

The Iran Crisis, #3: Ray McGovern on why Trump is unlikely to initiate war, on the Russian dimension, and more

*Transcript of the conversation Helena Cobban had with Ray McGovern late on 2/26/2026.
The video is [here](#).*

[Helena Cobban]

Hi, everybody. I'm Helena Cobban. I'm the president of Just World Educational.

And this is the third episode in our current series on the Iran conflict, which is a kind of continuation of our earlier project on "Gaza and the World" since it is so closely allied to the ongoing Israeli genocide in Gaza. Today, I'm delighted that my guest is Ray McGovern. Ray, it's good to have you with us.

[Ray McGovern]

Thank you, Helena. It's good to be back with you.

[Helena Cobban]

So, we've done a few things over the years. Ray, for those of you watching this who are not familiar with his amazing record, was a senior CIA officer who used to brief President Reagan daily on developments in the Soviet Union. Then he left the CIA.

And from early 2003, he has been a stalwart peace activist and was a co-founder of an organization called Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, which I think is a great name. And so it's great to have you with us, Ray. Today, we're going to draw some on your Russian expertise and some on your familiarity with the intelligence community here in Washington, DC.

But first, maybe you could give us your assessment-- By the way, I should note to people that we are recording this on the evening of Thursday, February 26. But it will be aired on Friday, February 27, for technical reasons, which is fine, because I don't think we're going to war tonight.

Ray, what do you think?

[Ray McGovern]

I'm glad you made that clear, because I'm holding my breath. Most of my colleagues, I correct that, all of my colleagues have been saying, oh, this is the weekend for the war to start. And this has been four weekends in a row.

And so I'm breathing a sigh of relief, because I've been an outlier on this whole thing. You know the business about, you know, if it's too good to believe, it's probably not believable, or something like that. Well, if this is too crazy to believe, then it might not happen.

And weighing all the factors here, and there are a lot of factors to weigh, not least of which, of course, is the big armada, the biggest since the Spanish armada, by the way.

[Helena Cobban]

Yeah, by the way, let's recall what happened to the Spanish armada. It got blown majorly off course, and the Spanish king's plan to invade and occupy Britain went completely by the way, because there was a windstorm, and they lost the whole armada. Maybe that's not what's going to happen this time.

But I think that when Trump uses the term armada, he probably doesn't know a whole lot about history.

[Ray McGovern]

He knows about as much as Kaja Kalas, the foreign policy expert of the European Union. Anyhow, just to finish up, I think I can breathe safely for this weekend, because we just got the results, preliminary results, of the talks between Witkoff and Araghchi, the Iranian foreign minister in Geneva. A couple of things about that.

The Omani go-between said, you know, these are very imaginative, very productive, very businesslike. And then he said, and they didn't even need me. Whoa, got this?

Witkoff met with the Iranian foreign minister together, like face to face.

[Helena Cobban]

Yeah. Previously, all the talks had been proximity talks, which is, you know, one set sits in one room and another set sits in another room, and then the Omani foreign minister shuttles between them.

[Ray McGovern]

Exactly. Yeah. So, this is a big deal.

Now, what was the result was, and the reason I can breathe more safely this weekend is because on Monday, the talks resume on a technical level in Vienna. And what's in Vienna? Well, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the IAEA, the inspectors, they're going to play a role, I believe, in what comes out of all this.

And they've been making noises about, well, you know, we can monitor, we can see how close Iran is to a nuclear weapon. And I think the Iranians will say, well, that's, that's fine. You monitored that before, and so did the US, and you found out that we weren't working on a nuclear weapon, right?

Okay. So, if you're honest, come on in. So, I think or have always thought that there's always room for Trump to back down.

Now, Tuesday of next week, I may be proven wrong. I've been wrong before, as you know, Helena. But, you know, all these things, I mean, do you want to straight up for moves to be closed?

