

Another CRUSHING Defeat: US Out Of Options In Iran | Patrick Hennings

Trump is losing the last chance there was for a face-saving exit from Iran. And he doesn't even know why. U.S. journalist Patrick Henningsen returns to Neutrality Studies after reporting from Iran. He and Pascal Lottaz discuss the funeral processions he saw, public unity under pressure, Iran's political culture, Shia Islam and Palestine, media narratives, military deterrence, sanctions, and the wider fight between the United States, Israel, Iran, Russia, and China. They also look at how the conflict may develop. Links: 21st Century Wire: <https://21stcenturywire.com> 21st Century Wire YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@21stCenturyWireTV> Patrick Henningsen Substack: <https://patrickhenningsen.substack.com> Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Merch: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop> Donation: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Timestamps: 00:00 Introduction and Iran reporting 05:02 Western media narratives on Iran 08:32 Iran after attacks: unity and anger 14:10 Iran, Shia Islam, and the Muslim world 24:40 A new revolutionary moment 35:20 Iran's deterrence and global role 48:53 What comes next in the conflict 01:01:01 Where to follow Patrick Henningsen

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies, today again with the wonderful U.S. journalist Patrick Henningsen. Patrick, welcome back.

#Patrick Hennings

It's great to be with you, Pascal.

#Pascal

Thanks for coming back, because you actually just returned from a stay in Iran, and that's what we want to talk about. You were there. You were, I think, if I remember correctly, you went there for the funeral of Ayatollah Khamenei, to witness this and to report from the ground. You've spent quite a bit of time there. Can you give us the gist of it, what you saw and what kind of impressions it left on you?

#Patrick Hennings

Sure. Yeah. Thank you, Pascal. This was actually the second time I've been in the country in the last six months. I was there before the bombing, about 10 days before the bombing in February, and totally anticipating that there would be a war. I think everybody in the country was expecting that.

And then this time, you know, it was an opportunity. I knew that the state funeral was going to be a really important event, but it had been delayed, or they hadn't announced the date until much later, because normally in Islamic customs, people are buried very quickly after the fact. And this was just very unusual in that sense. And I, you know, I really didn't fully appreciate why until I got there.

And I realized that, you know, the amount of logistics involved in an event of this scale—and I'll tell you how big the scale was—just throughout the country. It wasn't just in Tehran, and it wasn't just one day. It was, in total, six days. And it spanned not just the capital city of Tehran, but all the other major cities in the country, as well as in Iraq itself—Karbala, Najaf. So the remains of the late Supreme Leader were traveled to Iraq and then brought back again, and it culminated in the holy city of Mashhad, which is the final resting place of the leader, and it's also considered to be his home city or his hometown. And it wasn't just the leader, Ayatollah Saeed Ali Khamenei. It was also his family as well that were killed and assassinated on February 28th, including a 14-month-old granddaughter.

A very small coffin that was amongst the others as well. And so you can imagine this was so emotionally charged. Fifteen million people in Tehran on the street. Now, I don't know the exact breakdown of that, but that was admitted by the Financial Times. Okay, so that's a UK-based media organization. So if that was over Saturday, Sunday, and Monday, but conservative estimates on Monday put the numbers at something between eight and ten million, conservative on the Monday. That was the last day of the funeral procession in Tehran. And then nationally, 40 million people took part in this in one way or another.

That's approaching half the population. So just think about that, and also just kind of gauge that against everything that we've been told about how much support the government has, or how much support the leader or the political system has in that country. What we're being told in the West is what we have been told for the longest time, is that they're teetering on the edge of collapse. You probably saw the Lindsey Graham documentary. Clips have been released where he's musing while they're driving through Washington, "We just want to get a few cities to fall, and then we want to get the Arabs involved, and we think it'll happen quite quickly." He's talking about the collapse of Iranian society and the Iranian regime, as it were.

And, you know, so from my experience, I knew this in February. I learned very quickly after the riots and seeing the outpouring of support for the leader and the government in mid-February after these so-called riots. And I was also there to kind of fully understand what I now can see is a massive propaganda campaign, claiming that the Iranian government killed 50,000 of its own people in three days or something. Just totally outrageous, like the most egregious propaganda campaign in the West that you can imagine. Completely fake, totally false. But the main lesson there is that that was designed to create the moral background to justify a war that was coming, or an attack on Iran.

So the West are very clever when it comes to their propaganda, whereby they know they can even split the conservative debate by people who are the Thomas Massies of the world, or the former

MAGA anti-war conservatives, who say, "Well, you know, we're against the war," and then also the centrist liberals who are maybe leaning anti-war. And then when Trump and Israel go ahead and do the war, they'll say, "I'm against Trump. This isn't right. This isn't a legal war. They need, you know, to consult Congress for this," et cetera. But this is a really bad, bad regime. They killed 50,000 of their own people, so it's better that they're gone. It's the same argument they used for Saddam Hussein. Yeah. Yeah.

#Pascal

The 50,000 Iranian protesters killed is the incubator babies of Iran, isn't it? It's like the moral justification to bring enough people on board to say, like, yeah, fine. Actually, the United States has a very—the people in charge do have a very sophisticated understanding about their own population and how to manipulate them into kind of, yeah, let's go along.

