

The Iran Crisis #20: John Ross on China's role-- and the geopolitical and geo-economic salience of this war

Transcript of the conversation Helena Cobban held with global economist John Ross on 5/9/2026. Find the audio on [Apple Podcasts](#) or [Spotify](#). The video is on YouTube

[Helena Cobban]

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

And today in the 20th episode of our ongoing podcast series on the Iran crisis, I am delighted that our guest is John Ross, who is a senior fellow with the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies at the Renmin University of China. So, John, welcome to the series.

[John Ross]

Very pleased to be here.

[Helena Cobban]

So we have such a lot to talk about. You obviously hear a lot and are in good touch with a lot of things that are going on in Beijing. It's been a busy capital in world diplomatic terms and continues to be will continue to be this week because President Trump is supposed to be there, I think, around midweek.

And I think the summit is still on. I'm sure the preparations are still underway. And that there will be a number of issues discussed there.

But one of them surely will be the ongoing U.S.-Israeli attack on Iran and that woefully unresolved conflict. By the way, this we started our series on the Iran crisis on February 25th, shortly before the assault was launched by the U.S. and Israel on February 28th. I just want to note that.

But there are so many ways in which China's role is important. And John Ross, I'd like to ask you, first of all. How you see China's diplomatic position after the visit of foreign Iranian foreign minister Abbas Adakji to Beijing last week and and just days away from Trump's visit?

[John Ross]

Well, what China wants is, it wants the blockade of the straits of Hormuz lifted. But that means at the present time that it's the United States that's blocking it, because Iran declared when the ceasefire was declared, it declared the straits open. But then the U.S. imposed a blockade, which is completely contradictory to a ceasefire because a blockade is an act of war. But anyway, that's the situation. Then, obviously, there's the question of the

sanctions, which are against Iran itself. That's longer-term ones, the ones that have been in place for some time now.

This has two significances for China and the big significance for Iran. The big significance for Iran is that China buys about 80 to 85 percent of Iran's oil because China does not recognize the U.S. sanctions against Iran. China's position is it only recognizes sanctions imposed by the U.N. Security Council. It doesn't recognize sanctions that are imposed unilaterally. So therefore it's important for Iran because China is by far its most important customer and therefore getting the blockade lifted is important for Iran.

It is somewhat-- marginal would be a bit to understate it; small might be the right characterization of its importance for China. Only a relatively small part of China's oil imports come from Iran itself, and China has very big oil reserves. Exactly how big is a state secret. But the best estimates are somewhere between 100 and 180 days, even if it's running the economy at full flat out; and doubtless, if you make various economies and so on and so forth, they could last longer. And also it clearly feels relatively secure economically because as a precaution and when the war started, it banned the export of jet fuel and other fuels from China.

Just I think this is a precaution, but it's now lifted it for a number of countries in Southeast Asia. So it obviously itself doesn't feel under any great pressure. But of course, there are several aspects to this.

In addition to the immediate one, one is China does not accept the right of the United States to go around the world, blockading people because this is not the only case, where this is happening. This is-- it's occurring with Cuba. It's occurring with ships from Russia.

And now it's occurring with something that's important for China. And this is an attempt by one country to claim the unilateral right to control energy. We're actually all shipping, the most urgent is energy. So China is not going to accept that, doesn't accept that.

[Helena Cobban]

And secondly, if I could just jump in there, there are secondary sanctions that the US government has also unilaterally imposed against those small refineries and other refineries in China that have been processing Iranian oil and those secondary sanctions China is hitting back against. So, you know, we can come back to that later, maybe. But you were about to say secondly, sorry.

[John Ross]

But those are relatively small compared to the fact of the large amount of oil, which which China's buying from Iran, which is decisive for the question of Iran.

But then there's also another question which is sometimes discussed, not so centrally discussed, which is the United States policy for dealing with the world is increasingly what I would call military or military related measures. Military may mean you just invade. We saw that with Iraq.

It may be supplying all the weapons to Israel for the genocide in Gaza. It may be the blockade of Cuba. It may be kidnapping the president of Venezuela.

Now, obviously, it can't do that to China. If you have a direct military confrontation with China, a central military confrontation, this is very, very dangerous. And I don't think there's any serious current within the United States that proposes this as an immediate solution.

But there are military-related policies which it can carry out. One which is well known is to provoke the tension around Taiwan, which is a crucial question for China. But the second one is energy.

