

How Israel Pushed Trump Into War | Max Blumenthal

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Chris Hedges (CH): The Israeli government mounted a sustained campaign to entice Donald Trump into a war with Iran. It assured Trump that once the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was assassinated, the fragile edifice of the Iranian Islamic State would crumble and a new pro-Western government would replace it. Part of this campaign also included manufactured plots to convince Trump that Iran sought to assassinate him. "I got him before he got me", Trump told a reporter when asked about his motives for authorizing the killing of the Supreme Leader on February 28th. Joining me to discuss the campaign to convince Trump to go to war with Iran – something Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has unsuccessfully tried to get past administrations to do for decades – is Max Blumenthal, the editor of *The Grayzone*. Max is also the author of *Republican Gomorrah: Inside the Movement that Shattered the Party*, *The Management of Savagery*, and *Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel*, a book that despite being nearly 500 pages long was so captivating and so well reported, I finished it in a day. So Max, there's been long pressure on the Trump administration – in your article in *The Grayzone* you say this goes back to the very campaign itself – explain how that worked. He was of course surrounded by pro-Israel advisors both in his first term, figures like Bolton and in his second term. But just lay out the process – and of course he survived two assassination attempts, which I didn't know it until I read your story, Netanyahu immediately linked to Iran.

Max Blumenthal (MB): Well, there is the material political force that influenced Trump, that Israel applied to influence Trump. And then there is this psychological pressure, which is more sophisticated, was a very sophisticated campaign that was more difficult for people to understand because Trump is a difficult figure to understand. I mean, if you're a sensible person and you listen to what Donald Trump says now, you may want to try to apply some sort of rational logic to what Trump is saying, perhaps he's playing three-dimensional chess, or maybe it's three-dementia chess. Or he may just actually be an extremely stupid, feeble-minded individual who is ornery and irrational. But let's say you're Trump's enemy, it's less important than if you're Trump's frenemy in Israel and you need him to fulfill your

objectives because you have the lobby that can convince and influence US policymakers to act against American interests in your interest. But Donald Trump is an enigmatic figure, less stable and predictable than a Bill Clinton or even a Barack Obama.

However Trump offers this massive opportunity because he's totally transactional and he is someone who entered politics essentially to make a profit. So the Israelis were working Trump through their cutouts, many of the figures that out of the mega group that was launched in the 1990s to support Benjamin Netanyahu's campaigns and various pro-Israel objectives internally inside the US who are like 12 to 20 billionaires. Netanyahu had a handwritten list of billionaires that he drew up to support his campaign back in 1996. So you had those. The most important figure would have been Sheldon Adelson, who's succeeded by his wife, his widow, Miriam Adelson. There are other figures like Paul Singer, who was more of a mainstream, neoconservative Republican. He had a gay son, so he was hostile to the Christian right, but he liked the Republican Party because he is a vulture capitalist who wants to pay very low taxes. He backed Marco Rubio's entire career alongside the Adelsons. And Singer eventually got in with Trump when Trump made certain promises, which are now coming to bear right now in Iran and the West Bank and elsewhere. Singer is an "Israel First" guy. Other smaller figures, Ike Perlmutter, Bernard Marcus, we know these names – and it's obvious, Trump doesn't even hide this, that they are essentially bribing him through our corrupt campaign finance system to allow Israel to de facto annex the West Bank, commit genocide in Gaza, punish the International Criminal Court for attempting to hold Israel's military and political leadership to account for these crimes, and everything else, all the way up to war with Iran.

And then you had Donald Trump, the man who had to be manipulated, and I assume the Mossad and other forces within Israeli intelligence were seeking to first decode the enigma of Donald Trump's psychology and then to exploit it as they do with all of their targets, whether they're targeting them for assassination or targeting them an influence campaign. Donald Trump has been targeted through this campaign of legal bribery and manipulation since his first campaign. He spoke actually at the Sands Casino in 2015, I believe it was, when he first started to emerge as a candidate. This is the casino owned by Sheldon Adelson in Las Vegas for the Republican Jewish Coalition, which is a cipher for all the money from the right-wing Likudnik billionaires in the US, principally Adelson money. And Trump said, "you know, you guys like to make deals, most of you are in real estate". He's probably thinking about his buddy, Steve Witkoff. "So let's make a deal with the Palestinians. What would be wrong with that?" And what Trump said there was just so unacceptable that he was denounced as an anti-Semite by the RJC. Then he immediately started to change his tune. And what did he say? What were the magic words? "We're getting ripped off by the Iran deal that Barack Obama signed, and we're giving the Iranians and the Mullahs hundreds of billions of dollars".