Do you want a major war with the Russians and the Chinese supporting your opponent before the elections in November? Do you want all this stuff? I don't think nobody in their sane mind would.

And the way I think this thing went down is that Bush said, all right, well, I think, I think that Lindsey Graham is right.

[Helena Cobban]

Not Bush, Trump.

[Ray McGovern]

I'm sorry, why did I say Bush? Sorry, I mean, I don't know who to apologize to. Well, okay, it was Trump. Trump said, look, I think Lindsey Graham's got it right. And yeah, all those people. So, we're going to obliterate, we're going to re-obliterate the Iranian nuclear program.

And then he says to the head of the CIA, hey, can you stir up an insurrection in Iran? Let's just go back to May, early June.

And of course, [CIA Director]John Ratcliffe, the only answer to that is, of course, you give us all this money. We did it back in, when was that? Oh, we did that in '53. It's a piece of cake.

We got the British to help us like they helped us. Yeah, of course we can.

What happened? Well, they put all kinds of Starlink terminals in there so they could run their agents and inflame the people. And all of a sudden, the Starlink terminals turned off. How did that happen?

Nobody knows for sure, but I think it's probably the Russians, maybe less possible the Chinese. And without the Starlink, they couldn't stir up the people. And so, that sort of set, there was not going to be an insurrection.

And so, they, well, actually, the Israelis said, wait a second, these hypersonic missiles are coming into Israel now, for God's sake, call a timeout, Donald, call, and he did.

Okay. So, I'm thinking, well, now, that's not too long ago. It's a half a year ago. What's changed? Not a hell of a lot, but this big armada is coming in.

What's the purpose of this? Well, I think now the purpose is to scare the hell out of the Iranians and be able to say, we scared the hell out of the Iranians, and we got a deal, and they backed down, and they're not going to, well, they have just promised never, ever, ever,

cross their heart, hope to die, develop a nuclear weapon. Okay, forever, ever, not just now, forever.

[Helena Cobban]

But wait, Ray, wasn't that their position? Hasn't that been their position for decades already? I mean, there's nothing new in that position.

[Ray McGovern]

Yeah, but you know, Helena, despite your best efforts and my best efforts, about 10% of the American people know that.

[Helena Cobban]

Probably fewer, honestly.

[Ray McGovern]

What's that? Fewer? Yeah, so, ironically, what you don't know, Trump can exploit.

I mean, he's been saying, and his vice president said four times in four minutes on Fox just one week ago, we're going to prevent them from getting a nuclear weapon. That's the big thing, nuclear weapon, nuclear weapon, nuclear weapon. Is that four times?

Yes, that was four times. That's what Trump said. That's what he said in the State of the Union.

Well, if Americans don't know that the Iranians have not been working on a nuclear weapon since 2003: do the math, folks. It was the intelligence community that did an honest estimate on Iran nuclear after the debacle on Iraq nuclear, making stuff up, okay? An honest guy came in, did an estimate and said, and I quote, "Iran stopped working on a nuclear weapon at the end of 2003, has not resumed work on that weapon, and we have unanimous consent of the 14 intelligence agencies with high confidence we say that."

Now, long story short is, I am amazed that my analyst colleagues have stuck to that judgment because there's been no evidence to reverse it, and as recently as late March last year, Tulsi Gabbard pronounced the same thing. There is no indication that Iran is working on a nuclear weapon, and there's no indication that the Supreme Leader has reversed his edict of 2003, a religious fatwa, you know what that is? It's more important than an encyclical, okay?

It's not sort of a, maybe you will do it, and maybe-- In other words, he's not reversed that. And I hear from my Iranian friends that it's not like the Supreme Leader can say, okay, I reversed it. No, this has got to be debated in Parliament, it's got to be openly announced.

So, you know, so with all this going on, and I'm listening to all my friends counting all the ships and counting all the aircraft and all that, and I'm saying, well, could this be to frighten the Iranians?