The US used to conceive a blockade in China, basically close to the shore of China, in particular including the Malacca Straits. But the Chinese navy is now too strong for this. It won't work.

Therefore, if you want to blockade China's energy, which is a military-related solution, you have to do it thousands of kilometers away from China. You have to do it off Venezuela. You have to do it off the off of West Asia, off the Malacca Straits, etc.

And therefore, that is a thing which that is what is advocated by serious forces within the United States. And China is very well aware of this. Therefore, there is what you might call an immediate question of principle, which is that China is not going to accept that one country decides where the world trade can be carried on or not.

And secondly, this is directly aimed against China. So that that these are bigger strategic questions in addition to the immediate one of the oil supply, which is coming from Iran to China.

[Helena Cobban]

So a lot of other countries obviously have been very gravely affected by the US blockade. Among them, countries of the global south around the Indian Ocean and also European countries. So is China able to build a coalition to challenge the US blockade in any meaningful way?

[John Ross]

Well, China would like-- China is realistic. China know the reason that the US is trying to resort to having the potential to blockade China's thousands of kilometers from its shores is because it can't do it close to China anymore is because at the moment, China does not have the long range naval and air capacity to challenge the United States. That is, if China decided for some reason that it wanted to challenge the US blockade of Straits of Hormuz or it wanted to block challenge the US blockade of Cuba, it doesn't have the naval capacity at present time to do so.

So it can't do that. It would be much better if there was a coalition of countries. In my opinion, for example, if you take the longer established one on the question of Cuba, I think it would be good for several countries to cooperate, not just for one Russia-sent ship.

That's very good. It would be good for a number of countries, you know, to form a sort of small convoy and say, we're going to send the oil and send things there. And also on the question of Straits of Hormuz, that would be for them to say they don't recognize the American blockade.

So at the moment, what the US is blockading and it's trying to take off one country at a time and it would be much better not to do so. But of course, the other countries would have to play ball with that. They'd have to go along with that.

Europe, I'm afraid, has a rather suicidal but very negative position of basically subordinating itself to the United States. I mean, it's true that it's refused to participate in the actual military actions in the Straits of Hormuz because these are mad. You can't!

The US will not succeed in unblocking the Straits of Hormuz by military means, because apart from the fact that it's got a, Iran's got a very powerful ally, we may say, in Lloyd's of London, which is nobody is going to give you insurance to take super tankers through a strait where they will be subject to military action. And the very largest tankers, if you take the price of the oil and the price of the ship, this this can be two hundred and fifty million dollars. So nobody's going to try to run it through without insurance.

I mean, you may have individual little ships that are trying to run the blockade and all that type of thing. But for the serious things, it's not going to happen. So the US is incapable of militarily unblocking the Straits of Hormuz.

It will not work. And therefore, Europe relatively sensibly refuses to get involved in something which has got no chance of success. But apart from that, behind the scenes, it's been backing the United States in the same way that, for example, over the question of Israel, it condemns some excessiveness, but is in actual fact going along with the genocide which is going on in Gaza.

And over the question of Iran. It doesn't want to get involved directly. Including political reasons, because the European opinion is massively against the war. I mean, for example, [Italian PM] Meloni, who's normally very close to Trump, she's not gone along with the war because the opinion polls in Italy show 82 percent of the population oppose the war. So it would be political suicide for her to do that.

In Britain, also, where you had Farage, of the Reform Party and the leader of the Tory Party on day one came out and attacked Starmer for not giving total support to Trump. And then they changed their line three days later because they realized, and the polls showed, that the war was so unpopular that it would be massive political defeat for them to do so. So they're now trying to pretend that they never said that in the first place and denying it, etc., except, of course, they're all on camera doing that.

So therefore, I think it would be very good to have coordinated action. But at the moment, the biggest problem is that the other countries will not join in in doing it. That I consider is the greatest obstacle to that.

[Helena Cobban]

Interesting. I love this concept of a flotilla, because, of course, people who've worked on trying to counter the genocide in Gaza have been organizing tiny little flotillas in the Mediterranean for many years now. And their main achievement has been to raise awareness, I want to say. They haven't actually gotten things into Gaza,.

But a serious international flotilla to break, as you mentioned, the blockade on Cuba-- I gather that China has sent a lot of solar energy, like solar panels, to Cuba, which I think is a great way to help the the energy situation there.