This was, of course, a humongous lie. We were just unfreezing money that had been stolen, essentially held up in international banks through sanctions. And Trump hammered this message again and again. And it was like a Likudnik bat signal to Adelson and all the billionaires of the mega group that they could now support him. And suddenly he began to

surge forward. He was making deals behind the scenes through his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, who understood this world very well through his own family. Charles Kushner, the Kushner Foundation, was supporting some of the most radical settlements in the West Bank, supporting exclusively right-wing Likudnik-oriented activities. The Kushner family was close friends with Netanyahu when he was opposition leader in Likud. Netanyahu would come over to their house and young Jared would have to get out of his bed and sleep on the couch so Netanyahu could have a guest room. I could go into the Kushner family for the next hour. But he was the fixer who helped align Donald Trump with this Zionist billionaire class.

Donald Trump enters office, Israel starts pushing Trump to first of all, he rips up the Iran deal, so that was a major win. He announces the Abraham Accords, which is intended to encircle Iran with a Sunni Alliance of family dictatorships in the Gulf, seated in the front row, the Adelsons and Jared Kushner. It was all pretty clear what the agenda was. But Israel was making moves on the ground, too, to escalate so that Trump would be pushed to wage war. Gareth Porter published a really important analysis with us at The Grayzone, a two-parter on how Netanyahu and Mike Pompeo, Christian Zionist, were the subject of influence for not just the Israel lobby, but also the MEK, the exiled Iranian regime change group. When he was CIA director, Pompeo and Netanyahu basically teamed up to pressure Trump to authorize retaliatory attacks because of supposed axis of resistance attacks on US bases inside Iraq.

There was one key attack on a US base in, I believe it was Baghdad. It might've been Baghdad or Erbil in 2019. And it turned out that no group affiliated with Iran or the Popular Mobilization Units had carried out that attack. It was in fact an ISIS attack. ISIS, a group that had essentially been defeated. Anyone could claim ISIS. Raises questions about whether it was a false flag. And it was with that attack, Netanyahu and Pompeo both went to Trump and said, "you need to retaliate and the way to do it is we're going to take out Qasem Soleimani, the IRGC's leading figure, head of the Quds Force, responsible for all of this terrorism against Americans", they claimed, even though he had just worked with the US hand in glove to defeat ISIS. "And we know that he's coming to Baghdad and will be getting off a plane to commit acts of terror against Americans", when in fact he was going to negotiate diplomatically with Saudi Arabia. Trump authorizes a drone strike to kill Soleimani getting off the plane. And it's the first time that Iran retaliates against the US with ballistic missiles. They attacked the US al-Asad air base in Iraq. They of course give advance warning. Iran was always careful to avoid escalating beyond a certain point.

However, the Israelis had achieved a major objective, not just militarily, but psychologically, because they had set Donald Trump up in an escalation trap. He would not only have to continue escalating against Iran every time it retaliated or face looking weak, which is another aspect of Trump's character, his personality, he always needs to save face and avoid looking weak. But also, Trump would now fear his own assassination because he had just taken out the second most important figure in the Iranian leadership hierarchy. And that helps us set the stage for Trump's comeback, his comeback campaign, and the various assassination attempts he faced after enduring the whole Russiagate saga, which was indeed a hoax that was intended to paint Donald Trump as a traitor. The former CIA director, John Brennan,

someone who has been involved in assassinations all over the world, oversaw the drone assassination program, calls Trump a traitor on national TV. Trump's looking over that shoulder for John Brennan. The Democrats impeach Trump in Congress over the Ukraine War. He faces lawsuits, accusations from women that he sexually harassed them in the past. It's all coming at Donald Trump so fast and he develops this fear of assassination and also this determination to claw his way back to power to get revenge against all the people who sought to take him out. And so for the Israelis, now the psychology of Donald Trump is clear: we just need to convince him that Iran is trying to kill him and he'll do what we want.