And even if it wasn't, at least now we know, I think we know, that the head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who's kind of a mealy-mouthed MAGA guy, he's wearing a MAGA hat when he was recruited by, out of retirement by, he's a yes-man, okay? And so, he said yes when Ratcliffe said yes, sure we can do this. But now the other chiefs, the Air Force chief, the Army, the Marine Corps, and the Navy [say]: what did you tell the President? And so, now he's got to say, oh, well, you know, we can't do it easily, we can't do it quickly, and besides, Mr. President, I hate to admit this, but I should have told you, we're going to run out of missiles, maybe four or five--

[Helena Cobban]

Run out of interceptor missiles?

[Ray McGovern]

You know, well, missiles from the boat, from the ships, and missiles from the interceptor missiles: we're out of them. We gave them all to Ukraine. So, we have a bunch of clowns, head of our military, if they didn't save enough missiles to mount this thing, they should have told the President at least as early as May or June of last year, look, we can't do much, and you ought not to go by these can-do intelligence types to say they can do anything. They can't do anything without the military here. Let's ease off this thing.

And, of course, you've seen these reports that say, well, this would be havoc, and so, all I'm saying is that I'm trying not to let the wish be father to the thought, and I've been trying to do this for the last two months, but my wish is that we don't have a major war, and my thought is, my God, there's so many counterindications that somebody's got to tell Trump, and I think they have now, this is a fool's errand. This is really terrible.

You'll go down in infamy, and besides that, you'll lose Congress in the fall. Don't do it.

[Helena Cobban]

But, I guess I hear what you're saying, and I share a lot of your analysis. I want to put in two other points. One is the history of what I call diplomacy of entrapment, which is what we had last June, when the Iranians were gathered in Tehran to consider their reaction, their position on the ongoing negotiations at that time, and while they were gathered there, they got hit by the Israelis acting with the full cooperation and participation of U.S. Central Command. So, that is maybe a possibility still today. And the other is the possibility of the Israelis who desperately, as far as everything that I'm reading from and about Jewish-Israeli opinion, is that at the leadership level, at the popular level, they really want this war to happen. Could they not engage in provocations? There have been some indications that they have launched some provocations, an unexplained fire at a refinery or something like this.

They have amazing capacity to launch provocations. How do we know that the two sides are communicating, that is Washington and Tehran, speedily and effectively enough that they can say, gee, that wasn't us, and it won't happen again, or whatever, you know?

[Ray McGovern]

Well, a false flag attack is a 50-50 proposition, in my view. I agree with you how much the Israeli, even the Israeli citizens, not really appreciating what this could lead to, are favoring this kind of strike on Iran as the last chance, right? The last chance to really get them, you know, before they get a nuclear weapon, okay?

[Helena Cobban]

[Ironically] This was going to happen next week, didn't you know?

[Ray McGovern]

Well, yeah, that's just it. I grew up as a Soviet analyst, an analyst of Soviet affairs, and I learned to parse official statements, and it's called Kremlinology. And you look at these, and you dissect them, and you-- I mean, it's not arcane.

You look what the Russians say now, and what they said last week, and what they'd say next week, and as a result, for example, in the '80s, when the Russians changed their tune on conditions to destroy their intermediate-range ballistic missiles in Europe, that became the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty in 1987, okay? Well, we could see from the rhetoric, whoops, they backed off that precondition. Ah, whoops, Chernenko didn't mention this.

No, we were not persuasive with our, you know, Kremlinology. [It] seems so arcane, but when they say something that this is a precondition, and then they don't say it again, then that means something. So, let me bring that forward here. Trump had been saying, oh, they got to do zero enrichment, zero enrichment, because that's what Netanyahu says, right?

Zero enrichment, stop support for foreigners, foreign terrorists.

[Helena Cobban]

Missiles, don't forget-- I mean, one of the big Israeli demands is for essentially the crippling of Iran's missile capability.