And it's just worth reminding our viewers that we've been talking about China's, as you say, small degree of reliance on Iranian oil, but actually China is is not reliant on oil and gas, hydrocarbons, to anything like the degree that Europe or the United States are, precisely because of the excellent and speedy and effective development of solar power and wind power in China. So that's a great asset for China.

But it's also something that China can export to other countries, especially across the global south.

So if we're talking about a coordinated challenge to the blockade, to the U.S. blockade of Iran, do you see the United Nations playing any role in this? I mean, as far as I can see, the United Nations Security Council role for many months now, maybe since the beginning of the genocide in Gaza, has been extremely negative.

And regarding the U.S.-Israeli attack on Iran, we've had one bad resolution back in March, which was not under Chapter seven. And I think there is now a second attempt at getting an anti-Iranian resolution. But China and Russia vetoed the one in early April, which I think was a really important contribution.

But is there anything more that China can do to bring the United Nations, if you like, back to its original role of helping to prevent war and to uphold the rights of peoples?

[John Ross]

I personally think that the U.N. Security Council needs to act. I agree on the question of veto on the question of Gaza. It needs to act both on the question of Cuba and on the question of the blockade, the claims of the United States basically to be able to run world trade in a unilateral fashion, which is what the Straits of Hormuz is.

But that's my personal opinion. If you look at it from my judgment of China, it's the following. China is a powerful and great state. It therefore has to think very carefully what it does, for example, and because it knows that on a number of fields it can defeat the United States. Trump, when he had his so-called Independence Day tariffs in April [2025], got a very blunt response from China, which was if you impose those tariffs, we'll cut off the rare earths and the American car industry will shut down within six months. Now, think about it.

It put it more politely. China's style is not to be like that. It put it much more politely than a British or American [person] would.

[Helena Cobban]

And then we saw the classic, as it's called, you know, by the Financial Times, "TACO", Trump always chickens out, which I think we shouldn't. Maybe we shouldn't mock him for backing down from untenable positions. We should, you know, lord his statesmanship in backing down from untenable positions.

But still, he did back down.

[John Ross]

I know that China's got a style which is perhaps a bit different to even the British or American style, and it's very different to, for example, Latin American style, which is talks very quietly and considers the actions. I mean, a classic case, for example, was launched in the satellites of Venezuela.

The US made huge, huge pressure on China not to launch satellites in Venezuela. China made no denunciations of US imperialism or anything like that. But the satellites went up.

That's China's style doing it. And China will not do what it does not think will succeed. It's not really into gestures. So I don't know what discussions obviously are going to take place, obviously, between between Russia and China and also with other countries. What is the case is that China is in contact with all the countries in the Middle East. It's made absolutely clear that it's against the US aggression against Iran.

It's obviously very significant that Iran's foreign minister went to China before Trump's visit. We can be fairly sure what they discussed. And it therefore has a position. Obviously, all of the Gulf states would like the blockade to stop. But I think there's a crucial question which is on the war at the present time. And this is it relates to the economic question. At the moment, the oil price is high and this is extremely unpleasant for the global south.

You've got four-day weeks being imposed in some South Asian countries. You've got shops have to close at 6 p.m. And we got knock-on problems on fertilizers. It's very, very, very unpopular in America. It's very unpopular in Europe. But at the present time, that could be restored, not immediately, not overnight, but it could be restored, let's say, within three to six months, because at the moment it's a blockade, it's not physical destruction.

What I think the reason that the United States stopped the bombing was the following. It believed what Iran said, which is if you attack our power stations and our oil supply with Trump's notorious Truth Social thing about destroying Iranian civilization, we will respond by attacking that of the people who are de-facto allowing you to do it. That is the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia or other Gulf states. And I think that that was Iran's genuine position.

And I think that the United States, in this case, had the sense to know that that was exactly what Iran would do. And then you're into a totally different thing. If you have the physical destruction of the oil production facilities, then you're into a very, very high oil prices, not for three to six months. You're into it for years. And the Republican Party cannot merely

forget about the the midterm elections, which I think they're going to lose anyway and will now lose quite severely. Don't forget about the next presidential election as well.

