

# Why does the US support Israel?

## A geopolitical analysis with economist Michael Hudson

By Ben Norton

November 13, 2023

<https://geopoliticeconomy.com/2023/11/12/why-us-support-israel-geopolitics-michael-hudson/>

Why does the United States so strongly support Israel? Geopolitical Economy Report editor Ben Norton interviewed economist Michael Hudson to explore the reasons why Israel is such an important part of U.S. foreign policy and Washington's attempt to dominate not only the region of the Middle East, but really the entire world.

It is crucial to stress that Israel is an extension of U.S. geopolitical power in one of the most critically important regions of the world.

In fact, it was current [U.S. President Joe Biden, back in 1986](#), when he was a senator, who famously said that, if Israel didn't exist, the United States would have to invent it:

*If we look at the Middle East, I think it's about time we stop, those of us who support, as most of us do, Israel in this body, for apologizing for our support for Israel.*

*There is no apology to be made. None. It is the best \$3 billion investment we make.*

*Were there not an Israel, the United States of America would have to invent an Israel to protect her interest in the region; the United States would have to go out and invent an Israel.*

*I am with my colleagues who are on the floor of the Foreign Relations Committee, and we worry at length about NATO; and we worry about the*

*eastern flank of NATO, Greece and Turkey, and how important it is. They pale by comparison...*

*They pale by comparison in terms of the benefit that accrues to the United States of America.*

First of all, it goes without saying that the so-called Middle East, or a better term is West Asia, has some of the world's largest reserves of oil and gas, and the entire economic infrastructure all around the world relies on fossil fuels.

The world is gradually moving toward new energy sources, but fossil fuels are still absolutely critical to the entire global economy. And Washington's goal has been to make sure that it can maintain steady prices in the global oil and gas markets.

But this is about something much bigger than just oil and gas. The U.S. military's stated policy since the 1990s, since the end of the Cold War and the overthrow of the Soviet Union, is that the United States has tried to maintain control over every region of the world.

This was stated very clearly by the U.S. National Security Council in 1992 in the so-called Wolfowitz Doctrine. The [U.S. National Security Council wrote](#):

*[The United States'] goal is to preclude any hostile power from dominating a region critical to our interests, and also thereby to strengthen the barriers against the reemergence of a global threat to the interests of the U.S. and our allies. These regions include Europe, East Asia, the Middle East/Persian Gulf, and Latin America. Consolidated, nondemocratic control of the resources of such a critical region could generate a significant threat to our security.*

Then, in 2004, the U.S. government published its National Military Strategy, in which Washington stressed that its goal was "[Full Spectrum Dominance](#) – the ability to control any situation or defeat any adversary across the range of military operations".

Now, historically, when it came to the Middle East, the U.S. relied on a so-called "twin pillar" strategy. The west pillar was Saudi Arabia, and the east pillar was Iran. And until the 1979 revolution in Iran, the country was governed by a dictator, a shah, the monarch, who was backed by the United States and served U.S. interests in the region.

However, with the 1979 revolution, the U.S. lost one of the pillars of its twin pillar strategy, and Israel became increasingly important for the United States to maintain control over this crucially strategic region.

It is not just the massive oil reserves and gas reserves in the region; it is not just the fact that many of the world's top oil and gas producers are located in West Asia.

### **The 10 largest oil<sup>1</sup> producers and share of total world oil production<sup>2</sup> in 2022<sup>3</sup>**

| Country              | Million barrels per day | Share of world total |
|----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| United States        | 20.21                   | 20%                  |
| Saudi Arabia         | 12.14                   | 12%                  |
| Russia               | 10.94                   | 11%                  |
| Canada               | 5.70                    | 6%                   |
| China                | 5.12                    | 5%                   |
| Iraq                 | 4.55                    | 5%                   |
| United Arab Emirates | 4.24                    | 4%                   |
| Brazil               | 3.77                    | 4%                   |
| Iran                 | 3.66                    | 4%                   |
| Kuwait               | 3.02                    | 3%                   |
| Total top 10         | 73.36                   | 73%                  |
| World total          | 99.89                   |                      |

It is also the fact that some of the most important trading routes on Earth also go through this region.

