

# The Iran Crisis, #1: Elijah Magnier assesses the impact of the first 60 hours of the war

*Transcript of the conversation Helena Cobban had with Elijah Magnier on 3/2/2026. The audio is [here](#).*

**[Helena Cobban]**

Hi everybody, it's Helena Cobham here again with our Iran crisis special. Today we have with us Elijah Magnier. I know that we had promised people Trita Parsi, but Trita couldn't be with us. I'm sure we'll get him later in this project. But it's just really my huge pleasure to welcome you, Elijah. People love to hear your analysis.

**[Elijah Magnier]**

It's a pleasure to be with you.

**[Helena Cobban]**

Good. Okay, so just a few small questions today. I'm sure you can answer them really fast.

What is this war about?

**[Elijah Magnier]**

Donald Trump told us that he wants a regime change. Benjamin Netanyahu was more cautious by saying he will prepare the ground for a regime change. Both men have a different experience.

One is completely inexperienced and the other one has 16 years in office as a prime minister and understands that a regime change cannot happen from one day to another. So what he wanted really is to really destroy the Iranian missile program and cause a real havoc in Iran to destroy the energy, the economy, the infrastructure, and to cripple the Iranian financial system. That is his main aim.

But above all, he wants something to sell for the forthcoming prime ministership elections in October 2026. And Donald Trump is really helping him to be reelected.

**[Helena Cobban]**

Right. So they both actually face important elections this year. And we have to look at this war of aggression against Iran in that context.

I think I would say that both of them, you're right to note that there's a little bit of distinction between their rhetoric, but what both of them would really like to see is the collapse of Iran's central governance structures altogether. I mean, across all the domains that you mentioned, like the missile capability, the military capability, more generally, the

economic capability, the financial system and everything. But I think they're aiming at the central governance structure as such.

Do you think there's a chance they will get this?

**[Elijah Magnier]**

I think there is a difference between the objectives of Benjamin Netanyahu and Donald Trump. For Donald Trump, creating a chaos in West Asia is actually not in the interest of the most powerful country in the world. On the contrary, if you want to be the ruler, you want all the other country to be doing well and doing business with you.

And this is what the Iranians offered Donald Trump to invest and to come and take advantage of project up to four to \$5 billion, where the Iranian would buy American products for this amount in exchange of gas, in exchange of oil, in exchange of resources. The Iranians have a lot of natural resources that the Americans would want. And this is the logical pattern.

But Donald Trump, because he is a particular kind of person, he's looking for a very quick victory that he can really repeat and just bring out every single day. Like we've killed Qasem Soleimani. He kidnapped Maduro.

And now he has the oil from Venezuela. He has the oil from Syria. This is what he likes.

He's a theatrical. Benjamin Netanyahu is completely different. Benjamin Netanyahu wants a total chaos in the Middle East, and particularly in Iran and in Turkey, because Turkey is the border with Iran.

And there are seven countries that have borders with Iran. So can you imagine, for example, Kurdistan, Iran, the Kurds find themselves without a central government, so they want their independence. So they will claim to have a state and they will form a state on the borders with Iraq, Turkey, and Turkey.

And this is what they can say, okay, this is the Kurdish state, not because it's good or bad.

**[Helena Cobban]**

This would be like Somaliland, where the Israelis recognize this secessionary state from Somalia. They would probably rush to recognize an independent Kurdistan given their longstanding relations with the Kurdish movements in Iraq and also Iran.

**[Elijah Magnier]**

Well, maybe yes, maybe not. But that is another topic. My point is that a chaos in Iran would divide Iran.

We have the Sistan-Balochistan in the southeast. We have Kurdistan in the north. We have Ahvaz in the south.

So there are different parts in the south of Iraq. So we have different parts where Iran can potentially be divided, and a chaos can dominate because no one has a plan B. So the difference is Benjamin Netanyahu's plan B is to see Iran completely destroyed or divided.

Donald Trump's plan B doesn't exist. He just wants the Nobel Prize as a plan B, or he wants a quick victory so he can claim and capitalize on. For Netanyahu, a victory in Iran or destruction of Iran or chaos in Iran will bring him to re-election as a prime minister.

**[Helena Cobban]**

And it would give Israel unquestioned, unchallenged authority, supremacy across the whole of West Asia.

**[Elijah Magnier]**

Yeah, but if he goes and destroys Hezbollah immediately after Iran, and that was his plan, to destroy Hezbollah, to destroy the Iraqi resistance, and then he would say to the Arabs, now you can come for my blessing and have a relationship with me for free, and then he can have what he wants and do what he wants in the Middle East. That is his ultimate objective.