[Ray McGovern]

Exactly. Yeah, the missiles. So, now, most of my colleagues, I have to say, sort of said, well, since Netanyahu is in control of this, these are the terms that Witkoff will be given to go to Geneva.

And that's why this thing's going to, you know, it's a fool's errand, it's just going to fall apart. Well, this was not Trump's terms. And again, you're looking for clues?

When the negotiations, indirect negotiations between Witkoff and the Iranians started, Trump said, these are very good, they're going very good. Next thing you know, Netanyahu says, I got to come see you next week. Please, I got to come see you next week.

And what happened? All we know, as Trump said publicly, we made no other agreements. I insisted that we go to the negotiation path.

Nothing about zero enrichment, nothing about stopping aid to terrorists or Hamas or whatever, and nothing about missiles. So, McGovern says, well, that's interesting. And what would the final communique say?

Oh, they didn't have one. Oh, what about the final press conference? Oh, they didn't have one either.

So, you read these tea leaves, you say, in my view, Netanyahu went away empty. And the Israelis are very upset about this. But now, this today, Thursday [2/26] were the negotiations, and they came out reasonably well by all accounts, even that one of the US representatives said they were positive.

And we're going to meet in Vienna on Monday to discuss the technical details. And my prediction is that Trump will be able to say, the Iranians have promised, cross their heart, hope to die, never to, never, ever, like forever, develop a nuclear weapon. And they're willing to make these concessions on their highly enriched uranium they're going to give this portion to Turkey and this portion to Russia for safekeeping.

And they've agreed to have IAEA supervision. So, we scared the hell out of them. And we won victory, is what he will proclaim.

The Iranians will proclaim victory too, because they won't be destroyed. And Israel will have to sit back and console themselves with the thought is, if they're sensible, with the thought that, oh, well, we escaped destruction too. Because that was the lesson of June. Those missiles from Iran got through these very sophisticated Iron Dome and Patriot missiles, and they could wreak havoc. And that's one reason why I think Trump is going to back off.

You know, the high irony here, Helena, would be if this thing went forward, and Israel was destroyed, you would get a Palestine from the river to the sea. I mean, Israel would be obliterated, pardon the word. What you would end up with is an ineffectual IDF. You would have no real capability of the Israeli government to function.

And, you know, maybe this is a pipe dream, but wouldn't the eventual result be that Hamas would continue to be supported to the degree they get any support? There's not much from Iran. And there would be a Palestine from the river to the sea.

Maybe somebody suggested that to Trump and said, my God, we don't want that. So, those are my thoughts. Again, I may be wrong.

Again, I have been wrong before.

[Helena Cobban]

So actually, you raise an interesting possibility there that there is maybe a satanic deal between Trump and Netanyahu, under which Netanyahu, because I do see Netanyahu as having used a kind of mafia style of protection racket throughout this whole genocide in

Gaza, that he would say, you know, oh, you don't want me to go into Lebanon? Well, okay, I can hold myself back from going into Lebanon, but you need to let me do what I want in Gaza. And then it turns out he can do whatever he wants in Gaza and in Lebanon, and in Syria.

And, you know, nobody, not the United States, not the United Nations, there is no power on earth that is currently capable of stopping him except the resistance and resilience of the native peoples, the indigenous peoples of those territories. So, you know, maybe there's a kind of a deal now where Netanyahu says, well, I really, really wanted you to go against Tehran. But if you insist on not doing it, you have to continue to give me a free hand in Gaza and Lebanon and Syria.

[Ray McGovern]

Yeah, I think those are really good arguments. On the other hand, I think it's about 75% of the American people don't want a war against Iran. The support in our country here in the United States for Israel has plummeted.

It's no longer automatic. This is a big deal. It turns out that most Americans don't like America enabling genocide.

This is a big deal, okay? So, I think that the usual things that Netanyahu could rely on, well, Trump's got to take into account these things if he was going to look toward the elections in November. And, Helena, there's one other thing which I hate to raise, but I think it's a very important factor, and that is Epstein.