If you have the present high level of gas prices inside the United States for three years, whoever is responsible for that is going to be drastically politically unpopular. And I think therefore, at the present time, we can see in the skirmishes that have taken place around the Straits of Hormuz, neither Iran nor the United States really wants to escalate the actual fighting. And there have been several exchanges of fire, which would have could easily have been taken with a pretext for the United States-- I mean, they could have taken something much less than that as a pretext for restarting the bombing. So why didn't they do it? Because they don't want to, because they think that simply blowing up a few more rocket places or something, Iran might not alter the situation.

And the only thing to do would be to attack the power supply and the and the oil facilities in which Iran case will reply by doing this in the Gulf states and also knock out the desalination plants. And then then you've got chaos in the US economy for a long period of time. So I think that's why they stopped.

So I think that there is discussions. My looking at the objective alignment of forces, there are discussions taking place, both Iran, China and the other Arab states around the question of not escalating the situation. Also, a key question which China must be considering is that the alignment of the Gulf states is itself changing, which is the UAE walking out of OPEC.

That's not about the oil price. That's about the whole strategy. We know that with the so-called Operation Freedom, it's reported and seems to be confirmed that in the first day, Saudi Arabia refused to allow its oil airspace to be used for the attacks, which means they don't want it because the strategic stakes in this conflict are enormous.

If the United States can win in it's right to control world trade and to control the oil, that's a tremendous step forward, and if it loses, it's a disaster because I shouldn't exaggerate a very grave setback. Because it means that the US projection of military force loses its credibility, the idea that the US can do things militarily everywhere it can.

Secondly, because it will leave Iran as the most powerful state within the Western Asian region, because Saudi Arabia and other states, they will know the US cannot protect us.

[Helena Cobban]

OK, let's jump in there, John, because you haven't actually mentioned, I don't think, Iran's capability to issue deterrent threats against Israel as well, given that Israel is the major kind of military asset for the United States in the region.

[John Ross]

Yes, I think strategically that's decisive. Let's look at what might be the end game. How are we going to judge who won and who lost? Right. Take Clausewitz's most famous thing. You know, war is the continuation of politics by other means, which means you have to look at the politics. Right. OK. From that point of view, what's done on that?

I don't think that the crucial question is the nuclear question for Iran, because they have not shown any inclination they want to build a nuclear facility. Right.

What is crucial is the missiles question. And because that is what deals with Israel, because we know they can do great damage to Israel and it is what is can be used from the point of the other Gulf states. So I think strategically, yes, I think Israel: if Iran is not does not give up the capacity to build the missiles, this is a huge defeat for Israel.

Because what the war has shown is that without nuclear weapons, Iran can impose a degree of damage on Israel, which is unacceptable from the point of Israel.

In addition to the things that is behind it strategically. I just think that at the moment, if I was looking in the Gulf states, I'd be more worried of just urgently about the physical destruction of the oil facilities, because I think that Israel doesn't care about that. It doesn't. It just wants to try to destroy Iran. So strategically, I'd be concerned on Israel. But I just think at the moment in your immediate calculations, the crucial question which has been decided is, is the United States going to carry out a military escalation which will lead to the physical destruction of the oil production facilities in the Middle East or not? And if it's the leader of a Gulf oil producing state, this would be what would be dominating my agenda. But I agree with you from the outcome of the war.

It's the question, I think, of the missiles, not of the nuclear question for the point of Israel.

[Helena Cobban]

Yeah, and the Iranians have already proven, number one, that they can use their missiles to defend the homeland, even though, you know, there's been widespread destruction of their airfields and their large naval vessels and other means of defence. But the missiles remain in operation or as a capability. And we just saw this report in The Washington Post citing CIA analysts that said that actually Iran's missile capability has been much better preserved than was previously, than is, touted by Trump when he says we "obliterated" the the Iranian military.

So so they retain that capability. And it's an important one. And you're right, I think, to say that that is the crucial one of the crucial components of the outcome.

I want to come now to China's diplomatic role, because I think it's been very significant. It was significant back in March of 2023, when the foreign minister was able to bring together the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia and Iran in the first reconciliation between those two powers for a very long time. And you know, I read Chinese official media, and every so often, there's mention that Foreign Minister Wang has, you know, called this or that counterpart in Saudi Arabia or Iran or other states in the region.

And clearly, China worked pretty closely with Pakistan in formulating the approach that led to that first round of negotiations in Islamabad in early April, with the Pakistani foreign minister having just prior to that, had a conclave with his counterparts from Turkey and Egypt and Saudi Arabia, all of which are significant states in the West Asian region, which are also historically very pro-American.

