retreat. It doesn't know how. There's no—that's not—if the U.S. empire is the U.S. empire, if it's the hegemon, if it's ruled by the same people, these people don't stop. So they will always consistently go, no matter if they're set back. They can continue to be set back.

Hell, they might not even be able to dictate terms around the Strait of Hormuz. They won't be able to. They're not now. They won't be able to later. But it doesn't matter. They're still going to try. They're still going to attack Iran. They're still going to wage war. And so Iran then... for Iran, it's like, okay, well, then where do we settle? Where do we find ourselves comfortable in the position that we're in? And then for the rest of the world, the question is, do we want to keep on dealing with this damn empire that can't stop even when it's destroyed? Because what happens next? What's the next step from here? It ain't good. It's a bad step. It's worse and worse.

#Mark Sleboda

I'm sure the Russians and the Chinese and the Iranians actually are discussing this exact thing when they sit down, because they're tasked with the big problem of how do you manage the decline of this hegemon, particularly as it keeps lashing out violently, militarily, economically, politically, you know, in its decline. It's a big problem for them. You can't push it too much, right? But you want to take as much ground from it in every situation as you can. And I'm sure that's actually a point of disagreement between them.

There's, again, reports, but there's a lot of reports that it was the Chinese and Russians that pushed the Iranians to agree to the ceasefire and the memorandum of understanding in the first place. I have no way of knowing whether that's true or not. Neither does anyone else who isn't actually part of the process. And even then, it may not be completely clear. But, you know, there's not a monolithic agreement between the three of them either. But, you know, there is a common concern of, how do we manage this thing? Are you a fan of classic horror sci-fi flicks, Danny?

#Danny

I would say I do like horror films, but which ones are you talking about? I'm not talking about the more modern versions, because they all suck. But The Omen, The Omen is great.

#Mark Sleboda

Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Well, that's, that's, that's—we can talk Donald Trump and that, you know, another time.

#Danny

Is he the kid? Yeah.

#Mark Sleboda

Ben Rhodes likes calling the U.S. foreign policy elite the blob, right, as another way of referring to the deep state without calling it the deep state, or the blob. But we could also draw that analogy out to talk about, you know, the whole phenomenon of the fading hegemon. It's a blob. You know, if you get it to recoil from one particular place, that doesn't mean it's not going to flow around and try to deal with that. And even if it's getting smaller, it's still this—you know, we can hit it with a flamethrower in one corner, but then it could be flowing around the door, you know, and coming in around us on the back.

But again, that is a process of, you know, a continual problem. And the solution to that—and it's not always as easy a solution as us armchair multipolar warriors may think—but the solution to that is for Russia and China and Iran and, you know, other countries, North Korea and so forth, to cooperate and to coordinate with what they're doing, at least as much as humanly possible. And being humans, that's always difficult, right? Different interests, states, different interests, so forth. But there are certain, again, common concerns with managing, you know, the death throes of this hegemon, no matter how protracted and violent they may turn out to be.

But ultimately, that is the solution. Iranians need to sit down with the Russians and the Chinese and say, you know, how do we deal with this? What can we get out of this? And the Iranians are prickly. They have their national, their historical, their cultural pride. And, you know, there have been bad situations between them and the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, and even just decades ago with the Russian government, you know, withholding S-300 sales to them because Russia was trying to, you know, cozy up to the West at that time.

So, you know, there's mistrust, you know, or the difficulty of placing trust in each other is understandable, right? It is a real thing. Governments—it's not an easy decision to make, but ultimately I believe that that is the best place the answers lie, you know, in trying to determine how,

even in a defeated position like this, the U.S. is still very powerful and difficult to manage. All right, so Iran has won to a degree so far. Now, how do they end this? Can they end this? Are we going to be in a more or less state where U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iran whenever they feel like it is normalized as just the state of affairs going forward?