#Patrick Hennings

Yeah, they can game out the debate in the public sphere ahead of time. And then that's the propaganda that just fills in the gaps and keeps the narrative together. And so it worked to a large degree. I mean, Trump has repeated this. You've also got the 40 beheaded babies, same type of thing post-October 7th. Hamas's mass rape on October 7th. All these things have been widely debunked and shown as evidence-free claims. Likewise with this, but the scale of Iran as a nemesis for the West means that what they—the amount of energy and weight and just the full kind of wall of propaganda has been so relentless.

And so, and I became kind of, in a way, understanding much better the second time this year, which I came, you know, which is effectively during the war or after the main period of hostilities, although it ramped up while I was there, but that Iran is the most demonized country, society, dehumanized population, and mischaracterized leadership, possibly in history, at least in the modern era. We can throw a few other countries in there as well, including Russia.

I think it's because of the religious component that's particularly threatening to the West, and also what it represents as a sort of anti-colonial or a so-called anti-imperialist kind of role model for other countries. And so the West and Israel, this kind of team, if you will, and more so the Europeans are on board with this demonization campaign more and more, although they weren't so much before, but they kind of are getting into it. It's designed to delegitimize Iran, not just as a country or as a, quote, regime, but also as a civilization.

#Pascal

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#Patrick Hennings

And this really, this is where the real clash comes in, because you realize when you're there, and what I saw was extraordinary, Pascal. Like, I don't even have words to describe it. The amount of social cohesion, the power of the crowd, the intense energy on the street. And me as an American—and there weren't many Americans on the streets of Tehran, I can tell you—and I'm down there pretty much on my own for the most part, in some cases completely on my own, amongst millions of Iranians who are all chanting. Many red signs were held asking for vengeance for the death and the assassination of their leader, and a lot of signs with hashtag K-I-L-L Trump. Okay.

Held by very old, elderly women, as well as young people, as well as what I would consider former Western-leaning liberals, who are now the most hawkish of all in the crowd in terms of the chants and so forth, saying, "No more negotiations with the U.S. Those days are over." There are really many people having a go at Araghchi and Ghalibaf and the Iranian team, saying, "Why are you negotiating with the Americans?" So, very impatient, and so total transformation in terms of, you know, the opposition bloc in politics. And that's as a result of the U.S. and Israeli attacks and the Minab school, for instance, the slaughter of all these young girls in the opening days of the U.S. bombing and the Israeli bombing campaign.

But all of these things have basically kind of eviscerated the opposition that the West took and spent billions building up over decades in that country. And, you know, the real coup d'état was Scott Bessent, the U.S. Treasury Secretary, boasting at an international forum of how he took down the Iranian currency, the rial, and brought the protesters onto the street. Now, before that, there were a lot of people who were blaming the government for mismanagement of the economy. But between the Trump administration, Donald Trump himself, Pete Hegseth, and Scott Bessent, they completely discredited any opposition arguments within Iran and really empowered, I think, the government, the state, and the leadership, and really kind of validated everything that they've been saying about the West and how brutal and, you know, feckless they have been.

#Pascal

I have a couple of Iranian friends over here, and they are all basically not very happy with their government. But I've witnessed several of them saying, "Look, the biggest problem we have is that what these people told us for 30 years, that the Americans will attack us and they're out to kill us all, came true. So we cannot really tell them anymore, 'You were wrong,' and they kind of proved a point, and now we are under attack. So even though I would like them to go, I will certainly not support the side that bombs my family." And I think the Trump-Netanyahu alliance brought that point back home to millions of Iranians who were kind of, you know, not happy, but on the other side, on the opposition. And I mean, so speak about uniting a country. I think the United States did the job there.

#Patrick Hennings

And not only that, Pascal, they also reinvigorated the Islamic Revolution, or the revolutionary government. And if you think about the different generations, the generation of this late supreme leader, Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei, his generation and maybe his children, who were very young during the revolution—he's talking about the late '70s and early '80s, the Iran-Iraq War, '80 to '88—they can only pass... They have museums in Tehran showing every detail and aspect of the war, but nothing, nothing can match the firsthand experience, the lived experience. There's people who lived through the war, and then there's those who fought in the war or who saw the Scud missiles coming down on Tehran from Iraq.

And so as each passing year or decade comes, it's harder and harder to convey the urgency or the really intense insights derived from that, let's say, call it the living memory of the new Iran, the post-revolutionary Iran. But now the young generation, what they call Gen Z, or young people right now, they have even more of an intense experience than before because now they've seen firsthand direct confrontation with the United States military, the full brunt of the U.S. military and the Israeli military on them. And that's going to reinvigorate, I think, this revolutionary government and revolutionary society for maybe, it could be for the next 50 years. So that wasn't the case before. So now it is. So this is new going forward. I don't know if that certainly wasn't in the calculus of the West.