CH: And of course, that fear of assassination, as you point out, is well founded. He was nearly killed in Butler, Pennsylvania in July of 2024. And then two months later, there was another potential assassin arrested who was hiding in the shrubbery outside of Mar-a-Lago in West Palm Beach. So Trump was already primed for this since there had been two close calls. You write: "The FBI has manufactured a series of assassination plots, successfully convincing Trump that Iran was hunting him on US soil with highly sophisticated teams of hitmen". Can you give us the details and I guess begin by talking about Asif Merchant?

MB: Yeah. So anyone who watched your intro will hear you quote Donald Trump stating, "I got him before he got me", referring to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. It's not really in Iran's doctrine to assassinate a foreign leader and risk war. It would easily trigger the US to attack them, but this is what Trump believes. So, why does he believe it? Who convinced him? And what do we know? The first thing to know is that, as you said, Donald Trump's fears of assassination are well-founded. And the main assassination attempt, which nearly claimed Donald Trump's life in Butler, Pennsylvania on July 13th, 2024, is not well understood and still shrouded in mystery. And it's especially not well-understood by people on the left because, you know, what do they care?

The right is much more invested in this and trying to get to the truth and right wing members of Congress, Republican members of congress have gone as far as going to Butler to try to get to the bottom of it. One of them, Clay Higgins went to Butler, I think two weeks after the assassination attempt and he found that the body of Thomas Matthew Crooks, the would-be-assassin who missed Trump, supposedly sliced his ear and missed his head by like an inch – his body had been destroyed. It had actually been returned to his family. There was no toxicology report that he could access. We later learned the toxicology report was faulty, but there are so many instances of obstruction around Crooks. Christopher Wray, the FBI director at the time, said that Crooks had no social media history and was just this kind of mysterious lone wolf. It turned out he had an extensive social media history on YouTube, for example. He was a prolific commenter declaring his intention to ignite a civil war by killing political leaders in the US. He explicitly called for the assassination of Ilhan Omar in one comment on YouTube. Other YouTube users were flagging his comments, but nothing ever happened to him that we know of. So there are real questions within what once was Donald Trump's support base, which is now kind of like collapsing, about whether Thomas Matthew Crooks himself had been recruited by the FBI at some point, and that Trump's assassination was a manufactured plot gone wrong.

And it's going to get even eerier when we start to understand the details of this figure, Asif Merchant. He's from Pakistan and he entered the United States through Houston to visit family. He had an Iranian wife he had met in Iran on a pilgrimage in Karbala. And this wound him up on a terrorist watch list, a DHS watch list, when he entered the, what is it, George H.W. Bush Airport in Houston, I think in February of 2024. However, DHS or Customs and Border Patrol waves him through after discovering his whole history of having family in Iran on his phone, seeing the watch list. And they give him a special, I mean, I don't know if you call it a "special visa", but it's a kind of visa that enables law enforcement investigation. And they basically decided to target him and manipulate him.

The question is, were the Israelis alerting them in advance that he was coming? Had the Israelis wound him up on the watchlist? And was this a kind of operation conducted in tandem with the Israelis? Merchant enters the country. He's a small-time businessman. He's trying to meet business partners. A man approaches him and says, I want to help you sell shirts and get into the garment industry here. That man is an FBI informant, who is a former translator for the US Army in Afghanistan. We don't know his real name. And he winds up filming Merchant in a hotel room declaring his intention to carry out an assassination of unnamed political leadership using a 25 person protest as a distraction with a woman who's handling reconnaissance and a sniper.

This is a guy who has no military history, no experience with any of this. And then he's told by the informant, "Okay, I'll get all these people. All we need is \$5,000". So \$5000 for this giant flash mob style assassination extravaganza is absurd. And it turns out Merchant didn't even have \$5000 to his name. So the FBI informant leads him up and down the East Coast to meet various individuals who are all FBI informants to collect the money. And then he takes him to say, okay, we're going to do this. Merchant goes home to Houston. He's arrested on guess what date, June 12th, 24 hours before the Butler assassination attempt, raising serious questions. So then after Butler, Merchant is visited in his cell by a team of FBI agents who want to know if he had anything to do with the attempt to kill Trump in Butler. They determined that he hadn't. He had no idea about it. But it raises further questions. And as one of them later told the Washington Post, if we had demonstrated that this Merchant guy had been sent by the IRGC, it would have meant war. They would have had to have attacked Iran.

