



Iran, Ukraine & Japan – The Hidden Geopolitical Context | Prof. Peter Kuznick

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Zain Raza (ZR): Thank you for tuning in today and welcome back to another episode of The Source. I'm your host Zain Raza. Before we begin this interview, I would like to remind you to join our alternative channels on Rumble and Telegram. YouTube, which is owned by Google, has a long history of shadow banning and censoring content of independent media such as ours. In addition, it has a close partnership with the United States National Security apparatus. Over the last few months, our channel experienced tremendous reach, reaching millions of people worldwide, but over the last 10 days, the reach has dropped dramatically. Although we cannot prove this conclusively, we suspect our channel is being shadowbanned. So please don't forget to visit the description of this video and join our alternative platforms today. Also, if you're watching our videos on YouTube, make sure to comment, like and share them within your network.

Today I'll be talking to the Professor of History and the Director of the Nuclear Studies Institute of American University, Professor Peter Kuznick. Peter Kuznick also co-authored a book with Hollywood film director and producer, Oliver Stone, called *The Untold History of the United States*. Peter, welcome back to the show.

Peter Kuznick (PK): Zain, it's good to see you, always.

ZR: I want to begin by summarizing the most notable developments for our viewers around the Israel-US war of aggression against Iran, which began at the end of February under Operation Epic Fury. Iran retaliated with drone and ballistic missile attacks against Israel and US military targets across the Gulf. And it is estimated that between roughly 3,600 to 6,000 people were killed in Iran, including civilians as well as military and security personnel, with tens of thousands injured. On the other side, publicly reported figures indicate around 13 US soldiers were killed and more than 300 wounded, while Israel has reported a few dozen fatalities and thousands injured. Independent reporting from notable outlets such as Drop Site News suggests the full scale of casualties and especially damage to US bases and Israeli military infrastructure is likely under-reported.

After roughly six weeks of hostilities, a ceasefire was reached on April 8th through regional mediation, but diplomacy has since stalled. Talks in Islamabad, Pakistan failed to produce a breakthrough while the US imposed a naval siege on Iran, seized its oil tankers and expanded its military presence. Iran has rejected further talks under these conditions, calling these actions a violation of the ceasefire. A key dispute in the negotiations remained Iran's nuclear program, with the US pushing for a long-term freeze of around 20 years, while Iran is proposing a much shorter timeframe.

In the latest development, Iranian air defenses were activated over Tehran amid reports of drones, while President Donald Trump has not ruled out restarting the war. At the same time, the US Senate rejected a War Powers Resolution by a vote of 50 to 47. The resolution would have required the President to withdraw US forces from the conflict unless Congress formally approved the war. Most Republicans voted against it, allowing the war to continue. Peter, could you provide your assessment of this war, starting with the domestic political and social situation in the United States, and then provide a broader geopolitical assessment.

PK: Sure, Zain, that was a good summary. It's interesting how little support there is for this war in the United States. Trump and the Republicans are up against it. It puts them in a desperate position. Gas prices have gone up well more than a dollar a gallon now, I think the latest is. \$4.39 a gallon. Before this war started, it was under \$3 a gallon, now it's gone up dramatically and it's hurting Trump's base, or it's turning what used to be Trump's base. That base is shrinking, dwindling before our eyes. According to the latest polls, 25 % of the American people say that the war has put the United States in a stronger position, a better position. Trump's approval ratings are barely 30 % now. It's hard to go below 30 %. I mean, you could put a monkey in there and it gets 25 %. So Trump's got an extra 5 % over a monkey. Or 7 %.

But it's pathetic, because the Republicans know that in November there's going to be the midterm elections and they're going to get their asses handed to them. They're going to get slaughtered in the mid-term elections. They're going to lose the House by a wide margin despite the fact they've been trying to cheat by gerrymandering so that the states controlled by Republican legislatures are trying to rule out every Democratic district in those states and then force the Democrats to retaliate in the states that they control. But even despite the fact that the Republicans will get a few seats that way, it's not going to make much difference because they're going to get defeated overwhelmingly.

Even on the economy, on the issues, immigration, any issue that Trump thought could run on, the Republicans are running behind, and in most cases, far behind. So American people are angry, they're suffering, but not as much as the rest of the world is suffering, because the US at least is self-sufficient in oil and gas, at least for the most part, whereas much of the rest of world depends upon the oil, the gas, the fertilizer, the helium, the other products coming out of that region. 20% of the world's oil and gas comes through the Strait of Hormuz. And so the

Iranians quickly figured out that this was better than a nuclear weapon. They have a stranglehold over the world economy.