#Pascal

Well, I do believe that at least the people who were working on the planning, they actually thought it was a house of cards. They thought it would collapse. And even if it didn't completely collapse, at least, you know, in this sick, twisted way of thinking of the Lindsey Grahams of the world, it would at least lead to civil war, right? And massive bloodshed. And then Iran can take itself apart and we can just sit there and laugh and be like, "Oh, silly Iranian saga." Yeah. But it didn't lead to that, right? It led actually to the consolidation. I know you were in Iran mainly, but since you also talked about Iraq, what is your impression about the larger Muslim world? I mean, Shia Islam is currently kind of proving a very important point for the entire region. It's like, yes, most people in Palestine are Sunni, but we don't care. We care about them. Did you feel anything or did you have any discussions about this aspect of what it will do to the Islamic world?

#Patrick Hennings

Absolutely. A lot of discussions, in fact, on this. So we're talking about the Ummah, the Islamic world. And so what's happened? Because Iran has not just taken the hit, but they're still standing. And not only are they still standing, but they've managed to do this incredible geopolitical judo move against the U.S. and the Western empire, as it were, including Israel, but reversing the leverage, being the underdog, being completely outgunned. And they've managed to reverse the leverage. Now, we can talk about, you know, why that is, you know, from a pure, pure geopolitical—

And when I say geopolitical, I'm talking the definition of geopolitics: the combination of geography, of people, of culture, and of societies, and how that can shape international politics, especially the geography part. They have achieved geopolitical military deterrence using geographical deterrence and doing it in a way that is just so efficient. And then you have to ask yourself the question—and I'll get back to the religious component, Pascal, because that's actually crucial. In fact, when we're talking about Iran, that's the core of the conversation. But when you're talking about a civilizational state, I was reprimanded. I haven't spoken about this with the Iranians. I said, I said, "So you're a 3,000-year-old civilizational state."

They're like, no, no, no, no, no. Five, five. So it's okay, okay. Five. I stand corrected. 5,000-year-old civilizational state. Well, you know, and what's amazing, Pascal, and maybe this was serendipity, but on July 4th, that's the weekend when this funeral procession is happening. I'm in Tehran. U.S. Independence Day is happening. That's a big media event. And I'm attending the funeral of the leader that was killed by my government, and I'm surrounded by people holding up signs saying, "Death to America." Yeah, with my press badge with a little American flag on it, by the way, which was a nice touch the Iranians did. I didn't feel uncomfortable or threatened. I did recognize the intensity of the moment, though.

It was a very emotionally intense time for people. And there was a lot of curiosity from the Iranians as to what I was doing there, who I was, what I thought about them and everything, and the leader, and so forth. But... so from a country that's 250 years old, my country, America, and then I'm in a civilizational state that's 5,000 years old, the penny should drop at some point in the West, and with the Israelis too. But that's a penny—I don't know when that will drop. But anyway, that there should be some innate qualities or inherent qualities of this society, of these people, that makes them a 5,000-year-old civilizational state. They must have some inherent qualities, some advantages, not just as individuals but collectively.

And we see that around the world with long-running, successful, enduring civilizational states. Iran is one of those. And you're starting to see some of those qualities emerge from the government, how they're handling the diplomacy, how they're dealing with this chaotic, insane U.S. administration that doesn't know whether it's coming or going, seemingly from one moment to the next, and a completely bellicose, caustic Israeli regime as well that's hell-bent on annihilating them. So there's a level of discipline that's being displayed by the Iranians at pretty much every level of government. And it's impressive. So the patience, the strategic patience, really, they have a very good understanding of themselves and who they are.

Very strong identity system. And what I saw as well is the people don't need to be ordered to step up. They kind of know when to step up. They know why they're stepping up, and they come. And, you know, I was told that the people are—Trump saying that there's no food at the markets, that we brought the country to its knees. I saw more food being given away for free in Tehran on the streets during the funeral processions. It's just mind-boggling. How do you feed 8 million people and give

them drinks and keep them from getting heatstroke? And everyone just donates. And it's the same with Arbreen, the walk in Iraq from Karbala. It's the same thing.

It's this kind of collective spirit and this duty, this kind of meaning in what they're doing. And so they're standing resolute against a powerful, powerful enemy that's stated publicly that they want to wipe out their civilization. Yeah. And that's not a hollow threat, by the way. The U.S. has come good, and Israel have come good on some of that threat. And so, you know, there's a certain nature there. And I saw that, and it was just, to me, especially... It was very powerful in Tehran, the energy. It was very powerful. And there was a different kind of energy in Mashhad at the end of the sadness, mourning. And what's interesting, Pascal, and to the religious point, there was a slogan you started seeing everywhere in Farsi, Arabic, and English.

Even in English, they had, in certain places, it said, "We must rise." It was everywhere. Yeah. And it had this iconic graphic depiction of the fist of the Supreme Leader with his iconic amber-colored ring and his robe that had the fringes slightly tattered because he was known for this, having, you know, not gotten new clothes, but always used his old, you know, robes and stuff like that. Very austere, his life. And I even went to one of his houses in Mashhad and saw his library. They're full of American books, by the way. American, European literature, Victor Hugo, and all the American classics. So, very learned and scholarly individual. But it said, "We must rise."