It would be difficult to overstate how important Egypt's Suez Canal is. This connects trade from the Middle East going into Europe, from the Red Sea into the Mediterranean, and around [30% of all of the world's shipping containers pass through the Suez Canal](#). That represents around 12% of the total global trade of all goods.

Then, directly south of the Suez Canal, where the Red Sea enters the Arabian Sea, you have a crucial geostrategic choke point known as the [Bab al-Mandab Strait](#), right off the coast of Yemen. And there, more than 6 million barrels of oil pass through every single day.

Historically, the United States has tried to dominate this region in order to maintain control not only of energy supplies, but also to ensure these global trade routes that the entire globalized neoliberal economic system is built on.

And as U.S. influence in the region has weakened in an increasingly multipolar world, Israel has become increasingly important for the United States to try to maintain control.

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AUGUST 27, 2019

## The Bab el-Mandeb Strait is a strategic route for oil and natural gas shipments

Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration

The Bab el-Mandeb Strait is a sea route **chokepoint** between the Horn of Africa and the Middle East, connecting the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea. Most exports of petroleum and natural gas from the Persian Gulf that transit the **Suez Canal or the SUMED Pipeline** pass through both the Bab el-Mandeb and the **Strait of Hormuz**.

**Chokepoints** are narrow channels along widely used global sea routes that are **critical to global energy security**. The Bab el-Mandeb Strait is 18 miles wide at its narrowest point, limiting tanker traffic to two 2-mile-wide channels for inbound and outbound shipments.

Closure of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait could keep tankers originating in the Persian Gulf from transiting the Suez Canal or reaching the SUMED Pipeline, forcing them to divert around the southern tip of Africa, which would increase transit time and shipping costs.

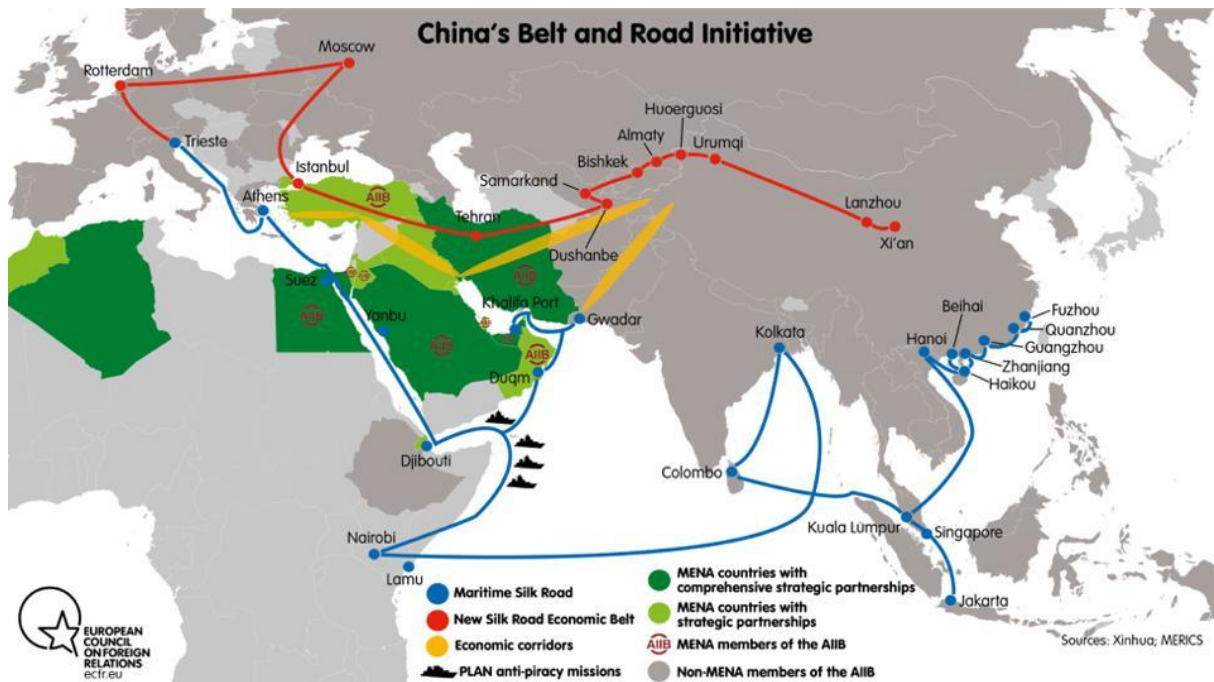
In 2018, an estimated **6.2 million barrels per day (b/d) of crude oil, condensate, and refined petroleum products flowed through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait toward Europe, the United States, and Asia**, an increase from 5.1 million b/d in 2014. Total petroleum flows through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait accounted for about **9% of total seaborne-traded petroleum (crude oil and refined petroleum products)** in 2017. About 3.6 million b/d moved north toward Europe; another 2.6 million b/d flowed in the opposite direction mainly to Asian markets such as Singapore, China, and India.