I said two months ago that there had to be some extra reason why Trump would arm, enable, pay for a genocide. I speculated that maybe it has to do with blackmail material that Netanyahu has on Trump. I continue to believe that that perhaps is speculation, but I think it was a factor in that.

Now, how does that cut now? Does he still have worse things that are not going to come to light in the United States? I suppose he does, but if I'm Trump and I'm seeing what's likely to eventuate now, or I'll be totally discreet, they will get those testimonies from those young girls, okay?

They will get this stuff. What else does Netanyahu have on me? Well, it's marginal.

So, maybe, just maybe, that blackmail factor isn't as potent as it was a couple of months ago, because they're spilling the beans right now. This is all very speculative, but all I'm saying is that when on the 11th of February, a couple weeks ago, Netanyahu came: he saw, but he didn't conquer, but what happened was he was rebuffed, and none of the usual things happened.

No final communique, no final speeches, nothing like that, and Trump saying publicly, I made no understandings with Netanyahu, except I insisted, Trump's word, that the negotiations with Iran continue, and that's what happened today in Geneva, and it's going to happen again on Monday in Vienna. Vienna is very telltale here. That's where the IAEA headquarters are.

They're going to be working on the enrichment part of this, and if I haven't made this clear enough, when people conflate, please pay attention, when people conflate the making of a nuclear bomb with uranium enrichment, they have to realize that they're two separate and distinct things. The Iranians are doing nuclear, and they're doing uranium enrichment. They're not working on the nuclear bomb.

Now, as I said before, the saving grace is that you say less than 10% of the American people know that, so here's Trump coming out in 12 days from now saying, all right, I'm pulling the armada out. They did their job. They're scared.

They decided they're not going to do a nuclear weapon, and they're going to do this stuff with the enrichment. So, that's my guess, and I hope I'm right. I mean, not only so I'm right, but the whole thing has to do with world peace, and if, my God, if they go ahead and use this armada, and they use all these aircraft, the Iranians have made it clear, and I believe them, it's not just bluff.

They've had it up to here. They're going to retaliate, and they have the Russians, and the Chinese in their camp.

I'll say one more thing about the Russians since I've focused on the Russian. For three years, up until the end of this past year, the Iranians and the Russians have been working on a treaty, a strategic cooperation treaty. Now, we were all wondering, will this be a mutual defense treaty? My God, you know, that would be something.

Turned out to be less than that, and this old Russian hand [himself] said, oh, well, Putin's not going to get involved in being responsible for responding to what happened to Iran. Guess what? This old Russian hand was wrong.

The Russians wanted to make it a mutual defense treaty. It was the Iranians that said, no, no, we don't think, no. So, just realize that this is a new situation.

Putin is talking directly with Trump, okay? Are they doing it in the ether? Are they doing it publicly?

No, they got a back channel.

[Helena Cobban]

Do you have evidence for that?

[Ray McGovern]

We do know that they're communicating in a secure way, and they have promised each other to continue to use this, well, it's a hotline sort of stuff that they communicate [with]. And so, yeah, and they've also been pretty good over the last several weeks, where Trump has kept his mouth shut after these talks to let things eventuate. And that was because the Russians complained about what they call bullhorn diplomacy. They don't like that sort of stuff.

So, what's my idea? My idea is that Putin called Trump a couple weeks ago and said, look, in June, we sort of overlooked what you did with those Israelis, okay? We even said publicly, [Putin advisor Dmitry] Peskov said, these are two different things. We give far more prominence to developing a good relationship with the US. This is a secondary matter-- attacking Iran is a secondary matter. Well, that's what they said, for God's sake.

This time, I think Putin got on the phone and said, look, remember what happened last June? "Secondary matter": forget about it. This is a primary matter. If you do that, we're going to have to support our friend [Iran].