And I started talking to Iranians about this because it's a very short, poignant slogan. And, Pascal, I got so many different answers. And that, to me, was fascinating, because people would say, "Oh, that's regime propaganda." Well, if it's regime propaganda, how is it interpreted in, like, ten different ways by different people? So this is a country that has an intellectual interest and depth, I think, that's usually underestimated in the West. I said, "Is it Islam must rise? Is it Shia Islam? Is it Iran as a country?" "Yes, as a country, this is our time. We need to rise up, and we need to rise up against the oppressors. Islam must rise. The Ummah must rise, must meet the challenge. Shia Islam, they're the nation of Imam Hussein."

And that's a very important narrative. And that really instructs everything. Look in the Iranian Constitution, Article, I think it's 154. It mandates that they defend oppressed people wherever they are in the world. This is unusual, to say the least, for any country or any constitution. So what they represent globally to each other, I think, within Iran, but also globally to the Islamic world—and not just the Islamic world—but they'll defend Cuba, they'll defend Venezuela, they'll defend the North Koreans or the Palestinians, of course, most famously. And those aren't Persian or Iranian people in Palestine. Those are Levantine Arabs. So they would defend the Irish or whoever.

So there's a principle there that transcends religion, but religion is what's used, I think, to crystallize the call. So what you see there is the distillation of 5,000 years of a civilizational state into some of the essence in the current, the present Shiite Islamic state society there, and it's extremely powerful. It's really hard to describe the feeling of being amongst that at such an emotionally charged time, almost 24/7. I mean, the final day went straight into almost dawn in Mashhad, and just millions of

people out there. And the chants, if I could speak Farsi, of course—but I had some stuff translated—were very defiant against America, you know.

#Pascal

It's so fascinating, the way—the words that you're using to describe this—because to me it sounds as if, though, you had witnessed a revolutionary moment. Because the way that you were talking about this is like how a lot of the descriptions of, like, people going through a proper revolution—you know, everybody in the streets and with guns and whatnot—is, that they talk about when you're part and parcel of something, of throwing something over and then creating something new, how that inspires the crowds in large masses.

But the interesting thing here is, of course, that was all in support of the very government that was in power and was supposed to be hated and whatnot. So it almost feels as if, though, you've witnessed kind of the struggle against the big power structure, the one on top, right? That's how people seem to perceive that, like a revolution against the unipolar moment, against the great hegemon. Actually, a common understanding, even if they don't have a common framework of it, but a common understanding that this is an existential struggle for something new.

#Patrick Hennings

Yeah, I mean, I witnessed something like this, but they also are witnessing it together because this is a historic moment. This is a punctuation in Iranian history and society post-revolution, especially because this leader transcended two generations, 37 years as Supreme Leader. Okay, so most people, especially if they're above, you know, the age of, let's say, 20, or if you're 40, 50, or 60, this, you know, for your adult life, this is the only—this is your, you know, national father figure. This is your mentor. This is your teacher. And you hear this word a lot: our teacher, right? I heard this with Hassan Nasrallah as well, as regarded as a teacher. So these are formidable intellectual powerhouses in terms of leadership.

They're religious leaders as well. They're philosophers. They're literary scholars. They're poets. But they're also there to help guide policy. This is why they have a unique system, their system of government, whereby when you face these incredible crossroads as a society and geopolitically and in history, the decisions can't be guided purely on politics. You know, realpolitik can't be guided purely on power politics. There has to be a moral component. There has to be some guiding principles there. And you need this combination of a Pope and a philosopher-king to help guide, who has a connection to the people, by the way, direct connection to the people. If the Supreme Leader says, "Come out and support this moment," they will come out.

And maybe a politician is not going to have that level of response and engagement. So consequently, the people are very politically engaged in this country. The level of intensity in terms of the political debate is very noticeable, and it's not soft and polite sometimes. It's quite intense.

And so there are factions butting heads quite vigorously and, in some cases, emotionally about some of these issues and what road the country should take, what decisions they should take, even on the nuclear question or on how to respond to this war and what society needs to do to go forward. And I will argue that that's a sign of a vigorous and healthy democratic environment.

#Pascal

It's a highly politicized society, right, where society feels as part of the political body, right? I mean, because we have very similar things in Switzerland, but we have direct democracy. But the debates get very heated because we know we have a stake in it, right? And I want to convince the other ones. So the Iranians also have that, although our propaganda media would tell us that the Supreme Leader makes all the decisions and everybody just follows, right?

#Patrick Hennings

Yeah, exactly. Exactly. They feel—it's not just that they feel that, they know that, because, you know, they have a consensus-building mechanism in that country. It's very sophisticated and includes the population. And the political leadership are very responsive to the population. But that process of distilling the consensus, as it were, is maybe a little bit slower-moving. It takes a bit more time. It's not a top-down consensus system. So I can compare it to Russia, where Russia has this vast national security institutional constellation of various types of NGOs, academia, and former Soviet vertical institutions all together distilling down the national security consensus in Russia. It's very sophisticated, and it moves incredibly slow sometimes, but it's very real. And so to get that buy-in, you need to work through all of these thousands of people.