**[Helena Cobban]**

So this would have, if you have what you say Netanyahu seeks, which is collapse of Iran, it has obvious, as you've described them, local terrible effects inside Iran with competing sub-entities, whether they are ethnic or regional or religious or whatever. It has those effects at the regional. It also has massive effects in terms of the global system that we have.

I hesitate to say system. I would put it in air quotes, because the UN system has already received very, very serious body blows from primarily Trump and Netanyahu and the genocide in Gaza and the creation of this outrageous board of peace. But there is still something called the UN.

And this, I think, would be a further, possibly the fatal blow against the whole concept of the United Nations. What do you think?

**[Elijah Magnier]**

Yes, it's true. It will be already. The policy of Donald Trump is undermining international laws and undermining the role of the UN, the role of the International Criminal Court, International Court of Justice, by imposing sanctions on the judges, directly undermining the UN rapporteur, he imposed sanctions on the UN personnel.

So everything that Donald Trump is doing actually is orientated toward his image to the world. But I don't see really anything benefiting the American population in anything he's doing. The Americans don't like to be the most hated people on earth after the Israelis.

The Americans don't really understand why their president is so much involved in politics and foreign policy, and also why he's bringing so far four Americans killed, their bodies returned to America, because he is really accommodating Benjamin Netanyahu's agenda. How the American people can accept that, I don't know.

**[Helena Cobban]**

So I can give you a few data points from here in the belly of the beast. One is some polling data from last week, which last week before the launch of the war, which was that 27% of Americans supported the launch, which, you know, was very, very imminent and possible at that time. And that contrasts with before the invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001, when it was 90%.

And before the invasion of Iraq in 2003, when it was something like 78%. So he goes into this with already a lot of skepticism, including from his base, actually, probably more from his MAGA base than he has from the Democrats, because the Democrats are very deeply divided on this. The other thing is just the cost of living, which is the big issue in this country, which he has not addressed, and which is going to be very badly impacted by this war.

As everybody can see already, gas prices, international liquid national gas prices are soaring, oil prices soaring, and so on and so forth. So the internal politics in this country is very different from how it was after the invasion of Iraq. So I think his strong motivation will be to keep it short, as short as possible.

He's talked about four weeks, he may have to bring it down further because of these political pressures rising, but also because of the lack of munitions, which they may, I mean, the Wall Street Journal is already writing about concern in the Pentagon, the Washington Post is writing about concern in the Pentagon about the rate at which they're using up their munitions. So it seems to me it's a very dynamic situation. And of course, another aspect of this, and maybe another aspect of the division between Trump and Netanyahu, is that the Iranians have shown from, I think, Saturday, and definitely yesterday, that they are prepared to target American-linked institutions in the Arab Gulf states, including the offices of Trump's business in Dubai, or obviously many of the oil installations are coming under a degree of threat, that it's changing the calculus for the Arab Gulf rulers. We don't know exactly how, but until now, Trump has been in close relationship with many of those rulers, as we know.

And there was a report in the Washington Post on Saturday that MBS, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, had urged him to launch the attack on Iran. That has never been confirmed by the Saudis or by any reputable source. It strikes me it's just a bit of pro-war propaganda psyops that's being waged here.

So let's get back to another possibility, which is what I would call the Delcy Rodriguez possibility regarding how Trump gets out of this war.

### **[Elijah Magnier]**

Well, there is no such a thing in Iran. On the contrary, during June 2025, the opposition, inside the country, the diaspora, supporting or standing against the Iranian ruling system, they all stood beside the country and the security forces because they refused to be bombed. This is their country.

They are the ones who decide what's going to happen, and not Donald Trump or Benjamin Netanyahu. They can change through votes who is going to rule them, but not by destroying

the country. So far, there are more than 2,000 attacks on Iran, which we're talking about more than 2,000 bombs.

Each one is a tonne falling on Iran, which means that they are watching their country destroyed. So no, there's nobody who's contacting the US by asking for a ceasefire. The Iranian diplomacy said, we are ready always to allow diplomacy to settle in, but what are the conditions?

What are the rule base that we want to talk about? We talk about what you started the war for the Americans and for the Israelis, and now you want to stop it based on what? Just because we shook hands in June 2025, no agreement, and then a few months later, you started another one, and then now you stop it, and then you prepare yourself.

It doesn't work. This is why the Iranians are raising the cost. And there is no one willing to talk to Donald Trump.

And Ali Rajani, one of the highest authorities in Iran, and the head of the national security, said, we do not want to negotiate with you, addressing himself to Donald Trump. So it is not about negotiating and showing a weakness. The Iranians cannot ask for a negotiation, otherwise there would be the weak one.