We can see this clearly in the discussions over oil prices through OPEC, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, which has essentially been expanded and is now known as OPEC+ to include Russia.

Now Saudi Arabia and Washington's archenemy, Russia, play a key role in determining global oil prices.

Historically, Saudi Arabia was a loyal U.S. proxy, but increasingly Riyadh has been maintaining a more non-aligned foreign policy. And a very big reason for that is that China is now the biggest trading partner of many of the countries in the region. For a decade, China has been the largest importer of oil and gas from the Persian Gulf.

Furthermore, through its global infrastructure project, the Belt and Road Initiative, China is moving the center of world trade back to Asia. And in the Belt and Road Initiative, the "road" in particular is a reference to the New Silk Road.



Can you guess which region is absolutely crucial in the New Silk Road and the Belt and Road Initiative? Well, of course, it's the Middle East – or, again, a better term is West Asia, and that term actually much better explains the geostrategic importance of this region, because it connects Asia to Europe.

This also explains why the United States has been so desperate to try to challenge the Belt and Road with its own attempts to build new trade routes. In particular, the U.S. is trying to make a [trade route going from India into the Persian Gulf](#), and then up through Israel.

So in all of these projects, Israel plays an important role, as an extension of U.S. imperial power in one of the most important regions of the world. That is why Biden said back in 1986 that if Israel didn't exist, the U.S. would have to invent it.

That is also why Biden repeated this in a [White House meeting with Israel's President Isaac Herzog](#) on October 27, 2022:

*We're also going to discuss the ironclad commitment – and this is, I'll say this 5000 times in my career – the ironclad commitment the United States has to Israel, based on our principles, our ideas, our values; they're the same values.*

*And I have often said, Mr. President [Herzog], if there were not an Israel, we would have to invent one.*

And even as recently as October 18, 2023, Biden once again repeated the same thing in a [speech he made in Israel](#): “I have long said, if Israel didn’t exist, we’d have to invent it”.

In that speech in 2023, Biden traveled to Israel in order to support the country as it was carrying out a brutal bombing campaign in Gaza, and [ethnically cleansing Palestinians](#) as part of what [many experts](#) around the world have referred to as a “[textbook case of genocide](#)”.

Top United Nations experts have warned that the [Palestinian people are in danger of genocide by Israel](#).

And the United States has steadfastly been supporting Israel, because once again, as Joe Biden said, Israel is an extension of U.S. imperial power in West Asia; and if it didn’t exist, Washington would have to invent it.

Below follows a transcript of the interview that Geopolitical Economy Report editor Ben Norton conducted with economist Michael Hudson, author of many books, including [Super Imperialism: The Economic Strategy of American Empire](#).