And besides, our friends, the Chinese, are continuing to give some very sophisticated stuff, which will make it really suicidal for your aircraft and some of your missiles to get through. So, Mr. Trump, I don't know what the CIA told you, but... as the Chinese say, it's going to come to a no-good end if you pursue this thing. So, I think that was also a factor.

I see that growing as Trump sort of steps back and does not offer Netanyahu's desiderata, his terms, but says, no, nuclear weapon, nuclear weapon, that's better. What did he say in the State of the Union? He says, "Iran must not get a nuclear weapon, but I haven't heard the magic words. All what I have to hear is, we will not get a nuclear weapon." Well, as I said, in a little tweet, yeah: Okay, done!

The Armada sails off without being decimated like the first one there off the coast of Ireland.

So, anyhow, I may be wrong, and I won't say that again. So far, so good. It feels pretty good to be an outlier and see no war weekend after weekend after weekend. I hope that persists.

[Helena Cobban]

So, coming back on the Russian question, it's worth recalling, of course, that Russia has a very long border with Iran and has, you know, for centuries been a major factor in terms of influence on Iran's politics and economy. So, one of the things that Trump achieved recently, I can't remember whether it's one of the eight peace treaties that he has reached around the world, or so he claims, but he reached this little agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia, which is, in my view, up near the Russian border, but I might be wrong. Presumably, that would have also affected the Russians' views of, gee, you know, Trump is now trumpeting this, what's it called, the Trump International Passageway or whatever between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

And that has to be a concern for the Russians, no?

[Ray McGovern]

Of course, yeah. But, you know, it's not like Ukraine joining NATO. It's of a secondary importance, in my view.

The Russians can handle what happens in Armenia and Azerbaijan, if and when they have to. These are pinpricks. These are things to be used by the CIA and MI6 to infiltrate people into Iran and cause havoc and that kind of thing, but I don't think it's a major problem.

Certainly, if Armenia wanted to say, okay, I'm leaving the nice little alliance we have there with all the Asians, and I'm going to join NATO, that would be separate and distinct problem that would not be treated with much respect by the Russians. They would stop it.

[Helena Cobban]

So, if I were President Putin, which I am not...

[Ray McGovern]

I wish you were.

[Helena Cobban]

I don't know. Let's not even go there. But, and I was hearing, you know, a lot of talk in Washington and Israel about, you know, regime change in Tehran.

And then some people say, no, you know, there is no easy regime change in Iran. If you destroy the Islamic Republic there, then you have a failed state, you have chaos throughout the whole of Iran. I mean, if I were Russia, that would be a terrifying prospect to have this massive population, 90 million people, you know, with all kinds of ethnic and religious stuff that might arise in that context, as we saw in Syria, with the slow collapse of the Syrian government. And then you end up with, a former jihadi in the presidential palace.

But this would be far bigger and far closer to Russia, because of course, Syria doesn't have a border with Russia, but Iran does. I think that would be a concern, no?

[Ray McGovern]

Of course, yeah. That's why [Khamenei advisor Ali] Larijani, a person very much practiced in international diplomacy, as well as with the Revolutionary Guards, and who is the national security advisor to the top people in Tehran. That's why he went up to Moscow four weeks ago, okay?

He saw Putin. Putin doesn't see just any other national security advisor. They had talks, and then reliable reports say that Larijani went to the Chinese embassy and had talks there as well.

So, what do I gather out of all this? Larijani is named now by the Supreme Leader as the guy to take over for me if I'm killed. So, this is a big fish, okay?

What would Putin have said to Trump under, using this secure channel? Look, Mr. President, the national security advisor from Iran, I talked to him, talked to him for two hours, and the Chinese talked to him too. We're going to have to support Iran if you launch this attack.

Don't do it. This is an important fellow. We gave him assurances that we'd be on his side, and as you probably know, we're giving him equipment as well, including fighter aircraft and including what the Chinese are doing in terms of monitoring ships and radar that reaches out 700 kilometers.