Iran has similar many institutions, many NGOs, former government officials that are in civil society in Iran, many of them much older, and they form a kind of, in some ways, official and unofficial guiding sort of elder guardian councils. Various types of opinions are coming from different places, and it's very real there. The people are a big part of that, and the government and the leadership pay very close attention to what the people are thinking and feeling. And so it all kind of works together. So this idea in the West, and how they portray Iran as a religious extremist, a Shiite Islam Twelver cult, eschatological-obsessed religious cult. And if you want to talk about eschatological-obsessed religious cults, you don't have to look any further than Christian evangelism or Christian Zionism or Zionism full stop.

#Pascal

It's just about—it's very rich for such accusations to come from a person who has a Crusader's cross on his chest, like your minister of war, right? It's just so rich. I mean, in a sense, every accusation is a confession, right? This is one of the main problems I have with our West, that we take our own

actions and then we interpret the others as they must be doing the same, right? So if they do something, then it must be like us, when in fact, no, and that's the misunderstanding. They do things genuinely differently. They have a different thinking.

#Patrick Hennings

Our vaunted Secretary of War in America, you're referring to Pete Hegseth, with the Jerusalem Cross and various other Crusader iconography emblazoned permanently on his body. But to speak to your previous point, Pascal, is that what's happened? To me, it's amazing if you think about how this is playing out in real time. The U.S. have killed an elderly but much revered and loved leader of the country, the godfather of the Islamic revolutionary state of Iran, the current godfather. They killed him. Now, his son has been nominated as the heir apparent, okay, by the Council of Experts and accepted by the people. But his son hasn't appeared in public. This has been hugely controversial.

The West is saying that his son is not alive. He's dead or he's maimed. They're putting out all sorts of egregious epithets and insults and things like that to degrade and defame the new leader, Mojtaba Khamenei. But quite obviously, the reason he hasn't shown his face is because the minute he does, he's marked for death. He will be the main target by U.S. and Israeli airstrikes and laser-guided bombs and so forth to kill him, because that's the policy of Israel and the U.S., is to decapitate and kill the leadership in Iran. But what's amazing about this is he hasn't shown his face. He hasn't come publicly. And in a way, this validates their political system.

The leader is not visible, and yet there's more cohesion and solidarity than ever before, and more support for the leadership. And they're well aware that his life and his family's life are in danger just by the mere fact that he has been pushed to the front, to the leadership position. And they accept that. The people understand and accept that. There's no petty debates about this in Iran. It's just known and accepted. But the West don't know how to deal with this because we've been told that you cut off the head of the snake and the regime will collapse. And, you know, this is the kind of Dr. Strangelove-style militaristic rhetoric that we're so accustomed to, especially coming from the United States.

#Pascal

Mm-hmm.

#Patrick Hennings

And what's happening here confounds everything. It confounds everything. So we're looking for ways that we can find these fissures in the West and these cracks that we can exploit and hammer a wedge in there. And the more and more they attack Iran, demonize Iran, the more and more these

fissures and cracks are disappearing within Iranian society. And it's, to me, quite an extraordinary phenomenon. I think if we survive this, if we're able to look back and study it, this is going to be one of the great case studies in the paradigm shift of world orders.

#Pascal

Yeah, yeah. You know, for all the bad that wars are, they have this tendency of bringing clarity to a moment because of the violence and everything. Like, certain things will bubble to the top, right? And they will come out, and certain powers will show that they don't have the power that they claim to have. I think the United States is one of them right now, showing that. The other might be, like, an underrated underdog that will show that there's a completely different setup actually, more adapted to what is needed. I mean, we now see that Iran has a completely, utterly different strategy than what any kind of IR school in the West would have told you. The strategy is like: we are able to absorb, and we will do conventional second strikes, and we will reestablish reciprocity, and we will stick to our guns, and we decentralize the military leadership.

Therefore, each military leader can choose their own targets. We don't do central organization. I mean, nobody in the West would organize their state like that. And the Iranians have been doing it for the last 50 years. And the fact that nobody understood that actually just speaks to the complete, utter lack of knowledge in the West about Iran and so on. What do you think? Like, what was your observation, though? Like, how other people from the media—not just the West, not just the US and Europe, but also the Chinese and the Global South—did you see any African media and so on? How did the Global South actually interpret that? Because this is a huge signal, probably a bigger signal than Russia and Ukraine.

#Patrick Hennings

Yeah, the main interface I had with other international media was from Pakistan and also Kashmir as well. And, you know, some are Shiite Muslims as well, and some are not. Some are Sunni. But what was interesting to me about the other, say, people from Muslim countries is how this issue and how Iran transcends the usual sectarian divisions that one might think in the West are so prevalent between Sunnis and Shiites, as an example. And Christians—Lebanese Christians were there, journalists as well—and it really does transcend that. And we'll talk about the Global South in a moment, but in terms of the Ummah, the global Muslim community, Iran has taken a leadership role by example. And this is significant.