## Transcript

**BEN NORTON:** Michael, thanks for joining me today. We are speaking on November 9, and the latest death toll in the war in Gaza is that Israel has killed more than 10,000 Palestinians.

The United Nations has referred to Gaza as a “[graveyard for children](#)”. More than 4,000 children have been killed. About 40% of the casualties are children.

And the United States has continued to support Israel, not only diplomatically and politically, not only by, for instance, vetoing resolutions in the U.N. Security Council that call for a ceasefire, but furthermore, the U.S. has been sending billions of dollars to Israel.

Not only the \$3.8 billion that the U.S. always gives to Israel every year in military aid, but additionally, tens of billions of dollars more.

So I am wondering if you could provide your analysis of why you think the U.S. is investing so many resources in supporting Israel while it is clearly committing war crimes.

**MICHAEL HUDSON:** Well, certainly it is supporting Israel, but it’s not supporting Israel because this is an altruistic act.

To the United States, Israel is its landed aircraft carrier in the Near East. Israel is the takeoff point for America to control the Near East.

And from the very time there was talk of creating an Israel, it was always that Israel was going to be an outpost, first of England, then of Russia, then of the United States in the Near East.

And I can give you an anecdote. Netanyahu's main national security advisor for the last few years has been Uzi Arad. I worked at the Hudson Institute for about five years, 1972 to '76. And I worked very closely with Uzi there.

Uzi and I made two trips to Korea and Japan to talk about international finance. So we had a good chance to get to know each other. And on one trip, we stopped over from New York to San Francisco. And in San Francisco, there was a party or a gathering for people to meet us.

And one of the U.S. generals came over and slapped Uzi on the back and said, you're our landed aircraft carrier over there. We love you.

Well, I could see Uzi feeling, tightening up and getting very embarrassed and didn't really have anything to say. But the United States has always viewed Israel as just our foreign military base, not Israel.

So of course, it wants to secure this military base.

But when England first passed the act saying there should be in Israel the Balfour Declaration, it was because Britain wanted to control the Near East and its oil supplies.

When Israel was formed in the United Nations, the first country to recognize it was Stalin and Russia, who thought that Russians were going to have a major influence over Israel.

And then after that, of course, when Truman came in, the military immediately saw that America was replacing England as the chief of the Near East. And that was even after the fight, the overthrow of the Mossadegh government in Iran in 1953.

So from the United States, it's not Israel's wagging the American tail, just the opposite. You mentioned that America is supporting Israel. I don't think America is supporting Israel at all, nor do most Israelis, nor do most Democrats.

America is supporting Netanyahu. It's supporting Likud, not Israel. The majority of Israelis, certainly the non-religious Israelis, the core population of Israel since its founding, is opposing Likud and its policies.

And so what really is happening is that to the United States, Netanyahu is the Israeli version of Zelensky in the Ukraine.

And the advantage of having such an unpleasant, opportunist, and corrupt person as Netanyahu, who is under indictment for his bribery and corruption, is precisely that all of the attention now of the whole world that is so appalled by the attacks going on in Gaza, they're not blaming the United States.

They're blaming Israel. They're blaming Netanyahu and Israel for it, when it's the United States that has been sending plane load after plane load of bombs, of guns. There are 22,000 machine guns, automatic guns, that are banned for sale in the United States that America is sending for the settlers to use on the West Bank.

So there's a pretense of good cop, bad cop. You have Mr. Blinken telling Netanyahu, when you bomb hospitals, make sure you do it according to the rules of war. And when you kill 100,000 Gaza children, make sure it's all legal and in the war. And when you talk about ethnic cleansing and driving a population out, make sure that it's all done legal.

Well, of course, it's not the rules of war, and there are war crimes being committed, but the United States is pretending to tell Netanyahu and the Israeli government, use smaller bombs. Be more gentle when you bomb the children in the hospital, when actually this is all for show.