Now, you know, you already have to keep your famous aircraft carriers way away from the shore. By the time you launch attacks, I mean, are these going to be one-way flights by these aircraft, or are they going to only be able to hit the targets? Look, Mr. President, just don't do it. It doesn't make any sense. Lindsey Graham doesn't know what he's talking about, and we trust Witkoff. Don't send us Rubio, for God's sake.

We don't trust Rubio. Nobody should. And that's why Witkoff and the son-in-law, Jared, are doing this work.

People demean that, and they say, oh, it's terrible. The British say this is not proper. This is not proper to have people who are not from the State Department.

Well, when I was on active duty with the CIA, I watched and I supported Henry Kissinger do all these things, circumventing the State Department and getting stuff done. So, if it takes that to get stuff done. Please don't dismiss Witkoff as just a real estate agent, as my colleagues call him. He has the trust of the President of the United States. He speaks for him, and I think Putin recognizes that. That's why he'll spend five hours between 11 o'clock in the night and 4 o'clock in the morning to talk to him, covering these 28 points, okay, and saying it was worth it. It was good. We addressed all these.

I mean, is Putin-- Are all these people that criticize Witkoff, are they not as smart, or are they smarter than Putin? And Putin takes these guys seriously. So, the question would be, will the Iranians take him seriously?

And I dare say that even though Witkoff and Kushner are Zionists, they're not Marco Rubio Zionists. They can talk to them because the President sent them, not Marco Rubio or any of his people, and that was done with the explicit intention of making a deal so I can withdraw my armada and pound my chest and say, we've got a good deal. That's my take.

[Helena Cobban]

And then how about all the thousands of soldiers and sailors and airmen whose lives will be saved that way? I mean, that is also not a trivial matter.

[Ray McGovern]

Well, yeah, I looked at it in a kind of, well, in a not nice, sort of nice way. I don't think Trump cares a lot about that. But he would care about body bags.

Now, I'm sorry, I'm old school. We don't say body bags anymore. We say transfer cases. That's what we have coming into Dover Air Force Base, "transfer cases". And they have big flags on them. They're not body bags. They're heroes that died. Even if they're heroes, if they come in by the dozens, there aren't any-- and I don't think Trump's going to go to Dover Air Force Base very much or want to. So, that's a big deal.

He cares about body bags. I don't think he cares very much about people getting killed. Witness what's happening in the Caribbean and on the western side of Colombia and of Venezuela.

[Helena Cobban]

But we do have the midterms coming up. So, this has been actually a really interesting conversation, Ray, because it's different from a lot of the other conversations I've had both on air and off air. When I was talking to Elijah Magnier earlier this week, he was making the case that China actually has a very close economic relationship with Israel that it doesn't want to upset, and that China would not be a major player in defense of Iran.

I have some kind of data points from June, when it was clearly some Chinese military tech that helped the Iranians to be able to do their targeting of their hypersonic missiles against the targets in Israel. And we also have the new, last May, direct rail link between China and Tehran. I didn't confront Elijah on this, but I think there's more there in terms of a Chinese relationship with Iran than most people understand.

Now, I know China is not your bailiwick, but what's your take on, you know, you've, I think, made a pretty strong case that Russia is going to be different this time if there's a confrontation than it was back in June. What's your take on China?

[Ray McGovern]

I think China is even more involved militarily than the Russians right now. The Russians are sending some equipment. The Chinese have sent a very sophisticated intelligence ship, and by accounts that I trust, they've sent a very, very sophisticated radar system, which as I said before, projects forward 700 kilometers.