And then they have to accept anything the Americans will impose on them. On the contrary, now the Iranians are imposing very heavy price on everybody. In Europe, the liquefied gas is 50%, has increased in America 5.2%. So the prices are starting to go up. This morning, they were 20%. Two hours later, 50%. What's going to happen next?

And we are just on the beginning of a third day. I'm scared to think about what's going to happen next, in day 10 or day 15. It is not something that Donald Trump controlled to stop the war.

He started it. But now the Iranians are saying, we stop on my terms.

**[Helena Cobban]**

So, Elijah, that's a really important point. When you say you're scared about what's going to happen, what kind of things are you actually scared of?

**[Elijah Magnier]**

Well, from day one, the Iranians bombed all the US assets in the Middle East. Day two, they disturbed the navigation in the Strait of Hormuz. Day three today, they sank so far two tankers.

They attacked the hotels where the Americans are placed because they left their bases to seek a shelter in civilian hotels. So they're hiding behind the and the Iranians seem they are updating their bank of information. And they know where the Americans are staying.

In Dubai, they've done that. In other places, they've done that. And now they create such a confusion where in Kuwait, the Kuwaitis have shot down three F-15E.

So we see the Iranians have quite a knowledge that the Americans are indeed using Kuwait military bases when the Arabs are saying we don't want the Americans to use our bases to attack Iran. And this is what created a legitimacy for Iran to claim that because you are allowing the Americans to attack me, which means that is your country responsible. So I would hit the base in your country.

So we have seen also that the Israelis are under tremendous pressure from the beginning of day three. And we're still at the start of the war. And they're spending day and night in the shelters.

The missiles are raining on Israel every single day. This is a war that Benjamin Netanyahu said he waited for the last 40 years. And now he got it.

Now it's up to him to explain to his people why they cannot be secured.

### **[Helena Cobban]**

So one thing that we have seen, obviously, since the beginning of this war is that the central Iranian governance structures have actually survived in spite of this very devastating decapitation, obviously, killing, assassinating, killing Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader, something that I'm still trying to come to terms with, you know, because just rubbing out the head of a state apparatus is a huge thing to happen.

And I know it's devastating for so many people in Iran and Shiite communities much further afield and others who really supported his resistance to Zionist aggression, and he has now fallen martyr to that aggression. But in spite of those decapitation operations, which also attacked, I think, the head of the military, the chief of staff of the military, and the head of the IRGC, the military and governance structures of the country survived. I mean, and they've done this before, you know, they've come under attack before and this is the massive attack, and they have survived this and are coordinating all these operations, such as you have described.

And I think that's worth underlining because the survival of these structures is itself a victory. And over time, and when I'm talking about time, I'm talking about days or weeks, then the political and geopolitical nature of this victory will become much more evident. What do you think about the regional implications of Iran's governance structure surviving?

### **[Elijah Magnier]**

It is, everything is written in the constitution. In Article 111 of the Iranian constitution, when the leader is removed, or he died for whatever reason, then there is a way for who's going to replace him and who's going to take over during that period. Because of that, there is a small committee that was formed to prepare the ground for the election of the new leader.

Also, in case of war, the IRGC and the army are prepared to take over the management of the war while the supreme leader is elected. And then he is appointing all the leaders that have been assassinated. For that, we're talking about thousands of generals, all within the system.

And they all have so many different vice commanders of various positions. And they all have the same information, they are all exposed to the same information, and they are all involved in the planning. So this kind of scenario, with the assassination of the leader of the defense minister of the head of the IRGC, is something that Iran has been preparing for.

And also in ideological state actors, like Iran, the leadership is really not perpendicular, it's horizontal. One goes away, another one jumps in. And there are many people who are capable to replace the one that has been killed.

This is why it shows a lack of understanding from the Americans and the Israelis, how this functions. And for the Israelis, it's very important, the theatrical part of it, because Israel took on its charge, the assassination part at the first beginning of the war. So they went to assassinate Said Ali Khamenei.

So Benjamin Netanyahu can come out and say, I have done this job and get credit for it. But then this victory would be capitalized on, had Benjamin Netanyahu stopped immediately the war. And then this is where it ends.

And then he can say, well, we killed the leader of the country, and that's it, we are victorious. But this is not the way it happened. And this is why the Iranians don't want really now to stop the war, because they don't want to offer this quick victory to Benjamin Netanyahu or to Donald Trump.

And the system has survived, but not only survived, it's doing remarkably well by fighting on so many fronts. They are attacking Qatar, Bahrain, the Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, Cyprus, Israel. So they are really Oman, and also running the traffic in the state strait of Hormuz or disrupting it.