It's invited a lot of people to support Iran purely on the moral issue of what they're standing for, and the fact that they're willing to take a hit on behalf of the Palestinians or on behalf of the Lebanese—that they're willing to do that, they're willing to put themselves out. And this is a very powerful message across the Muslim world. And it kind of, in a way, breaks down some of the sectarian divisions that the West and the Gulf states have tried to promote quite aggressively for the longest time, which serves certain geopolitical and colonial... We're talking in terms of the British, you know,

the progenitors of Wahhabism. Let's just be clear about that. And the United States have also run with that and used that as their main geopolitical tool, which is sectarianism. And this has transcended that.

So I think that's really positive in a certain way because for a lot of journalists from around the world, either from Muslim countries or outside Muslim countries, it means that they don't have to filter this story through any sectarian lens anymore, and it means that the story is very clear and the story is simple. It's—and I think that's something I don't think the West was banking on, because you have to think about America's invested so much in the Sunni versus Shiite narrative over decades, decades, and they're just plowing everything into it. You know, even Tulsi Gabbard is pushing that aggressively when she was working for Fox just before the 2024 election, which was kind of surprising and shocking and disappointing, you know, for some of us that used to support her back when she was running for president as an anti-war candidate.

But that's just an example of how ubiquitous she is. That line is in the West. And so I think a lot of international journalists were quite, you know, happy to see me and some other people from the West there and interface with us, talk to us. And, you know, you can't not be there and not ask questions and learn about their religious life, about their faith, about what's happening in front of your eyes, because that's an integral part of how this drama is playing out, especially this funeral and going to these holy sites like Mashhad and the Grand Shrine of Imam Reza and so forth, very important in the story that people have about their history.

And so it's a defiance and the duty of the story of Imam Hussein standing up against the oppressors, risking his life, ultimately giving his life on behalf of people who were not strong enough to fight for themselves. And that message is the core. So that moral component is very hard to beat. You know, it's a universal message, and it invites support from everybody. And it means that you can then universalize that principle, and it can apply to anyone in the world. And anybody can take up that cause. They don't even need to be Shiite Muslim. But so Iran's playing a kind of exemplary role in Islam, in geopolitics, in a sort of anti-colonial—or however you want to frame it—anti-imperialist, anti-hegemonic. You could say is probably a better term, anti-hegemonic.

They're playing a really important exemplary role in that sense, and they're doing so under sanctions, under total siege economically, under embargo. They don't have the air force that Turkey has. They're not equipped as a conventional military, not even close to the level of some of their neighbors, even Saudi Arabia. So, but somehow they have managed to parlay what resources they have and focus on kind of the foresight of the future, the future of defense, national defense, and warfare geared, as you said previously, you know, preparing for decades to gear against a U.S.-led attack. And they have managed to pull this off. And, you know, how could they do that? And I've traveled all around West Asia, Pascal.

And I've never seen a country in the Middle East or West Asia, at least from Iran going westward to the Mediterranean, that does not import any labor at all. In other words, everyone works in that

country. And from the bottom of society right to the top, as it were, everybody is working. It's massively educated. Higher education is an absolute sought-after and coveted accomplishment in that country for men and women. So everyone works, everyone at every level of society. They're not reliant on the import of either labor like the Gulf states are. The Gulf states import all of their manual labor, all their builders. They use them as cannon fodder to build Dubai, from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines and so forth. And then the middle management is all imported from America, Britain, France, Germany, Europe, Switzerland.

The middle management and the board level is usually Gulf Arab, of course, for the most part. But they import everything. Iran is completely self-sufficient. So, from a human capital point of view, they've been able to produce a state-of-the-art missile program. They've been able to produce domestically anti-aircraft technology, satellite multi-stage rocket launches, deploying their own satellites into orbit. They've been able to produce their own medical, pharmaceutical, their own sort of materials and building industries and engineering and architecture, and a long storied history of great architects from Iran. I mean, so they've been able to do this. So there's no way that you can completely cut them off and suffocate them like other countries have been suffocated.

I think Syria was similar in that Syria, everybody worked in Syria. They didn't import labor. And it wasn't really *au fait* to import, like it is in, like, say, Lebanon. There's a lot of lower-tier labor that's imported from Eritrea, Ethiopia, the Philippines, like nannies and servants from Nigeria and different countries, African countries. You don't see that in Syria. So Syria was similar to Iran in that respect. But from a human capital point of view, Pascal, if there were no sanctions, if this was a free market, I do not see how any of the Gulf states could compete with Iran.

I think within 10 years, Iran would probably have the world's leading airline, the most luxurious, the best service, the best food, the best planes. Whether they buy them from America, from Boeing or Airbus or not, they would be world leaders in so many different areas. I just—it's kind of obvious that they're being held down by the U.S., by the West, by Israel, and so forth. And they're really just trying to stave off the inevitable. So I think from a conventional point of view, Iran has achieved a great victory in terms of deterrence. Now, if that goes into the unconventional realm, people are very casually throwing around nuclear threats, which is disturbing in itself.