My God, you know, that teamed up with some of the sophisticated AAA or anti-missile defense that the Russians have given them should be enough to say, Mr. Trump, you know, since your aircraft carrier is going to have to travel 300 kilometers to get to the shore of Iran, and then, you know, to go inland, well, they have to be a one-way trip. So, in other words, if this information is true, and so many people have attested to it, I don't know for sure, but if the Chinese have done this, that's a big, big, big deal, and it may be part of why, finally, the head of the Joint Chiefs went back to Trump 10 days ago and said, oh, Mr. Trump, sorry, I should have told you, blah, blah, blah, this is going to happen. And besides that, the Chinese have this kind of thing, the Russians say they're talking to you, maybe you know what the Russians are doing too.

So, there's so many things against this, against an attack, not to mention the midterms, or not to mention the closure of the of the Strait of Hormuz, which, of course, that's about 20 or 25 percent of the energy exports to the world, okay, a good portion of that used to go to China. Now, China can compensate for that probably, but these are big deals, and it hurts people. There'll be a worldwide depression, I'm told, if those Straits were closed, and that would, do you think the Iranians wouldn't close it?

Of course, they'd close it. They've practiced closing it, for God's sake, and can they close it? Well, some people say, no, they can't. Well, I think they can.

[Helena Cobban]

I think they can, yeah.

[Ray McGovern]

So, that would be a major factor.

[Helena Cobban]

So, actually, getting on to geopolitics, we're going to have to continue this conversation another time. But, I mean, if this Iranian, like the Islamic Republic of Iran, is able to stare down Donald Trump, and the Israelis, and the whole might of the Western world, and essentially force them to take a step back: that has massive geopolitical consequences. And I don't think we can go into that today, Ray, but maybe another day we could talk about that.

So, I think I'm going to bring this to an end. Just before I do, I want to remind people of the help and contribution that you made to the book that-- well, it was a project that was a series of webinars that then became a little book that is still available on the Ukraine conflict. And we brought that out in April of 2022, four years ago.

We were the first organization that really started to call for a ceasefire in Ukraine. And I wish people had listened to us then. And I wish people would listen to us now.

[Ray McGovern]

But we keep on- Well, Helena, let me just add now that I have to tell people that it was only I, as we started this conversation offline, that suggested that this was a monumental effort. I mean, it really was terrific. And it was so quick.

And I'm proud to have been a part of it. If it's still available, for God's sake, get ahold of this and see what we all thought and what we all said just six, seven weeks into the war. It's very instructive, if I do say so myself.

[Helena Cobban]

No, you made a super contribution. And I know it's available through the website. I'll put that up closer to the top of the website so people can buy the book and buy all of our fine books, including the one called *Understanding Hamas and Why That Matters*, which, you know-- we like to be out front and to really take risks for peace.

And I know you're somebody like that as well.

[Ray McGovern]

Let me just add this. When I was in Germany about five years ago, I saw this button. I don't know if you could see it, but it says *Putin Versteher*.

Okay. And now what does that mean? It means someone who understands Putin.

And so I thought, wow, that's terrific. How many buttons are really? And my friend said, no, don't take that. No, no, no, no. That's a pejorative. My God. Don't wear that.

It was true. This was a pejorative to understand Putin. Understanding Hamas: just as bad, folks. So if you want to take any risks about understanding people, read that book. It is excellent.

And I'm glad I had a chance to push it because people like me don't know about these things. Thanks to you, Helena.

[Helena Cobban]

Well, anyway, yeah. I mean, to understand any actor in world politics is not to be supporting them or cheerleading for them. But if you're gonna deal in world politics, it helps to understand the other actors.

I think so. Anyway, great talking to you again, Ray. This is part three of, okay, this is the third episode in part two of our Gaza and the World project.

And I hope that people watching and listening to this will listen in or watch on at the same time on Monday when we have Trita Parsi coming, who is with the Quincy Institute. And then on Wednesday, we have Ambassador Chas Freeman coming and Thursday we have Barbara Slavin. We may have somebody for Tuesday as well.

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And thanks for being with us, Ray McGovern.

[Ray McGovern]

You're most welcome.