And so, the war has not gone the way the Israelis or the Americans wanted it to. Back in the meetings in Mar-a-Lago, December 29th and 30th, when Netanyahu visited Mar-a-Lago, or the meetings, February 10th, when Netanyahu visited the White House – and what he said to Trump then was, "Donald, you're going to go down as the most powerful president in history". He said, "all of your predecessors have opposed Iran, but you're going to be the first one with the courage, with the balls, to actually go to war with Iran". Trump was, you know, he's been trying to get an American president to declare war, go to war with Iran for more than three decades, but he never found one so stupid, so ignorant, so reckless to take the bait before Donald Trump and his minions.

And you look at the people he relies on for advice. You know, you've got Stephen Miller, "might makes right", "law of the jungle". You've got Pete Hegseth – "we negotiate with bombs" – you know, the neo-Nazi Secretary of Defense. You've got a little backboneless Marco Rubio, anti-communist zealot who cares mostly about Cuba and Latin America. You've got outsiders like Rupert Murdoch, then you got Netanyahu, or you got Kristi Noem and Kash Patel. This is a pathetic group of incompetence surrounding Trump.

What scares me, among other things, we can go into a lot of detail, well, this scares me and I've become, since I last saw you, a columnist for Al Jazeera. And Ivana Hughes, the Columbia professor who heads the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation and I have co-authored four pieces for Al Jazeera. Plus I have been going regularly on Al Jazeera TV and on Al Mayadeen. So we've got a lot of outreach in that region that I didn't used to have. The first piece we wrote was called "Breaking the Nuclear Taboo". And what we said there is that some of Trump's advisors, and we think Netanyahu, have been telling him that if he really wants to be the greatest president in history, maybe the strongest person in history he should break the nuclear taboo and use nuclear weapons. Not because the US needs them militarily, but to show that nothing can fetter him, nothing can constrain him.

And in an interview with The New York Times, the New York Times reporter asked, "well, what can limit you? What can constrain your power?" He said, "not international law". He said, "the only thing is my own morality, my own mind". And after the US kidnapped the Maduros and then began threatening Greenland and Panama and Columbia and Mexico, Canada, across the board, Trump was on a sugar high from Venezuela. And he thought that all the US has to do is threaten people and they're going to capitulate. And so he chose two clowns as negotiators, two real estate idiots, Witkoff and Kushner, his son-in-law, who know nothing about diplomacy, know nothing around Iran, know nothing any of the issues here, the history – and so Witkoff says, well, we put all those troops in the area and we thought the Iranians would just capitulate. Big surprise, they didn't. This is a proud and ancient civilization that goes back thousands of years. And they had a fairly tepid response to the bombings in June. And so maybe the US thought they'd have a tepid response again, but they didn't. They surprised the idiot planners or the lack of planning, and they not only hit US

bases throughout the region, they hit US allies throughout the region. And they did a lot of damage in Israel and throughout the Gulf, a lot of damage.

And so now when Trump threatens to take out Iranian infrastructure and energy infrastructure, the Iranians say, well, you do that and we're going to hit everybody throughout the gulf and the US backs down. And so controlling the Strait of Hormuz, having prepared for decades for this war, the Iranians built underground tunnels, a vast network of underground tunnels, hardened, deep-in bunkers. They hid planes, they hid boats, they hid launchers, they hid missiles, they hid interceptors. They are prepared for this war in ways that the US isn't. You know, so in the US you got Hegseth and Trump braying, "oh, we've defeated it, we won the war, we destroyed everything there". They're so full of shit, it's pathetic, And the world knows that.

So one of Trump's options – they actually had the intelligence community do a study: what would be the impact globally if we declare victory and slink away? That's the best option for the United States. The other options are worse. The other options mean more bombing, or troops on the ground, or ships in the Gulf, in the strait. Any of those would be disastrous for the United States, because it's a war that has no support, next to no support. Usually when the US declares a war, you get 60, 70, 80, 90 % support. People rally around the flag. But the American people, stupid as they may be, have seen that they've been lied into one war after another for decades, since Vietnam, if not Korea. And so they don't buy it. From the very beginning, they didn't buy it. They've gotten a little bit of an education.

So the war had no support from the beginning and it went disastrously. And the US can blow things up, yeah, the US military can blow things up, but we've learned over and over and over again, blowing things up is not the same thing as winning a war. And Trump has got no patience – the attention span, people say, of a gnat or flea, whatever insect you want, but Trump has no patience. And he wants an immediate, quick win. It's what he always wants, and he's not getting it. And right now, the Iranians hold far more cards than the US does, and they're playing games with the United States. And they're making the United State's dangle, and they are holding it over Trump. And they know that every day they hold out, Trump's approval ratings go down further, support for the war goes down further, Republican prospects for November go down further.