CH: And I just want to stop you there, Max, because as you know very well, immediately after 9/11, this was kind of the modus operandi of the FBI, where they would find these dead-enders and essentially suggest particular plots and supply them with the money and the material to do it. I think in something like 90% of these cases where they had supposedly uncovered terrorist cells, exactly like this, they were essentially created by the FBI.

MB: Completely. Trevor Aaronson, the researcher in his book, *The Terror Factory*, found that something like over 90% of terror busts during the Obama era by the FBI were manufactured plots. And the FBI agent who oversaw the Merchant case, this is a detail that might be a little bit hazy for me, he's the same FBI agent who oversaw the Detroit field office

that spun out the phony Gretchen Whitmer kidnapping plot where Americans were told that these right-wing militiamen had plotted to kidnap the Democratic governor Gretchen Whitmer. Turns out it was a controlled plot by the FBI. None of the defendants conceived the plot. The plot was completely conceived by paid FBI informants. But they were all convicted anyway. And when did we learn about this horrifying right-wing terror plot? In October of 2020, it was kind of like the October surprise that they dropped in order to further implicate Donald Trump as an extremist. And I'm no fan of Trump, but it was pretty clearly a political ruse. So the same guy was involved. He was found in contempt of Congress, I believe, for lying about evidence. The FBI, throughout this entire saga, has proven itself to be one of the most corrupt institutions in American society and one of the most dangerous.

CH: We should also mention that there was another FBI manufactured plot to supposedly kill John Bolton.

MB: Yes. This was another plot that involved confidential informants and never amounted to anything. Even the mainstream press concluded that there was never any point when the dupe who was supposedly going to assassinate Bolton, there was never any point when Bolton's life was in danger. And Mike Pompeo subsequently claimed that he was targeted by the same IRGC-run assassination network, but there's nothing even in FBI or DOJ documents indicating that Pompeo was a target. It's just something Pompeo runs around and says constantly in order to implicate Iran. So the IRGC operative, who supposedly oversaw those plots, is named Moghaddam. This was the guy whose assassination Pete Hegseth announced on day three of the war on Iran. And how did Pete Hegseth know that Moghaddam had supposedly been killed? The Israelis told him that they killed him. And so Hegseth was thanking the Israelis for taking out the IRGC operative, who he believed had overseen all of these plots against Donald Trump, except they're even said to involve Donald Trump. It supposedly involved John Bolton. What's more, this would be like assassinating, I don't know, Pete Hegseth, because some American guy was in another country and killed somebody. I mean, Moghaddam, whoever he is, is so far up the food chain, it's very doubtful that he had any command and control over this supposed assassination.

In every case, there are either confidential informants or witnesses who appear to have been confidential informants but aren't named as such. And there never was a case in which any individual who's accused of being instrumentalized by Iran to take out Donald Trump ever came anywhere close. Asif Merchant said, you know, "I didn't even want to do it. I felt like I was being manipulated and pressured, and I thought I had to do it or my family back in Iran would be harmed". But he said, there's no way I was ever going to succeed. But then there were imaginary plots that were conceived as well. I mean, we're just talking about the manufactured ones. The most serious of these was when Donald Trump was told that there were IRGC operatives or IRGC-trained operatives in the United States who had shoulder-mounted MANPADS that could take out Trump Force One. And this prompted Donald Trump to take decoy flights during the campaign on the private jet of his real estate buddy, Steve Witkoff. Where did the FBI — I guess this came from the FBI — where did they get that from? It looks like they pulled it from the indictment of Ryan Routh, who was the

second guy who attempted to assassinate Donald Trump at Mar-a-Lago in September 2024. He was a mentally troubled drifter who was seen pointing an SK assault rifle toward the golf course that Donald Trump was playing on with Steve Witkoff, by the way. And he was pursued and caught by Secret Service agents. It turned out he has his own shady history. He was attempting to recruit internationals to fight in Ukraine, including Mujahideen from Afghanistan and including Iranians. And he had said – you know, probably this was all bluster – but he had told some Iranian he was trying to recruit that he would give him a shoulder mounted anti-aircraft, he would give him a rocket launcher. So it looks like the FBI just finessed the Routh indictment into an imaginary threat against Donald Trump to keep him afraid of Iran on the campaign trail.