They just kind of leave the Arab states to come up with their own terms of dealing with them. You know, we're never going to sign anything. We're never going to admit we lost. We're never going to commit ourselves to anything. You know, or if we do commit ourselves, we'll never follow through on it anyway. How do you deal with that as Iran? That's very difficult. And I think you really just have to prepare for the worst, that you can never have peace with the U.S., that you can never have any type of diplomatic conclusion, that you always have to be prepared for a state of military, of economic, of political war with them until they go away. You want to keep that to a minimum as much as you can, but that has to be the state of affairs.

It's like the same thing that Russia faces. You know, they can talk all they want with Ukraine. They can talk all these grand things. Well, what we want out of this is a common security architecture across Europe and Eurasia. Yeah. You know, and, you know, and, you know, you can want a leftist global utopia too, or a pretty little pink pony, but none of these things are actually going to happen. So, in realist, cynical terms, what can Iran actually get out of this? And the one thing that they probably can get is they're going to control the Strait of Hormuz. Now, all of the Gulf states are going to be looking for ways to get their energy out to market now that don't depend on the Strait of Hormuz, or potentially now the Bab el-Mandab Straits either.

But at some level, the hope for Iran is probably, rather than coming to terms and coming to some type of diplomatic endgame with the United States, which I just don't believe is possible or trustworthy, maybe at some point—we're not there yet—maybe at some point they can actually sit down with the Saudis, with the frigging Emiratis, you know, with the other Gulf states, and come to some type of modus vivendi. We've got to live in the same neighborhood. Maybe we can return to doing business with each other, even if we don't like each other, rather than, you know, blowing each other's shit up. That is a greater hope for Iran ending this war than any type of deal with the U. S. or Israel, which, even if a deal is made, you know, I wouldn't wipe my rear with it.

#Danny

Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think those are important points. And I think for the purposes also of an audience that may be viewing from, let's say, the United States or the combined West, the reality is, even if Russia, China, Iran continue on building what they're building around the United States' behavior, Israel's behavior—you know, maybe you just call it the combined West's behavior with the U.S. at the head—their recklessness, interventionism, sanctions, all of this, even if they continue to do this, even if Iran can, which could be the case, right, continue on in this direction, even if the U. S. conducts strikes here and there, Israel and the U.S. conduct strikes here and there, it won't change the status quo.

Iran can continue building. Russia and China are not disrupted either. But even so, then the question is, for audiences who are viewing from the combined West, are you trusting the impulses of the blob, as you called it, Mark, to not go in directions that are unthinkable now, maybe even impractical, maybe even, as you said, unrealistic, right? Maybe trying to galvanize an actual ground force to fight major, you know, to fight major ground wars or nuclear war, right? Those things feel far away. But do you trust leaders? All of them happen to be in the Epstein files and have very bad impulse control. We've seen how Donald Trump behaves politically. But that's Trump.

Think about the rest. The rest are no better. Biden's old advisor, what did he say? "Oh, we were probably going to do the same war, probably in the springtime." Anyway, like... they all have the same track mind because they're all serving the same system. So this is, I think, where the danger is. Even if Russia, China, Iran, even if they're strong enough to withhold it, will we also have to face the consequences of what it means for the United States under any leadership, under the blob, how they react to the realities? And we're seeing that in real time right now. We're seeing that's not good. And it doesn't seem like it'll get better just because they're pushed back.

#Mark Sleboda

See, this is a constant problem that I have, and I'm sure you do, and everyone else does in the alt media, when trying to understand it. And it's even more dramatic than it was, say, in the Blinken-Sullivan administration, where the task was to put yourself in the twisted framework of the way these people think and their assumptions. But you could still generally assume that if you could put yourself into that framework, operating from their interests and their beliefs about the world, that you could still arrive at a logical train of thought within that vein of thinking. With the Trump administration, there's no logic, right? There's no rationality here. You can't count on any of that. And so you're absolutely right.