But I think it was it was a kind of a diplomatic masterstroke that the Chinese and Pakistani foreign ministers were able to bring together this approach that led to what could have been a productive negotiation between the US and Iran in Islamabad. It didn't work, partly because Israel was determined to carry on fighting against the Lebanese people and against, you know, the Palestinians in Gaza.

But how do you see China's, first of all, did I kind of get that characterization of the Chinese Pakistani diplomatic duo more or less correct? And then whether I did or not, do you see that as being a continuing effort by those two capitals?

[John Ross]

Yes, I think that there is careful coordination. It's not extremely publicly announced between Pakistan and China. I think that's one of the key reasons why Pakistan's able to play this role, because people know it's acting in coordination or as an intermediary with the question of China.

Again, if you look at what China is trying to achieve, again, the Chinese style, as I say, is not to make big declarations and denounce people. It's a question on Iran. We should be clear, Iran would not survive without China, if China had not been buying its oil. That's the end of the matter. This is a decisive factor in the situation. Therefore, China doesn't need to make big declarations and words.

What's important is it buying 85, about 80 to 85 percent of Iran's oil under conditions in which other countries won't do it. And it's doing that for two reasons. One, because it's self-interest, which is it wants to diversify its energy supply. It doesn't want to be dependent upon any one place because, you know, the world, political alignments, et cetera, can change.

And secondly, because it has very good relations with Iran, and it doesn't want a situation in which one country, the United States, claims that it can control world trade. I mean, you know, international trade is something that by its very nature should be subject to international agreements and international negotiations.

And with the World Trade Organization, it was to some extent. So that's one of the reasons why the US is trying to wreck the WTO. So China understands that if it accepts that one country can control world trade, which is not in the general interest of the world, it's not in China's interest either. It's not in the question of Iran's interest. So they're going to be very firm upon this.

And the terminology which China uses about red lines is to be taken very seriously. It means it's not going to get bogged down in a lot of secondary matters. It uses terms, as you know, like core interests, et cetera. It means we're not completely inflexible. We're not going to pick a fight on everything. But there are certain questions which we regard as red lines. That means they will not cross and be crossed.

And it doesn't matter how long you go on about it. You're not going to change your position. One is obviously the question of Taiwan. Taiwan is a part of China. It should have been returned to China in 1949. But it doesn't matter.

I mean, I'm sure that Taiwan will return to China before 100 years. But if we're at 100 years time, China would still have exactly the same position. It's not going to change its position on that question.

And it says, if you act on that, you will get a great deal of trouble. We're not going to change it. And that's also on this question of control of the seas: It's not going to accept that one country can control world trade against itself. And it's not going to change on that.

Now, the immediate question is, therefore, it would like to-- the most urgent is to get the Straits of Hormuz unblocked, of which the people who are blocking it at the moment is the US.

That is, as long as the ceasefire [holds]. Of course, I'm sure if the ceasefire broke down, Iran would also insist upon imposing the blockade. But Iran's position immediately, the ceasefire was announced, was that the Straits would be open.

That means there is only one country which is blocking the Straits of Hormuz at the moment. That is the United States. Right.

And therefore, that's things which China wants to do. It would also like to get rid of the general sanctions on the question of Iran. It doesn't agree with sanctions, as it says, it only accepts sanctions which are imposed by the UN Security Council. It doesn't accept the unilateral ones. And that's just its position. And it's going to continue. It won't shift from there.

China will do-- obviously, it's looking at the question of Trump's visit at the moment. And again, another aspect of China's style is it examines the situation very precisely. These types of things where people say there are only two variants or there are only three variants, China doesn't think that way. It knows you may say there's only two, three variants, but very often the fifth, sixth or seventh will turn up.

Therefore, it's going to go into the thing with Trump, meaning exactly what it says, which is it does not want a bad relations with the United States. It doesn't cause insurmountable problems. For example, the tariffs ended in defeat for the United States.

No, China doesn't even say it. But of course, the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal and the Financial Times all say China won. But China's too polite.

It doesn't say, "We won." It just says, you know, "This problem's been resolved, et cetera, et cetera." And that's one approach, it doesn't exaggerate.

Secondly, most of the world doesn't want the confrontation between the United States and China. It causes problems for them. Therefore, it wants it to be absolutely clear for tactical reasons as well. That if there are bad relations between China and the United States, it's that the United States is the cause of the problem and not the questions of China.