The United States is trying to say, well, we're only there to give help to an ally. The whole world has noticed that the U.S. now has two aircraft carriers in the Mediterranean, right off the Near Eastern shore, and it has an atomic submarine near the Persian Gulf.

Why are they there? President Biden and Congress say we are not going to have American troops fighting Hamas in Gaza. We're not going to get involved. Well, if the troops are not going to get involved, why are they there?

Well, we know what the American planes are doing. Yesterday, they bombed yet another airport and a fuel depot in Syria. They're bombing Syria. And it's very clear that they're there not to protect Israel, but to fight Iran.

Again and again, every American newspaper, when it talks about Hamas, it says Hamas is acting on behalf of Iran. When it talks about Hezbollah, and is there going to be an intervention from Lebanon against northern Israel, they say Hezbollah are the Iranian puppets.



Any time they talk about any Near Eastern leader, it's really that all these leaders are puppets of Iran, just like in Ukraine and Central Europe, they talk about Hungary and other countries as all being puppets of Putin in Russia.

Their focus, really – America isn't trying to fight to protect Ukraine. It's fighting for the last Ukrainian to be exhausted in what they'd hoped would be depleting Russia's military. Well, it hasn't worked.

Well, the same thing in Israel. If the United States is pushing Israel and Netanyahu to escalate, escalate, escalate, to do something that at a point is going to lead Nasrallah to finally say, okay, we can't take it anymore. We're coming in and helping rescue the Gazians and especially rescue the West Bank, where just as much fighting is taking place. We're going to come in.

And that's when the United States will then feel free to move not only against Lebanon, but all the way via Syria, Iraq, to Iran.

What we're seeing in Gaza and the West Bank today is only the catalyst, the trigger for the fact that the neocons say we are never going to have a better chance than we have right now to conquer Iran.

So this is the point for the showdown, that if America is to control Near Eastern oil, and by controlling Near Eastern oil, by bringing it under the US control, it can control the energy imports of much of the world.

And therefore, this gives American diplomats the power to cut off oil and gas and to sanction any country that tries to go multipolar, any country that tries to resist US unipolar control.

**BEN NORTON:** Yeah, Michael, I think you're really hitting such an important point, which is how this is one of the most geostrategic regions of the world, especially when it comes to hydrocarbons.

The entire global economy is still very heavily reliant on oil and gas, and especially considering the US is not part of OPEC, and especially now considering that OPEC has really expanded essentially to OPEC+ and now includes Russia.

That means that Saudi Arabia and Russia essentially can help control global oil prices. And we've seen this really, in fact, in the United States in the past few years with the rise of consumer price inflation.

We saw that the Biden administration was concerned about gas prices, in particular in the lead up to the midterm elections. And the Biden administration has been releasing a lot of oil from the strategic oil reserves of the United States.

And we can also see these kinds of statements in particular when we go back and look at the Bush administration. There are numerous people involved in the Bush administration and the so-called “War on Terror” who openly talked about how important it was for Washington to dominate this region.

And I’m really thinking of, in 2007, when the top US general and NATO commander Wesley Clark famously disclosed that the Bush administration had made plans to overthrow seven countries in five years. And those were countries in North Africa and West Asia.

Specifically, he revealed in an [interview with journalist Amy Goodman on Democracy Now](#) that Washington’s plans were to overthrow the governments of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and finally Iran:

***WESLEY CLARK:** About 10 days after 9/11, I went through the Pentagon and I saw Secretary Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz. I went downstairs just to say hello to some of the people on the Joint Staff who used to work for me.*

*And one of the generals called me and he said, “Sir, you’ve got to come in and talk to me a second”.*

*I said, “Well, you’re too busy”. He said, “No, no”. He says, “We’ve made the decision; we’re going to war with Iraq”.*

*This was on or about the 20th of September. I said, “We’re going to war with Iraq, why?” He said, “I don’t know”. He said, “I guess they don’t know what else to do”.*