In a rational world, I would say that the U.S.'s chance of just throwing up their hands and going nuclear and start tossing tac nukes at Pickaxe Mountain for the hell of it would be absurd. I cannot write that off with the Trump administration. I don't think it's likely, but I can't write it off. Same thing with ground invasions. As a military person and someone with a strategic education, I look at the U.S. military options and I say they can't possibly do a ground invasion, not without months of building up 500,000, a million troops. It would be suicide. It would be crazy. But that doesn't mean they won't do it. I still think it's unlikely. But between you and me, Danny, and, I don't know, a few hundred thousand people out there watching this, I hope they do it.

#Danny

I mean, it would be...

#Mark Sleboda

I hope they do it. And I know there are people within the Iranian military and security structures that are hoping they do it because right now they're only able to hit long-range strikes at U.S. bases and proxies.

#Danny

And those guys are hiding, for the most part. There are 50,000 non-combat troops.

#Mark Sleboda

Come at us and try to invade our country. We can actually engage in close-quarters battles, and I can shove this thing up into your gut.

#Danny

Well, I just saw a video in southern Iran. Iranian media was covering how there are people, people living in the southern Iran coastal areas, who are walking around the beaches with machine guns and rifles, waiting for the invasion. Like, this is—I mean, this was reported on during the first 40 days of the war, that there was a popular mobilization.

#Mark Sleboda

That's just common people, right? That's not even the military and the IRGC. I mean, you know, they've been planning for this, you know, and if you listen to some of their planning, they saw all of this coming, right? And they think very strategically. They think very asymmetrically. They're well aware of what they can achieve and what they can't achieve. So, but if the U.S. does something irrational like that, it will do a lot of damage. It will kill a lot of people. It will push us all to another stage of global crisis, closer to global midnight on the atomic clock and whatnot. But it also will ultimately, undoubtedly, make the already top U.S. geostrategic blunder of the modern era into a full-scale geopolitical, hegemonic, crumbling catastrophe. So if I'm sitting in Russia and China, you know, my first concern—oh, and I am sitting in Russia.

#Danny

Just not in Ukraine. How do we know that? No, I'm just kidding. Yeah.

#Mark Sleboda

Russia and China, their first concern is they don't want the Iranian government to collapse. That's their first concern. But past that, if this is dragged out and the U.S. keeps wasting resources and geopolitical and military and diplomatic capital on this, it's better for them, just like it's good for China and Iran if the conflict in Ukraine is dragged out and the entirety of Western militaries are

attrited and their economies are slowly committing, you know, seppuku, suicide, you know, with their decoupling from Russia and so forth and all that. You know, ultimately at a strategic level, you know, whatever the personal human tragedies—and, you know, those things have to be acknowledged, of course.

But, you know, when you're thinking in terms of states, you know, you're thinking in terms of what you believe the good is for the millions or hundreds of millions or, oh, I don't know, the billion or so people that are under your authority. So it's a different situation. But for Russia and China, the U.S. blowing their load on a failed attempt to bring down Iran is great for them. And in higher, you know, multipolar terms, again, as long as Iran stays afloat, it's not even a question anymore. No one is, "Oh, the Iranian government could collapse next week." No one seriously talks about that. It's only, can they continue to exert control of the Strait of Hormuz?

How far back can they drive the U.S. military bases in the Middle East? Those are the things that are being discussed. And will there be a return to any type of peace or business as usual in the Middle East? And if not, then what does the state of affairs between Iran and the Gulf states look like going forward? It's a very prickly situation. Those are the details. But at a higher strategic level, this is such a catastrophe for the U.S. You know, I was just asked the question, is Donald Trump literally a Manchurian candidate destroying the U.S. and U.S. global hegemony? I'm like, no, he's just that incompetent. But the people around him are also incompetent. Yeah.

#Danny

Yeah. No, it's, it's, it's been, you know, and this is not coming from a place of Trump derangement syndrome or having any dog in the two-party system, because I believe they hate all U.S. leaders. Yeah, exactly. They work for the same bosses. But yeah, we have to be quite honest: for as crippled as the Biden administration was, the people around him were not as disastrous as the people around Trump.