So these are 10 tasks to run the country at war, apart from the domestic front, where the Basij take over, not the IRGC, which is a branch of it, more or less. So it showed the capability of the system, and how the system functions very well in case of war. And the proof is it has functioned.

It is unlike what happened in June 2025, when the Iranian launched their first missile after 18 hours. This time, in the first hour, the retaliation started immediately. So that is an indication that Iran was prepared, has the experience.

Inevitably, they've trained on that. And then they put it in practice and it's functioning.

**[Helena Cobban]**

So what are the implications if this turns out to be a fairly decisive Iranian victory in this war? What are the implications across the region and globally?

**[Elijah Magnier]**

First, Iran needs not to lose for it to win. Secondly, the relationship with the Gulf countries have been damaged. But the Iranian said already they can live with that, and then start to repair the relationship afterward.

Third, the presence of US Navy and US bases in the Middle East turned out to be negative, not positive for the countries of the Gulf. They did not protect them. They can't protect themselves.

And then they brought missiles in case of war because they are using the airspace and the bases to attack a neighboring country. So this is kind of not really Iran saying, mea culpa, because the Arab said, we will not allow the Americans to attack you and they allowed. And the proof is Qatar, not Qatar, Kuwait, there are three jets that have been brought down, F-15E Americans, what they were doing in the sky during the bombardment.

So it means there is an involvement and there is an approval of these countries leadership. Therefore, it is Iran's right to defend itself against who is attacking it. And according to the law, Iran has a legitimate right to defend itself.

But the Arab will not swallow that easily. Because for 40 years, the Americans have been saying to the Arabs, Iran is a problem. The danger comes from Iran.

But the danger came indeed from Iran, but only because the Americans started the war and used the Gulf countries as a platform to attack Iran. So this is where they need really to renegotiate the terms and restore the relationship.

#### **[Helena Cobban]**

So back in March of 2023, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi played a very important role in bringing about a reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran that was followed by many of the other GCC countries. Some of them had had good relations with Iran all along. But do you see a role for either Chinese or other international diplomacy to try to bring about a new relationship after this war between the Arab Gulf states and Iran?

Iranian diplomats are extremely talented and have a good basis on which perhaps to do this on their own, but it will transform-- I guess what I'm hearing from you or what I'm extrapolating is that these kind of normal good relations can only be rebuilt if the Arab states of the Gulf do not have American bases, and that would be a massive change, right?

#### **[Elijah Magnier]**

Well, that would be ideal. But Iran is not in a position to impose that on the Arab states. But yes, indeed, China played the role.

Iraq played the role. And I forgot to mention Iraq and the objective of the Iranian in Kurdistan, where there are the Harir US military base and the Erbil airport where the US are present. So, Iraq played a significant role in the rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and was finalized by the Saudis.

However, the resentment between both sides exists since 1400 years ago. The Shia and the Sunni, they did not reconcile ever. And the Iranians came from a position to say, let us put our differences on the side.

Sorry, because Iran didn't want the Gulf countries to feel afraid, and therefore they rely on the Americans to defend them. Well, now we know that the Americans cannot defend themselves. So, this is more reason for the Arab countries to come close to Iran, and have the security that Iran is not going to attack them, and they will not attack Iran.

So, for that, they need to sort out the problem there are in the Middle East. But we've seen this not happening, really. We've seen in Iraq, for example, the Gulf television are attacking, for example, the decision of Nouriel Maneke returning as a Prime Minister.

So, this is not something that indicates the relationship is really smooth as it is.

**[Helena Cobban]**

So, you talked about these age-old, 1400, 1450-year-old divisions between Shiites and Sunnis. The Axis of Resistance, if we can recall that, actually succeeded in overcoming this in particular because of the wholehearted participation of both Iran and the Hamas leadership in the Axis of Resistance and their close coordination on many issues, including in Lebanon. So, obviously now, with this war, this gross attack against Iran, we are also seeing a lot of Israeli aggressive, offensive actions continuing against the people of Gaza and against the people of Lebanon, in particular, and some against the people of Syria.

So, the Israelis are capable of undertaking both the long-distance war, although most of it is being done by the Americans, but also the local war. I wonder, what is the relationship between the balance in and around Iran and the balance in and around the Mashraq, the Levant, the historic Syria, one could call it?

**[Elijah Magnier]**

What's the question, sorry?

**[Helena Cobban]**

Well, what's the relationship between the balance, the outcome in Iran and what Israel is still capable of doing to its immediate neighbours?