*So I said, “Well, did they find some information connecting Saddam to al-Qaeda?” He said, “No, no”. He says, “There’s nothing new that way. They’ve just made the decision to go to war with Iraq”.*

*He said, “I guess it’s like we don’t know what to do about terrorists, but we’ve got a good military and we can take down governments”.*

*And he said, “I guess if the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem has to look like a nail”.*

*So I came back to see him a few weeks later, and by that time we were bombing in Afghanistan.*

*I said, "Are we still going to war with Iraq?" And he said, "Oh, it's worse than that".*

*He said, he reached over on his desk, he picked up a piece of paper, and he said, "I just got this down from upstairs", meaning the Secretary of Defense's office today, and he said, "This is a memo that describes how we're going to take out seven countries in five years, starting with Iraq and then Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and finishing off Iran".*

*I said, "Is it classified?" He said, "Yes, sir". I said, "Well, don't show it to me".*

*And I saw him a year or so ago, and I said, "You remember that?" And he said, "Sorry, I didn't show you that memo! I didn't show it to you!"*

**AMY GOODMAN:** *I'm sorry, what did you say his name was? (laughs)*

**WESLEY CLARK:** *I'm not going to give you his name. (laughs)*

**AMY GOODMAN:** *So go through the countries again.*

**WESLEY CLARK:** *Well, starting with Iraq, then Syria and Lebanon, then Libya, then Somalia and Sudan, and then back to Iran.*

**BEN NORTON:** And since then, we of course saw the U.S. war on Iraq. We of course saw the proxy war in Syria that still goes on in many ways. The U.S. is occupying one-third of Syrian territory, including the oil rich areas.

And Trump himself, President Donald Trump, boasted in a 2020 interview with Fox News host Laura Ingraham that he was leaving U.S. troops in Syria to take the oil:

**DONALD TRUMP:** *And then they say, "He left troops in Syria". You know what I did? I left troops to take the oil. I took the oil. The only troops I have are taking the oil. They're protecting the oil.*

**LAURA INGRAHAM:** *We're not taking the oil. We're not taking it.*

**DONALD TRUMP:** *Well, maybe we will, maybe we won't.*

**LAURA INGRAHAM:** *They're protecting the facilities.*

**DONALD TRUMP:** *I don't know, maybe we should take it. But we have the oil.  
Right now, the United States has the oil.*

*So they say, "He left troops in Syria". No, I got rid of all of them, other than we're  
protecting the oil; we have the oil.*

**BEN NORTON:** We also saw the U.S. impose sanctions on Lebanon, which contributed to hyperinflation and the destruction of the Lebanese economy. And that was largely because Hezbollah is part of the government, and the U.S. has been pressuring the Lebanese government to create a new government without Hezbollah.

We also saw, of course, that NATO destroyed the Libyan state in 2011. Somalia also has a failed state. And Sudan was divided in no small part thanks to the U.S. and Israel supporting South Sudan's separatist movement on ethno-religious lines, using religious sectarianism.

So if you look at the list of countries that Wesley Clark named in 2006, the seven countries in five years, again, that was Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and finally Iran; the only country that really has been able to maintain state stability, that has not been completely devastated by the United States, is Iran.

Of course, it took longer than five years, but the U.S. was pretty successful. And of course Israel has played an important role in this U.S. goal to destabilize those governments in the region.

**MICHAEL HUDSON:** Well, let's look and see how this was done. Remember after America was attacked on 9/11, there was a meeting at the White House, and everybody knew that the pilots were Saudi Arabians, and they knew that some of the pilots had been staying at the Saudi embassy in Los Angeles, I think, in the United States.

But after 9/11, there was a cabinet meeting, and Rumsfeld said to the people there, look and find any link you can get to Iraq, forget Saudi Arabia, no problem, Iraq is the key. And he directed them to find it, and 9/11 became the excuse for attacking not Saudi Arabia, but Iraq, and going right on with it.