And they're happy to see that because they've had negotiations twice. And both times in June and now again in February, they were sucker punched by the United States in the midst of a negotiation about which the Omani foreign minister who was mediating said that they were making significant progress. And this was good, they were going to get a deal. But Trump, the idiot who tore up a deal in 2018, that actually stopped Iran from any hope of a nuclear weapon – US intelligence has reported that Iran gave up its nuclear weapons program in 2003. And then Ayatollah Khamenei issued a fatwa against nuclear weapons. And under the JCPOA, Iran was enriching up to 3.67%. They shipped out 98% of their enriched uranium. They'd mothballed their centrifuges. They were more than a year away from a bomb. Trump tears it up, and then the Iranians start to enrich up to 60%.

And so one of the big issues that keeps getting raised is that with 60% of the enriched uranium, Iran could already make Hiroshima type bombs, 10 of them, or it could enrich further to 90% for more sophisticated nuclear weapons. But then the US attacked in June and buried much of that supply. But what you don't hear in this discussion, so there's a lot of discussion of what to do about the 970 pounds of highly enriched uranium that Iran has, but you hear nothing about the thousands and thousands of pounds of the low enriched uranium or the plutonium that Iran has. So the US can't extricate all of this. And what you don't hear about is a peaceful solution. And I'll end with this for this part of it.

If we want to get rid of Iran's nuclear weapons program, what we need is a deal for a nuclear weapons-free Middle East like we have in other parts of the world, which would be great. We have to lift sanctions on Iran, give them their frozen assets, have Israel commit to giving up its nuclear program, because Israel has between 90 and 300 nuclear weapons – they're the only nuclear weapon state in the region, but they have no peace and no security. And they have reason to think that especially after the US and Israel bombed Iran again the second time in months – because Netanyahu and Trump say, well, if I were the leader of Iran, I would definitely develop a nuclear weapon, because otherwise Israel and the US will bomb it again. So, for that reason, the Israelis are very nervous.

After the genocide in Gaza, after the slaughter going on in the West Bank, after Netanyahu's judicial reform that has turned much of the country against him, Israel's long-term security is based on a Palestinian state, it's based on rebuilding Gaza, it is based on Israel giving up its nuclear weapons program in the interest of a nuclear weapons-free Middle East, and Israel and Iran and the Gulf states participating in a peaceful economic development program based on converting those deserts into green areas, desalination, high-tech development so that the region won't be so dependent on oil and gas and that it'll have a flourishing economy. That would be in Israel's real interest, to make an entire weapons-free, nuclear weapons-free region with very intensive inspections, which is what existed under the JCPOA. IAEA inspectors were able to go everywhere they wanted without any advance warning or notice in Iran. And the heads of the IAEA said that no country had ever been so inspected, so surveilled. They knew everything that was going on there then. And we need the same thing in Israel, the same throughout the region. And that would be a long-term peaceful solution.

And the craziness of our world is that people talk about rearming, building more weapons. Nobody talks about a peaceful alternative, so we don't have to waste all this money on arms everywhere. Germany is a good example of a country that doesn't need to rearm, but does need peace. But you look at Merz, you look at Starmer, you look at Macron, you look at Tusk, you look at all of these clowns who have very low support in their countries, and all they want to talk about is war-making and military solutions to make us strong and safe and secure. There's another way to approach it, and we don't hear that coming from any of them.

ZR: I want to turn to the Ukraine war theater, which has moved in the background due to the war in Iran. On the battlefield, Russia has made significant gains in recent years. According

to the Institute for the Study of War, Russia seized about 3,600 square kilometers in 2024, around 4,800 to 5,600 square kilometers in 2025, and in 2026 Russia claimed around 1,700 square kilometers since January, while pro-Ukrainian sources put the figure closer to 600. Russia continues large-scale drone and missile attacks on Ukrainian cities and infrastructure while Ukraine has expanded long-range strikes on Russian oil and energy facilities deep inside of its territory. Ukraine and Russia agreed to a short-term ceasefire during the Orthodox Easter period, but it was not fully observed with both sides accusing each other of violations.