#Mark Sleboda

They chose other disasters. They were firing ballistic missiles into Russia.

#Danny

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

#Mark Sleboda

But Blinken and Sullivan did everything they could to avoid this direct conflict with Iran. They went through several pantomime attacks, agreed to via intermediaries with the Iranians, that allowed both sides to save face. They fired some missiles at each other, hit nothing. That happened, what, three

times during the Blinken-Sullivan? They did not allow themselves to get drawn into direct conflict in the Middle East, fighting Israel's war against Iran for them. Say whatever you want. I've got nothing good to say about Blinken and Sullivan and Biden's brain-dead corpse. But again, in this particular situation in the Middle East, they were far wiser than the Trump administration. And Netanyahu, he said, "I've been working for this 40 years," and the quote-unquote thing, "and I finally got a U.S. president idiot enough to go to war with Iran for me and pay the price."

Now, again, Biden, Blinken, Sullivan were all hot for going to nuclear conflict with Russia in Ukraine. So that was a whole other problem. But on the subject of the Middle East, yes, they had a much wiser policy, and they sought to—they certainly didn't love Iran and didn't want to be friends with it. They just didn't want to fight it now, right? It was out of their prioritization, their strategic sequencing. And Israel kept—Netanyahu kept trying to draw them into it, and they kept wiggling out of it and arranging these pantomime attacks with Iran during the Biden-Sullivan or Blinken-Sullivan administration. So that's it. That, that, that there is change possible in U.S. foreign policy, if only in the prioritization of whether it's Russia or China or Iran that they're going to concentrate their efforts on during that particular—

#Danny

Yeah, if we see Democrats in 2028, a Democrat, and I could see easily Russia and China becoming far more of a focus than Iran, if nothing else, to get away from the unpopularity of what Iran has become for the U.S. population. In 60 seconds or less, Mark, because we are running out of time, if Israel and the United States use a nuclear weapon, would China or Russia step in? I mean, it's two seconds or less.

#Mark Sleboda

How would you think they would step in?

#Danny

I would say...

#Mark Sleboda

They would protest very strongly at the United Nations. They would provide all sorts of humanitarian and material support for Iran. Uh, they would call for all sorts of actions. Are they going to send troops to Iran or nuke the U.S.? No, we live in a realist world.

#Danny

Right. I mean, it would be—thanks so much, Mark, for this. Yeah, it would be a completely disastrous situation. It would probably lead to nuclear proliferation among the Iranians. I mean, a nuclear weapon is not going to destroy Iran either. It will do a lot of other things.

#Mark Sleboda

The Saudis are hot for nuclear weapons. The Egyptians are hot. The Turks are hot.

#Danny

And that in itself could lead to a cascade, which then could—yeah, you might see, if not Russia and China should mobilize. You'd have to. I mean, you'd have to mobilize for defense, for nuclear deterrence. So it would be a disaster. But, yeah, I agree with you. It couldn't be something that Russia and China could do, or should make a kind of a nuclear posture out of it. It shouldn't follow the ways, but it would be a disaster, and it would have consequences we can't foresee.

#Mark Sleboda

Unlike some neocons, the governments in Beijing and Moscow don't have some type of Götterdämmerung death wish.

#Danny

Yeah, yeah, yeah. But we can't foresee consequences of such an unthinkable disaster either. But Mark, it was great to be with you. We're going to head out together. I want to make sure everybody knows that your Boosty account is in the video description below so they can check out all of your work, support you there. Definitely do so if you're not already. Hit the like button before you go. All the ways to support this channel are also in the video description: Patreon, Substack, and more. I'll be on tomorrow with KJ Noh, 26th of July, 1 p.m. Eastern time, same time. Mark, any final thoughts before I hit end stream?

#Mark Sleboda

I'll be checking in to watch that with KJ Noh.

#Danny

Yeah, KJ is great. All right, everybody, take care. I'll see you tomorrow, 1 p.m. Eastern time, July 26th. Bye-bye.