Well, you needed a similar crisis in Libya. They said in Libya, there was some, I think, fundamentalists in the suburbs of one of the [cities], not the capital city, that were causing problems. And so you have to “protect” the innocent people from [Muammar Gadhafi], and you go in and grab all of their gold reserves, all of their money, and you take over the oil on behalf of France’s oil monopoly.

Well, this is the role of the fighting in Gaza today. Netanyahu’s fight against Gaza is being used as the excuse for America moving its warships there, its submarines, and bombing, along with Israel, the Syrian airport so that the Syrians are not able to move weapons or any kind of military support either to Lebanon, to the west, or Iran, to the east.

So it’s obvious that all of what we’re seeing is somehow to soften up public opinion for the fact that, well, just like we had to invade Iraq because of 9/11, we have to now finally fight and take out the oil refineries of Iran and their scientific institutes and any laboratories where they may be doing atomic research.

And Iran realizes this. Last week, the Iranian press TV said that their defense minister says that if there’s any attack on Iran, whether by Israel or by anyone else, the U.S. and its foreign bases are going to be hit hard.

Iran, Russia, China have all looked at the Gaza situation not as if it’s an Israeli action, but as if it’s the U.S. action. They all see exactly that it’s all about Iran, and the American press only says when it talks about Gaza or Hamas or Hezbollah or any other group, it’s always the Iranian tool so-and-so.

They’re demonizing Iran in the same way that the neocons have demonized Russia to prepare for America declaring an undeclared war against Iran. And they may even declare war.

Last night, on [November] 8, the Republicans had their presidential debate without Trump, and Nikki Haley said, you know, we’ve got to fight Iran, we’ve got to conquer it. And DeSantis of Florida said, yes, kill them all. He didn’t say who the them was. Was it Hamas? Was it everybody who lives in Gaza? Was it all of the Arabs in the Middle East?

And we’re really seeing something very much like the Crusades here. It’s a real fight for who is going to control energy, because, again, the key, if you can control the world’s flow of energy, you can do to the whole world what the United States did to Germany last year by blowing up the Nord Stream pipelines.

You can grind its industry to a halt, its chemical industry, its steelmaking industry, any of its energy-intensive industries, if countries do not agree to U.S. unipolar control. That’s why it wants to control these areas.

Well, the wildcard here is Saudi Arabia. Well, in two days, I think you're going to have the Iranian president visit Saudi Arabia, and we're going to see what's going to happen.

But Saudi Arabia finds that while its role is key, Saudi Arabia could simply say we're not going to export more oil until America pulls out of the Near East. But then all of Saudi Arabia's monetary savings are invested in the U.S.

The United States is holding the world hostage, not only by controlling its oil and gas and energy, but by controlling its finance. It's like you have your money in a mafia bank or in Bankman-Fried's cryptocurrency mutual fund. They can do whatever they want with it.

So I think what would happen is it's very unlikely that Saudi Arabia is ostensibly going to visibly break with the United States because the U.S. would hold it hostage.

But I think what it would do would be what has been talked about ever since the 1960s, when similar problems came with Iran. And Iran's ace in the hole has always been the ability to sink a ship in the Hormuz Strait, where the oil goes through a very narrow little strait, where if you sink a tanker there or a warship, it's going to block all of the sea trade with Saudi Arabia.

And that would certainly, number one, take Saudi Arabia off the hook for saying, we can't help it. Of course, we'd love to export oil, but we can't because the shipping lanes are all blocked because you, America, attacked Iran and they defended themselves by sinking the ship. So you can't send your aircraft carriers and submarines to attack Iran. That's very understandable.

But the United States is causing a world crisis.

Well, obviously, the United States knows that that's going to happen because it's been discussed literally for 50 years. Since I was at the Hudson Institute working on national security, it was being discussed what to do when Iran sinks the ship in the Strait of Hormuz.