Following this, President Vladimir Putin has proposed another short ceasefire around May 9th for Victory Day celebrations. When it comes to external support the European Union recently approved a 90 billion euro loan for Ukraine. Germany also deepens military and industrial support by elevating its cooperation with Ukraine to a strategic partnership, focusing in particular on air defense, long-range capabilities and a joint drone production program. Meanwhile, the US funding has slowed compared to previous years, with no major new large-scale package announced so far. European support for Ukraine is often justified on the basis of protecting the rules-based international order and that states like Russia cannot redraw borders at will. The other reason that is regularly cited is that Russia may continue its expansive ambitions beyond Ukraine. Given this, do you think this 90 billion euro loan can be justified on those grounds? And more importantly, do you think this credit has the capacity to actually shift the tide in favor of Ukraine?

PK: Good questions. Russia is not going to lose this war. It's possible that nobody wins the war in a real sense, because in the nuclear age, war is not an answer. And while Russia is making very slow incremental but steady advances on the battlefield, it is paying a big price for it. The Europeans, I think, are out of their minds. The European leaders are—I wouldn't say they're cowards, but I think they're idiots. When I hear this refrain from all of them is – well, you hear from Mark Rutte, who loves to grovel in front of Trump, he says, if Russia wins in Ukraine, then Europe is next. But I hear the same thing from Starmer, Macron, Merz. You've got Mandon, the leading French general, talking to France's mayors, and he said, "the problem with France is that we're afraid to lose our children. We have to get ready to lose our children again in a war with Russia". What kind of idiocy is that? In a country that lost 50 % of its young men between the ages of 15 and 30 in World War I, saying that they want to go to war again and sacrifice their children.

You've got the European leaders comparing Putin to Hitler. You have the heads of British intelligence, Germans, all saying the same thing: Russia's coming after us after they win in Ukraine. That is so stupid. As Putin said, what the fuck is wrong with these people? You know, we don't want a war with Europe. We don't want a war with NATO. Ukraine is very, very different. I say Putin should not have started the war in Ukraine. And look, for example, at what's going on in terms of Iran again. The US can't send the armaments to Ukraine because the US doesn't have enough armaments in Iran. All the discussion of the US is that there are no interceptors left. They are running out of interceptors. Israel, Arrow 2 and Arrow 3, the best interceptors, they're down from 150 to a small handful. Maybe they're all out by

now. Part of the reason why when Iran is going to attack now, it will be so successful, is because there's no more interceptors or munitions that are running low. All the discussion in the US about that – we just had two days of Hegseth testifying about how bad the US supplies are at this point, and lying about it, of course, as he always does.

But the Europeans are going to try – where are they going to get these armaments? Maybe Germany has some. They've committed \$90 billion, but that doesn't mean that they're actually going to be able to buy them either from the US or elsewhere to send to Ukraine. But what I see, Lavrov, Peskov, Putin, Ryabkov. And other Russian leaders correctly condemning the US war against Iran, US-Israeli war against Iran, what I say to them is you don't have any moral authority to do that as long as you're involved in your own war against Ukraine. So even though you haven't achieved all your objectives, this is the time to say we're going to stop now because the world has got to find different ways to resolve issues.

Putin talked about the Global South. That's exactly it. The message from the Global south, from the BRICS+, is we need an alternative. We need to find other ways. Modi keeps saying, this is not an age of war. This is not a time of war, while in reality it is, but he means it shouldn't be. And the nuclear age, you can't resort to war anymore. So on the battlefield, Russia is making slow progress. They're taking very heavy casualties in the process. Because what we know, what we're learning is that between AI and drones and robotics, it's easier to defend territory than it is to take territory. And so we're seeing the Ukrainians with their own drones now being able to hit Russian oil facilities. They're doing a lot of damage inside Russia now as well.

But I think Putin can claim the high ground if he says that we're ending this because this is the right thing to do and that what Trump is doing is not acceptable morally, politically, militarily, internationally – so that's the way I would like to see this go. At this point I don't know that there's the voices for that, I'm not hearing that when I go on Russian TV, which I do, I have two shows right after this. You know, that's my message more than ever and they still invite me back to keynote, to visit despite the fact. Because they know even though I'm critical I'm doing it as a friend of Russia not as an enemy of Russia. And they need to hear that alternative because there's not a lot of dissent inside Russia that I'm discerning at this point, which is another thing that I regret very deeply.

ZR: Let us move to the Asia-Pacific region. In Japan, since Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi won the election in February, the country has moved ahead with a clear shift towards militarization and has begun reconsidering key elements of its post-war pacifist stance. On April 21st, the Japanese government approved a major overhaul of defense export rules, lifting long-standing restrictions on lethal weapons exports, including missiles, drones, warships and fighter jets. At the same time Debate around Japan's long-standing non-nuclear principles has resurfaced, although no formal policy change has been made so far. China reacted strongly to these shifts, saying it was, quote, "seriously concerned", unquote, about Japan's return towards militarization.