Therefore, I'm sure it will deal with Trump's visit in a very proper fashion. It will not engage in big, big denunciations, but it will maintain exactly the position which is got at the present time, which is we don't want the Straits of Hormuz blocked.

And we're not going to allow you to control, or any country for that matter. But no other country is claiming to control world trade in the way the United States is. This is not acceptable and they're not going to shift within that framework.

They will then try to make whatever small step forward can be made, which is beneficial to China. And that's going to be their approach. That will be the stance.

I'm sure Trump will be dealt with. There won't be the types of denunciations you get on Truth Social. You'll be dealt with very correctly and you'll be dealt with very firmly on.

And China doesn't have a secret position. China's positions are explained perfectly openly.

[Helena Cobban]

How important do you think this Iran crisis, Strait of Hormuz blockade is on the agenda for China for this summit? I mean, what are the other key issues?

[John Ross]

Oh, the most important one is China, as always says, is and that is the real red line is the question of Taiwan. This is the most-- China has always explained that the solution that the question of Taiwan at the time of Nixon's visit to China in 1972, Kissinger knew perfectly well this question had to be solved. That's China's position.

Taiwan is part of China and it will return to China if there is any messing with that, then the whole structure of relations between the United States and China could collapse. And this is why there is danger. I know there are some people within the mainstream in the United States who think that a conventional war with China should be provoked around Taiwan.

I mean, they write about it. This is what they propose, because China's position is very well known, which is if Taiwan declares interventions, China will invade it. It's not, it will "consider" doing it or anything. It will. And therefore, you could, if you engage in such a reckless action, you could provoke a very serious conflict with China very quickly. The reason it's not done is because I think the mainstream American military and foreign policy establishment quite correctly says there is no guarantee that such a conflict would remain a conventional conflict.

It's all very well for people to write books saying it would be a conventional conflict and the United States would win it. Well, many military studies say the United States wouldn't win it. But anyway, leave that aside, because there is no guarantee that such a conflict would remain conventional conflict.

And therefore, I don't think that the establishment in the US wants that. So that's one thing. Secondly, this relates to the question of trade.

The fundamental reality is the United States is losing the economic competition with China. I mean, it games a great deal of bluff saying we're developing greatly and the greatest, but it's all nonsense. China's economy is growing more than twice as fast as the as the United States and China's in real terms, that is, purchasing power parity terms. China's economy is already about 30 percent in the United States. And also, China has achieved something which no developing economy has ever achieved before, which is it has become a technological leader. You had in an important series of industries, you had before developing economies which grew fast, not as fast as China.

But nevertheless, they grew up South Korea when it was the developing countries. It grew very fast, but it didn't become a technological leader. China has now established technological leadership in a whole series of important areas.

One you already mentioned is the whole question of renewable energy. That's going to transform the whole energy structure of the whole world. And that's a transition is going to take decades.

It's not not a matter of five years or something. Right. In EVs, in drones, in sectors of AI, in telecommunications, in parts of pharmaceuticals, that is China has made the transition now to be the first developing country ever which is a technological leader.

So the United States is losing to China, both in a quantitative sense and it's losing in a qualitative sense. That is, of course, what the well-being of humanity should want. Let's have a peaceful economic contest between the capitalist system in the United States and the socialist system of China.

And let's see who wins. Well, I know. And it's obvious China will win.

But therefore, the big risk in the present situation is the United States fearing it's losing economically will relate to, I say, military-related means. I don't mean by that launch in a full scale world nuclear war. I mean, that is always a threat, but it's not the most likely.

But: creating problems around the question of Taiwan and creating problems in South China Sea, blockade in China, etc. Those are the types of threats which the United States use.

So China will want to see is the US attempting to proceed on these or is what it's doing at the present stage is causing problems for China, but they're not causing problems which slow its economy to slow down greatly. They're not wrecking it. Is the United States trying to push on these things further?

And it will then look at the balance of all these things, of which certainly a significant one is going to be the question of Iran. Not, I think, directly because some people think that if the oil from Iran was cut off to China, this would cause some huge direct problem for China. It would be bad. It would be annoying, but they can find other ways to get around it. But the question that the United States controls world trade in a unilateral fashion: that's not acceptable. That's not acceptable to China, because that doesn't just threaten the question of Iran.