**[Elijah Magnier]**

Well, first of all, the Axis of the Resistance turned out to be kind of deterrence narrative, rather than a joint command. Of course, Iran and Hezbollah supported Hamas, but this is an unconditional support where Hamas can decide whatever it wants and be completely independent and take the assistance that is offered. And at the end of the day, it's up to Hamas to decide what it wants to do.

Now, this showed in the 7th of October, where the attack was not coordinated with all the members. And then we have seen only Hezbollah supporting Hamas, and the others did not. Syria did not refuse at that time.

Iran sent a few drones, and that's it. So, the Axis of the Resistance exists just as a response to what George Bush said, the Axis of Evil, when he described Iran and Korea, etc. But they never had a central command, military command.

However, the Iranians have in their constitution, Article 154, that they support oppressed people around the world. This is why they support Hamas, the Islamic Jihad, and other Palestinian factions, Hezbollah, the Yemeni Ansarullah, the Syrians when they wanted the support. So, where is Israel in all of that?

Turkey helped Israel in Syria, but indirectly, by helping to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad. And by removing Syria from this logistic axis of the resistance, where the traffic of money and weapons used to reach to all the members, that was really a serious failure in the policy of the Levant, that Israel took advantage of and attacked Syria, destroyed all its military capability, the weapon industry, and then occupy not only the Golan Heights, but also part of Quneitra, of the Sueda, and is still operating inside Syrian land, undisturbed.

Now, for Iran, the only people who continue fighting are the Lebanese, the Iraqis, and the Yemeni. And there is an exchange of experience and an exchange of finance, where the Iranians support them and finance them. But it doesn't mean Iran will go and fight on their behalf, or they will fight on behalf of Iran.

Hezbollah is starting a war now, not to fight on behalf of Iran, but because it is the only opportunity for Hezbollah to impose a rule of engagement on Israel and stop the daily bombardment and the violation of the ceasefire agreement and the killing of the Lebanese. Israel violated the ceasefire 4,500 times and killed Lebanese in the last 15 months, just immediately after the ceasefire. The only way to force Israel to stop is to impose new rules, and new rules without a war are impossible.

But starting a war from Hezbollah's side, when Iran finishes its war, then the whole military effort of Israel will be concentrated on Lebanon. And that is more difficult for Hezbollah to cope with. But when the Israeli jet needs to be dispersed a little part in Iran and part of Lebanon, then that makes the possibility of imposing another really serious ceasefire, something that Hezbollah can obtain.

**[Helena Cobban]**

Then I want to just, before we finish, come back to the relationship of this big confrontation with the ongoing genocide in Gaza, because obviously part of Trump's goal is to... I think he's fairly committed to his vision for Gaza, which is just a horrendous colonialist vision that he has been hoping, obviously, to have a lot of support from the Arab Gulf states and to completely take over the land and resources of Gaza. So what is happening with both that plan for Gaza, and also, are the Israelis now less able to impose their will on the remaining people of Gaza, or do you see that just continuing?

**[Elijah Magnier]**

Oh, it's completely the opposite. The Israelis dictate how many trucks they can go in. Instead of 600, they're allowing 120 to 150.

They impose the number of people who can cross from Gaza to Egypt through Rafah crossing, who can go, who cannot, and vice versa. They are the ones who are occupying more land in Gaza. They've started with 50%, now they end up with 53%.

And all the construction plan that Donald Trump is talking about, but never happened so far, is to construct in the part that is occupied by Israel, but not the part that is completely destroyed and occupied by the Palestinians. The reconstruction of Gaza should have started in Phase 2. The opening of Rafah should have started in Phase 1.

We finished from Phase 1, and now we are in Phase 2, and there is no reconstruction. There is another war, and to the delight of Benjamin Netanyahu, because that diverted the attention away from everything he's doing in Gaza.

**[Helena Cobban]**

Yeah, I mean, it is very, very depressing to think how this is all affecting Gaza and affecting the people throughout Iran who are being killed and having their infrastructure destroyed. But I think it's really important to note that, as you did, that the Iranian state structure remains and remains capable. So, Elijah Magnier, I hope we can have you back again very soon.

It's always really good to have your assessment of things. I urge people to sign up for your WordPress blog, where you're publishing three or four pieces every week. I just want people also to remember that we're going to have tomorrow, same place, same time, Rami Khouri, and then on Wednesday, Ambassador Chas Freeman, talking here about the Iran crisis.

Please go to our website, [www.justworldeducational.org](http://www.justworldeducational.org), where you can see everything that we're producing in this current project. And Elijah Magnier, I thank you again. Talk to you again soon.

**[Elijah Magnier]**

It's a pleasure. Thank you for having me.