In parallel, tensions around Taiwan are also rising. On April 10th-11th, for example, Chinese President Xi Jinping met Taiwan's opposition leader Cheng Li-wun in Beijing, while Taiwan reported 16 Chinese warplanes operating near the island at the same time. On April 22nd, Taiwan signed an arms deal worth \$6.6 billion with the United States that include HIMARS rocket systems, self-propelled howitzers, missile stockpile replenishment, anti-armor missiles, etc.,etc. On April 29th, a US House Committee advanced an additional \$500 million in military aid for Taiwan. And now Washington is also pushing pressure on Taiwan to pass a \$40 billion supplemental defense budget to accelerate its military build-up. Peter, given these developments, how do you assess the current security and geopolitical trajectory in the Asia-Pacific region? Are we moving towards deterrence and stability or towards more dangerous escalation?

PK: Clearly the latter, although it's not certain how the US can pull this off at this moment. The US has actually shifted supplies and troops from the Asia Pacific region to the Middle East, and they're talking about pulling troops out of Germany, as you know, also. So, the US cannot arm the world the way it used to. US supplies are quite finite and limited right now. And in order to conduct the war against Iran, they have to take a lot of what they had promised and what they positioned in the Indo-Pacific in order to do that. So the shift, the famous Obama pivot, is being reversed in many ways right now. You started off by talking about Takaichi. She's a nightmare, but she's a nightmare on top of Abe, Ishiba, Kishida, one after another. And it was even before she took office that Japan was doubling its military spending. Now she's accelerating that further. She gave a response to whether Japan would send troops to support Taiwan in the Taiwan Strait if there was fighting. And she gave an answer that made it sound very much like Japan would do so, which outraged the Chinese, of course.

But then she went further and she questioned the three non-nuclear principles. And we know that there are a lot of hawks in Japan who say Japan has become a normal nation, which means we need to have our own nuclear weapons. What we see now, we're on the verge of nuclear proliferation globally. We see now Karol Nawrocki, the president of Poland, saying that Poland needs its own nuclear weapons. Zelensky said, either give us NATO membership or give us nuclear weapons. We've got Macron talking about extending a nuclear umbrella. There are forces in Taiwan that want their own nuclear weapons. 73 % of the public in South Korea says it wants South Korea to have its own nuclear weapons. So, the world is going mad in a lot of ways.

Because of the United States' Air-Sea Battle Plan, what Admiral Davidson said years ago was that it would take the US forces three weeks to get from Alaska or the west coast of the United States to Taiwan in the event of fighting. So what does the US do? The US has operational control over the South Korean military in the event of a war. So not only 28,500 US troops in South Korea, but also the vast South Korean military could be deployed against China in the Taiwan Strait. Then you bring in the Japanese military. And the US has been working on interoperability between American and Japanese forces and effectively takes over Japan's military in the event of war. So that's the US strategy for war with China.

There was just today a lead article in Foreign Affairs today talking about China's nuclear buildup and what a threat that that poses. So what we're seeing now is the US stretched thin. Trump is doing everything he can to antagonize, demean, and alienate his European allies and NATO, who now know that they can't count on the US support in any way anymore. But instead of them thinking about what are the peaceful alternatives, they're thinking about rearmament. And to do so, that means taking money away from the schools, housing, health care, food – all the things that make life in Europe great, or did make life in Europe great, are now going to be cut back by these warmongers.

So we need a vision. And that's why I call on Putin to end the war and try to speak for that vision, and Xi Jinping to speak to that vision, because at least China knows something about development while the US knows a lot about austerity and military. So we're at a crucial juncture as a planet, partly because there is, you know, if Trump escalates in Iran, which he might feel compelled to do since he's trapped, it could lead to the use of nuclear weapons and then all bets are off and we might not have a future as a species. So we need to find ways to live together peacefully as a planetary population and get rid of this extreme nationalism, sectarianism, and a reversion to war as a means to solve problems.

ZR: Peter Kuznick, Director of the Nuclear Studies Institute and Professor for History at the American University. Thank you so much for your time today.

PK: Thank you, Zain, it's always great to talk to you.

ZR: And thank you for tuning in today. If you like the journalism that we undertook and would like to follow us going forward, then make sure to click on the subscribe button below. And also, don't forget to donate. We are an independent and non-profit media outlet that does not take any money from corporations or governments, all with the goal of providing you with information that is free from any external influence. Hence, we only depend on you, the public, to continue our independent and relentless journalism. I thank you all for your support and tuning in. I'm your host Zain Raza, see you next time.

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