I'm sure that China's does have a definite position on Iran, but it involves a much more fundamental question. That's why I think that people some people seem to think-- watching social media-- there's going to be a quick way out that Trump can find a quick way out or they're trying to find the off ramp. I don't think so.

And I think this is already shown by how long the crisis is going on for, because the issue is not the short-term oil supply. The issue is the ability of the United States to carry out blockades and the issue to therefore put its control in over the world economy. If it can't, if the United States can't win this around Iran, then it suffers a very deep strategic blow.

I think that is even more fundamental than the question of Israel, because I don't agree with the view which is put forward in some circles that Israel controls the United States foreign policy. I don't think it's true. I think that the United States can bring Israel to heel any moment it wants.

It just makes one phone call and says the weapons are stopped. Stop whatever it is you're doing. The United States finds it convenient to allow Israel to go on it does because it fits US foreign policy.

And I think for the United States to lose in this ability to carry out blockades, to control world trade, this is a huge strategic defeat for it. I mean, the Wall Street Journal put it that, you know, the Trump previously said that you shouldn't lose a war. You shouldn't launch a war unless you intend to win it.

And he said, we've got to keep, I paraphrase, right, we've got to keep to the promise and other things to the Council of Foreign Relations. If Iran is left after the war in control of the Straits of Hormuz, this is a tremendous strategic defeat for the United States. Therefore, because the stakes are so high and they don't relate only to the question of West Asia, although West Asia, the so-called Middle East, is very, very important. But what the strategic questions are even more important. And I think, therefore, that's why the crisis has already gone much longer than some people think and why I think there's not going to be a quick off ramp from the situation.

[Helena Cobban]

So, in other words, what you're saying is that for the United States and its longstanding control, well, its current state of control of world trade, this is a sort of an existential confrontation. The global stakes are huge. And if the United States decides it needs to resolve this in one way or another, then Israel won't be able to stop them.

And I kind of agree with that because, I mean, there's no way the Israelis could have done anything that they did against Iran on February 28th or back last June without having, you know, complete support from the American-controlled air bridge between Israel and Iran. I mean, and then when Trump agreed to that early April ceasefire, he said, you're not allowed to use the air bridge. And so the Israelis turned instead to devastating the whole south of Lebanon, which has been a nightmare, obviously.

But I think it's really fascinating to have your kind of global perspective here. We could also note that US ammunition stocks have been seriously depleted by the attack against Iran, but

that maybe is a sub-theme. Just come finally to a question about the Board of Peace and Gaza.

It was very upsetting to a lot of my friends in Palestine that China and Russia did not veto that Security Council resolution. And I got an explanation from my friend Chas Freeman as to why he thought that China had not done that.

Do you see any potential, because the Board of Peace is supposed to report to the Security Council every six months. Do you see any potential for reversing that shameful-- well, I think it's shameful-- support that the Security Council gave to the Board of Peace.

[John Ross]

Well, I don't know. Chas Freeman knows much more about the UN Security Council than I do. So I'm not I'm not an expert on those types of matters.

But I-- I've never run a country, but you know, I was running London's economy for eight years and I was there for the middle of the situation there. And it's got more and bigger GDP than many European countries. Right. You will have in that situation all sorts of pieces of information that other people don't have. I don't know what pieces of information were available to China and Russia on that on that question of why they didn't veto it at that time.

Maybe it's right. Maybe it's wrong. I mean, I'm a very, very big admirer and supporter of China's policy, it's overall policy. It doesn't mean on every single thing I think it obviously gets right. So I will really pass it on this if you don't mind, because it doesn't determine what is the strategic question. And Chas Freeman has got much better judgment on this than I have. He's got much more experience and much more knowledge.

[Helena Cobban]

But but anyway, what you've given us has already been extremely rich and helpful and helps I think all of our viewers to see this in the broad global perspective, where there are military and economic and technological big picture issues of control that are brought into focus precisely by this ongoing confrontation between the US and Iran.

So big thanks to you, John Ross for this really helpful framing of the big picture issues in a week in which we're going to have this US-China summit happening, I think Wednesday or Thursday or so. And just I want to remind viewers that our website is www.justworldeducational.org And you can find the records of this conversation and all the 19 preceding conversations that we've had in this series. And please, if you want to support our work on this-- our groundbreaking work!-- hit the Donate button there.

But now it's my pleasure to say a big thank you to you, John Ross, for giving us so much wisdom in a very short period of time.

[John Ross]

Thank you very much.