But going back to the supposed Israeli assassination of Moghaddam, The New York Times reported last week that they probably didn't even kill this figure. I mean, this all came from Israeli intelligence. So, this is the first time mainstream media has acknowledged that Israeli intelligence was behind the information that Donald Trump received that Iran was trying to kill him. So it raises questions about the Israeli intelligence role in Asif Merchant's case, about the Israeli intelligence role in convincing John Bolton that he was targeted, Mike Pompeo, and the phony plot to take down Trump Force One. And then finally, Benjamin Netanyahu after Israel launched an unprovoked assault on Iran in June 2025, the 12-day war, Netanyahu wanted to guarantee that Donald Trump got involved and authorized US military action. Because Israel was not doing very well at that point. Tel Aviv was getting hammered. Iran was retaliating after losing much of its IRGC command structure in a way I Israel expected.

So Netanyahu goes on primetime on Fox News, which is what Donald Trump constantly has on his TV with Bret Baier, and he declares that Iran is behind two assassination plots, two attempts on Donald Trump's life. And Bret Baier was stunned. You know, it was a completely scripted interview and this was the only followup question. And he said, "what are you talking about? Do you have intelligence on this?" And Netanyahu said, "oh yeah, we have intelligence". But he was very careful to kind of cover up the fact that Israeli intelligence was manipulating Trump, and he said, "we get this through proxies". So it was very clear that Israel was trying to convince Donald Trump that Iran was not only attempting to target him, but that they had sliced his ear with a bullet in Butler, PA, and that Thomas Crooks was somehow an IRGC operative, this lone American boy who apparently was friendless, had never left the country. And Donald Trump by this point, believed it.

CH: Do you think that was the primary motivation behind Trump's support of the war?

MB: That's a great question. I think Trump has to answer for that. He's not being asked these kinds of questions. He often deflects from questions with insults or amusing stories or just incoherent rhetoric. But when this war is over, it will have dealt such a blow to the US empire that there will be a lot to answer for and I think his motives will come back into play. And I think there are motives that he's not able to address, such as his own personal fear of the Israelis, that Donald Trump wonders what would happen to him if he suddenly went off script

after accepting so much money from this mafia-like coterie of billionaires Adelson, Singer, Marcus, etc. What does Donald Trump think about Charlie Kirk's assassination? Who does he think did it? I know people around Trump have serious questions about that one as well. But watching Charlie Kirk get shot in the neck in the middle of a rally was probably not received well by Trump. He's not someone who wants to sacrifice his legacy. He's there to make as much money as possible. He's worried about his grandchildren and sons being targeted. His son, Eric Trump, actually stated on Fox News that he doesn't believe the official story around Charlie Kirk or around Butler, PA. So, I think there's a fear factor as well. I don't think Donald Trump likes Benjamin Netanyahu.

CH: I don't think anybody likes Benjamin Netanyahu.

MB: I think he's afraid of him. I think that he defers to him. And I think Donald Trump is so feeble-minded and had so much hubris after Venezuela, the success he saw there, that he thought that he could achieve the trifecta of Venezuela, Cuba, and Iran in a few months and would be seen as this hero. And he was the subject of so much manipulation, financially and psychologically. That his brain had been rendered putty in the hands of the Israel lobby.

CH: I mean Max at the same time he was getting heat on the Epstein files.