But even then, even then, that's not going to— even a nuclear attack on Iran, limited or otherwise, it's not going to end the civilization. It's not going to eliminate the people. And I think the futility of even that idea hopefully will sink in eventually. But, you know, Japan is a good example. The U.S. dropped two atomic bombs on Japan. Did it end Japanese civilization? Absolutely not. It changed it. It changed the politics. But Japan is still a civilizational state, you know, among other civilizational states. So Iran is no different.

#Pascal

Now, I really wonder how long it will take the West, Europe, and North America until it thinks that there are places that just have other ways of managing themselves. And even though they don't look like what we are doing, that doesn't mean that they're inferior, not at all. I mean, they're just proving that they actually have figured out how to deal with the top dog, right? And it's not pretty. It's not pretty at all, but nobody ever said it was or would be. The fascinating aspect for me, again, is this kind of the judo move you described it as, right?

In a sense, it is the United States that now unleashed the full potential of Iran as kind of not only as a signpost of what is possible, but also as a, you know, as a... The social cohesion within the country, which is probably the greatest asset a country can have, a nation can have: social cohesion. Which doesn't mean that everybody needs to be, in a fascist manner, like, walk in the same direction. I think Iran shows it's the opposite of that. Like, everybody walks their own way, but it seems that they came out that way. This is now the new post.

We know where to go because the others are closing everything else off, and they're bombing us into this one direction, right? So, which is, you have to take and be the standard bearer of a better form of politics, even if you don't want that. And I have Iranian friends who told me, like, well, we're kind of unhappy because why should we take the bombs for the Palestinians? I mean, very bad for them, but why should we? But now it turns out, well, they are thrown on you anyhow. So, I mean, this kind of changes the game, doesn't it? So what's your overall assessment of how this will shape the next couple of months and years of this conflict?

#Patrick Hennings

I'll start with just from the Iranian society point of view. There is a recognition that's slowly sinking in. Obviously, they're on full alert. The U.S. will just repeatedly escalate and de-escalate, and we can talk about why that is. But there is a realization, I think, amongst Iranians that I detected, that I could see. They're aware of what they have achieved geopolitically. But there's also a humility there. And they're not out celebrating it in the way that Americans celebrated the Gulf War in Iraq, waving the flag and the troops and listening to the national anthem. It's more of a sort of quiet realization, of a quiet confidence, that they have gone through this ring of fire so far, and also a humility there. I think the humility comes from the religious component, the religious part of society and of the individuals, and collectively that they share together.

And that's a tempering force that is really essential. It means that they're very focused, very observant, very patient, very intellectual, very strong in math and sciences as well, I might add. If you look at history, in terms of colonialism, the story of colonialism has often been a technological story. It's one power's ability to exert some advantage in warfare or technology or administration or something that would put them in a position to dominate another less advanced civilization or people. And now in the 21st century, a lot of those barriers are down, and technology is more or less global and ubiquitous, especially as it pertains to Iran, quite obviously. So that advantage that, you

know, the British or the Soviets, for that matter, or the Americans previously had over Iran, used as a geopolitical piece on the board.

That's not so visible now. It's gone. It's dissolved. And Iran is now demonstrating that, I think. There is no technology that can be deployed against them, whether it's fifth-generation warfare via the internet, mobilizing violent riots and so forth, dropping Elon Musk's Starlink terminals by the thousands into Iran. They've dealt with all of that, not just from a technological point of view, but also from a strategic, a social, a government statecraft point of view as well. And it's quite incredible. So that's really important.

And so that's a sort of, I would say, mitigating factor from the outside attacks. Now, the economic situation is very bad in Iran, but they're coping. They're coping because there's solidarity. There's a recognition that they are being victimized. They're under siege. They're being attacked. And because of that, there is a patience there. They're digging in for the long term. So those are all realities, I think. So looking forward, I don't think the United States is going to stop antagonizing or attacking Iran anytime soon, nor the Israelis.

They might go through periods of running fake negotiations or running a fake MOU gambit. But the U.S. have very clear long-term strategies that they're dialed into. One of them is eliminating any peer competitors. That transcends multiple administrations, and it's spelled out in Zbigniew Brzezinski's Grand Chessboard, published in 1997. And it's a strategy that predates Brzezinski even. So they have that. They have the Middle Corridor, which they will disrupt and sabotage. That's from Russia through Iran down to the south coast, Chabahar, through to the port of Mumbai in India. That's U.S. geostrategic priority: disrupt and degrade, sabotage the Middle Corridor.

The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative as well is sabotaging, disrupting China's Belt and Road. This is a U.S. consistent long-term grand strategy and objective. As well, we have the choke points, the Bab al-Mandeb Straits, the Strait of Hormuz, the control of these key waterways and not allowing a peer competitor to control them. All of those are dialed in as U.S. strategies. Those are all priorities of the Pentagon. The Pentagon's funded. Those operations are funded, and they will continue. They might dial down, but then they will dial back up. And what the U.S. has been doing is using the MOU as a ruse to create and stage provocations in and around the straits to go and pick off infrastructure targets over a long period.