MB: I helped coin the phrase Operation Epstein Fury. That was my reply when the Department of War announced it was Operation Epic Fury. I just happened to be up watching the war at that time and I responded Operation Epstein Fury and my tweet got 52,000 likes. I'm sure someone else would have come up with it too. I think Liberals tend to see this war as a distraction from the Epstein files and the Epstein saga. There's like a running joke that Trump's going to have to release more Epstein files to distract from his failures in this war. Most Democratic voters, according to a poll that was commissioned by the outlet Drop Site, overwhelmingly believe that this war is a distraction from the Epstein files. I don't think so, I see it sort of as synonymous with Donald Trump's proximity to Jeffrey Epstein and to the class of grifters, elites, and oligarchs that existed within the transatlantic militant Zionist network of Jeffrey Epstein. It's the so-called Epstein class. And that's why you'll even hear from Iranians who are very familiar with American culture, western culture, that they're at war with the Epstein class or the Epstein army or the axis of Epstein. It's just a symbol. Epstein has become sort of a symbol for this decadent militaristic Western elite that's incapable of negotiation or humanity and worships at the Altar of Bhaal, the Moloch – which is why in Iranian pro-Islamic republic rallies, when they want to show defiance against the US and Israel for attacking them, they're burning effigies of the pagan god Bhaal. So I think there's just a greater symbolism to Epstein and the Epstein files, that if we read it too literally – just as if we read Donald Trump too literally – and try to see this in a sort of linear sense, will misunderstand the true meaning. Whether it's the meaning to Donald Trump or the meaning to those who he's now placed under bombardment in Iran.

CH: So the war is not going well for Israel or the United States. We don't know how much punishment Israel is taking because of very heavy censorship but reading through the lines,

it's significant. Iran has no interest in negotiating. It's tried that route. It realizes these are not entities, either the United States or Israel, that they can appease or negotiate with. Iran has the capacity to inflict tremendous economic damage, it's already inflicting economic damage, over the long term. Where do you see it going and what do you expect the response to be?

MB: Well, just to try to continue with the theme of this discussion about how Trump is being manipulated and moved, the reason that the Iranians won't negotiate, I think the main reason is who's on the other side of the table or down the hallway since they negotiate through an intermediary in Oman. It's Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner. And these are dedicated Zionist movement ideologues and operatives who used negotiations to weaken Iran's ability to respond to an Israeli decapitation strike. Steve Witkoff is a guy who carries a pager gifted to him by Benjamin Netanyahu in honor of the pager operation. He's someone who declared at a fundraiser for an Israeli group called United Hatzalah that his mother would be so proud to see him speak immediately after the former head of the Mossad, Yossi Cohen. His sons are also very involved in the Zionist world and in Trump corruption networks. Jared Kushner, I spoke about him earlier, Kushner was not even supposed to be part of this administration. He simply emerged out of nowhere to lead negotiations and lead the Board of Peace, which is a board of war designed to replace the UN with its first project being to profit from the biometrically controlled concentration camp of Gaza. So those are the figures on the other line.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has said that he constantly is turning down Steve Witkoff's attempts to negotiate. Steve Witkoff – after the US launched this war with Israel, assassinating Iran's supreme leader and as many leaders as possible and killing many common people in the process – Steve Witkoff went on one of the Sunday shows and he said that Iran refused to not only end enrichment, which is a lie, but that Iran refused to give up its navy and to give up its ballistic missile program, and that they can't have a navy because it will allow them to close what Steve Witkoff called the Gulf of Hormuz. He didn't even know what the Strait of Hormuz was called. By saying that, it was very clear what was going on in these negotiations. Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner were putting forward Israeli terms in order to make sure that Iran's red lines were crossed at every point. What sovereign country is going to give up its own navy? Or give up a ballistic missile program that's entirely legal under international law and which exists to deter these attacks that it continues to receive? It's not going to happen.

And we were told in the media that these negotiations are only focusing on Iran's nuclear weapons. Well, Steve Witkoff went to Trump and said Iran can produce 9 to 12 nuclear bombs within a week because they've reached 60% enrichment and that got back to the Iranians. And they said, this guy doesn't know anything, you can't produce a nuclear weapon at 60%. He's an idiot. So, I mean, you're dealing with ideologically motivated Zionists who are also complete morons who can't even understand the basic technical parameters to even come to a deal. So why would Iran ever go back to the table? The only thing Iran can do at this point is impose an end to the war through force. That's the only language that the Trump administration has demonstrated that it understands.

There's another thing happening now, because we're two weeks into the war or so. Iran is showing that it can hit back. Just today, the fuel depot at Dubai International Airport was hit. Iran has been able to continue meeting the US and Israel up the escalation ladder. And that's very shocking, especially for someone like Donald Trump, who has just been a target of manipulation and has no capacity for critical thought. And so what is Donald Trump being told now, now that the war is going badly, by those who want to keep him in the war? There's definitely a faction in the Trump administration that would like to get out of this and that has buyer's remorse. I think Marco Rubio might even be part of that faction. He wants to focus on Cuba and his little "Donroe doctrine" project in the Western hemisphere.