And they'll continue that through the midterms and into 2027. Because the long-term U.S. strategy, there's no kumbaya moment coming, not under the Trump administration. It's not going to happen. The only reason the U.S. will dial down their long-term strategy is if they don't have the equipment or the resources available at that moment to do what they want to do. The only thing stopping them from continuing to attack Iran is a resource and a logistics issue for the U.S. So they'll go through this charade of, you know, Donald Trump just did one this week: "Oh, we're going to—the Iranians are asking us to negotiate. The Arabs want us to call off the attacks. And for the good of humanity and for the people of Iran, we're going to show mercy and negotiate."

This is just a ruse. The U.S. is working outside of the legal framework, outside of congressional approval for war, by just sending a letter to Congress every 60 days asking for a renewal of the authorization for the use of military force. And they'll have just enough interceptors, just enough missiles to do a 10- to 14-day campaign. And then they'll ramp up these massive threats, and then they'll use that to claim that it's leverage for a deal, and the deal will fall. And in some cases, the U. S. will use right now the fact that Trump said, "Oh, we're pulling back and doing a deal." That's also a green light for an attack by the U.S. and Israel, if you look at their previous record.

#Pascal

Yeah, yeah, no.

#Patrick Hennings

So we're going to see this just repeat, rinse and repeat, Pascal, I predict, right up to the midterms and then beyond as well.

#Pascal

No, I agree. And this is also the part where Brian Berletic and so on are absolutely right to point that out, that this is deep-seated policy that happens below, actually, the level of the actual decision-making of the day and so on. But which just means that it again validates the strategy of the others saying, like, yeah, we just need to—the permanent war state of the United States that it imposes is permanent. So the only way to deal with it is by taking away the means to implement. So they're working on that. So that's the thing. They have figured it out together with the Russians as well. And I think the Chinese, the longer, the longer, the more that, well, you just got to make sure that the U. S. can't do it. Not that they don't want to. You're never going to change the want, but you can change the can. So that's probably the name of the game of the next couple of years.

#Patrick Hennings

The timeline that the American administration is working on, it's, you know, two- and four-year timeframes, corresponds with elections. The style of a Democratic foreign policy will be different than a Republican or a Trump foreign policy. But the underlying strategy, as you said, is consistent through administrations. So there's certain opportunities in a Trump administration that the U.S. empire, as it were, can realize, or that Israel can realize by also using the U.S. empire for its objectives of a Greater Israel project. By the way, that's also accepted by the U.S. strategy makers so long as it doesn't impede their strategy.

American imperial objectives. But so there's an opportunity in the two years remaining of the Trump administration to do certain bombastic things, because once Trump's gone, then it goes into NGO soft and smart power, a total different type of subterfuge, working through human rights

organizations to create responsibility to protect narratives and so forth. But you're right. Russia and Iran understand clearly. They understand this is a war of attrition, and it's about de-resourcing the empire over time. They're fully, fully engaged in this. You know, the other thing I will say, Pascal, is...

You know, when the Iranian leadership steps up to an international summit and they're with the Russians and the Chinese and everyone else, nobody else has stood toe-to-toe and taken the full hit of the U.S. military than Iran. In the modern era, it's the only country that has done that. So that gives them a certain level of respect. And if you think about them trying to enforce this moral red line, as they did in South Lebanon, and it was the first clause of the MOU, that's effectively a moral red line. So in international relations, that's a normative power. By definition, that's a normative power. So Iran, by default, has stepped up as, I would say, the normative power in the region.

There's nobody else that's basically trying to enforce a red line based on a moral or human rights-related principle. And only superpowers can do that if they can back it up with military power. That's the difference between a mid-tier normative power and a superpower. A superpower could back up that red line, whether it's erroneous or not. You know, America draws many erroneous red lines. Let's be clear. Being able to back it up with hard power is what defines you as a superpower. So Iran, by default, maybe not what they intended to do, but by default, they're occupying that position, at least in the region.

I wouldn't go so far as to say globally. But if you consider the importance of the region as a geopolitical and geostrategic pivot point, then actually, you could say they are a global superpower in respect of the position they play within that important hinge, as it were, between the West and the East. And that can't be ignored. And the other powers recognize that. And it means that if Iran's disciplined, consistent, morally, militarily, doctrinally, and foreign policy-wise, they're going to eventually get the support even from the Indias of the world. And no matter, it's going to happen. It's a new precedent.

#Pascal

And it's definitely a precedent of the multipolar world that we will look back on one day and draw conclusions from. But for now, I need to thank you very much, actually, for sharing all of those experiences and observations with us. Very quickly, Patrick, if people want to follow you, where should they go?

#Patrick Hennings

Well, hopefully I'll send you a couple of links if we can drop those below, but definitely follow us at 21stcenturywire.com. Definitely support our YouTube channel, which we're not getting any favors from Alphabet, so we need people to go and land on there physically. Like and subscribe. I'll drop that link to you, as well as a Substack. Just kind of recently this year, developing a Substack presence as well. So, yeah, any support from anybody is greatly appreciated.

#Pascal

Everybody, please support the work of real and fantastic journalists. Support Patrick Henningsen. I will drop all of the links that you will send me into the description box below, and then we'll talk again soon. Patrick Henningsen, thank you so much for your time today.

#Patrick Hennings

Thank you, Pascal. Appreciate it.