But those who want to keep Trump in the war are telling him that all of the images he's seeing of destruction at US bases, for example, the US Consulate in Baghdad, US embassy was evacuated this week. All Americans are being evacuated from Iraq. What's going on there? They're getting hit by drones from Iran, from the resistance or outfits inside Iraq. And Donald Trump doesn't believe it. He's being told this is all AI. And he threw a tantrum yesterday on Truth Social and on Air Force One, screaming at the press and declaring on Truth Social that all these videos of Iran's supposed successes are AI and the whole media is falling for it. He screamed at a reporter and said that a major rally of 250,000 people in Tehran after he assassinated Khamenei was fake, that that was an AI image. The New York Times has verified the image. I don't need to verify the images. I can see from all my acquaintances and sources in Iran that this is happening every night there, the whole society is mobilized and united against this assault or much of the society. But Donald Trump doesn't believe any of it.

And then Pete Hegseth, this glowering, sociopathic, dry drunk character who should have been fired over Signalgate and managed to stay relevant by bombing fishermen with drones off the coast of Venezuela is now banning photographers from the Pentagon because he doesn't like the way they make him look. They make him look weary and angry and under pressure. And he threw a temper tantrum at the Pentagon press corps just two days ago, screaming at the press, "you're cheering for Donald Trump's failure. That's all you do, is cheer for his failure". And he declared that he can't wait for David Ellison to take over all of their networks, David Ellison being another Israeli billionaire asset who controls Paramount, CBS, and will soon control CNN, Viacom, TikTok, and many other media assets. So they're in panic mode. They're blaming the press. This is not where they thought they were going to be. And Donald Trump is now being manipulated by being told that the entire failing war is a simulation and that he's actually winning.

But what are they doing? And what are they hitting? Most of the targets that the US is hitting are civilian residential targets. Over 17,000 residential buildings have been damaged or destroyed according to the Iranian committee on the Red Cross. And the military targets they hit primarily are Iran's Navy, naval ships that would not be useful in closing the Strait of Hormuz. And Iran's Air Force, which was outdated and might have been useful in a regional conflict or to attack ISIS, but would have never been able to compete with the US Air Force.

But they're not able to suppress Iran's Shahed drones. Iran had launched the 54th wave of Operation True Promise 4 just yesterday with ballistic missiles. And so it's not working and Iran is, I think, ready for a month's long conflict that could fully exhaust the US empire. What they're demanding is the withdrawal of US bases from the region. That's what Donald Trump is fighting for now. He's not fighting for regime change. There's not going to be regime change. He's fighting to simply maintain the US presence in the region and to open the Strait of Hormuz, facing global economic catastrophe. The Europeans are not coming to his aid because how did he treat them with the tariffs? He threatened them over Greenland. The Europeans have more minesweeping ships than the US. He needs them, and they're not coming to his rescue at this point. So we may be seeing the unraveling of Donald Trump through this war and the Trump administration, and we're only like a year into that administration.

CH: I mean my fear, Max, is that Bibi will reach for the nukes.

MB: Why do you fear that?

CH: Because I think Israel cannot sustain this kind of war of attrition.

MB: That's a legitimate fear. I think one of the bigger stories of the year is that Israel likely tested a nuclear weapon in Dimona in I think early February. There was a massive earthquake near the secret nuclear facility in Dimona that was likely the result of the test of a nuclear bomb, and Israel was sending a message but also preparing for the worst.

CH: Yeah.

MB: And I think we should consider the possibility that Donald Trump could detonate some form of nuclear weapon or tactical nuclear weapon if he's unable to simply walk away. The Israelis do not want Donald Trump to walk away from this. He's being urged to walk away by many of his advisors, but the Israelis have all this leverage over him. So we should be concerned about whether they'll drop a nuclear weapon. And this is why it's completely rational and legitimate for Iran to develop a nuclear weapons program as a means of deterrence against these psychotic forces that are coming to destroy them.

CH: Thanks, Max. And I want to thank Victor, Sophia, Max and Thomas who produced the show. You can find me at chrishedges.substack.com.

END

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