Well, the United States figures, okay, oil prices are going to go up. And if Iran fights back in this way, we then will have the power to do to the world what we did to Germany in 2022 when we cut off its oil. But in this case, we don't take the blame.

We'll say, oh, we didn't block the Saudi and Arab oil trade. It was that Iran that blocked it, and that's why we're going to bomb Iran, assuming that they can.

So that, I think, is the contingency plan. And just as America had a contingency plan just like that, waiting for an opportunity, like 9-11, they needed a trigger, and Netanyahu has provided the trigger. And that's why the United States has been backing Netanyahu.

And of course, Iran says, well, we have the ability to really wipe out Israel. And in Congress, General Miley and the others have all said, well, we know that Iran could wipe out Israel. That's why we have to attack Iran.

But in attacking Iran, you send its missiles off to Israel, and again, Israel will end up being the Near Eastern equivalent of Ukraine. And that sort of is the plan, and I think a lot of Israelis see this, and they're the ones who are worried and are opposing Netanyahu and trying to prevent him from triggering a whole set of military exchanges that Israel won't be able to resist.

And even though Iran, I'm sure they can bomb some places in Iran, but now that you have Russia, China, all supporting Iran through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, you're having the lines being drawn very, very clearly.

So it seems that this scenario is inevitable because Mearsheimer pointed out that it's impossible to have a negotiated solution or settlement between Israel and Palestine. He said you can't have a two-state solution because the Palestinian state is going to be like an Indian reservation in America, all sort of cut apart and isolated, not really a state.

And you can't have a single state because a single state is a theocratic state. It's like, again, it's like the United States in the Wild West in the 19th century.

And I think the way to put it in perspective is to realize that what we're seeing today in the attempt to split the world is very much like, excuse me, very much like what happened in the 12th and 13th century with the Crusades.

**BEN NORTON:** Yeah, Michael, you raise a lot of very important points there. And I know you want to talk further about the Crusades and the historical analogy. And I think you made a really good point about the US empire standing in as the new Crusaders.

But before you move away from the more contemporary political discussion, I wanted to highlight two very important points that you stressed.

One is not only the hydrocarbon reserves in the Middle East, which are so important for the world economy and in the US attempt to maintain control over oil and gas supplies and in particular energy costs.

There's also an election coming up in 2024, and the US is concerned about gas prices and inflation. And of course, energy inputs are a key factor in inflation.

But furthermore, this region is strategic because of trade routes. Of course, the Suez Canal, according to looking at [data here from the World Economic Forum](#), 30% of the world's shipping container volume transits through the Suez Canal and 12% of all global trade consists of goods that pass through the Suez Canal.

And we saw this in 2021 when there was this big media scandal when a US ship got stuck in the Suez Canal. And this, of course, also came at the time when the world was coming out of the pandemic and there were all these supply chain shocks.

So we can see how sensitive the global economy is to even small issues in the global supply chain. And when you talk about shipping routes, we're not only talking about the Suez Canal, we're also talking about in the Red Sea toward the south.

You also have the [Bab al-Mandab](#). This is a very important strait off of the coast of Yemen. And in the war in Yemen, starting in 2014 and 2015, a lot of the fighting back by the U.S. in this war was in the south, off of the Bab al-Mandab, because this is such an important strait where every single day millions of barrels of oil flow through this strait.

And this also reminded me, Michael, you were talking about the historical context. And if you go back to 1956, Israel invaded Egypt. And why was that? Israel invaded Egypt because Egypt's leftist president, Nasser, nationalized the Suez Canal.

And at that moment, what was very interesting is that the U.K. and France were strongly supporting Israel in this war against Egypt because they were concerned also about Nasser's nationalization of the Suez. At that moment, the U.S. wasn't as deeply pro-Israel as it later became.

Of course, in 1967, in the Six-Day War, Israel attacked the neighboring Arab states and occupied part of Egypt, the Sinai, and then also what became Gaza. Israel occupied the Golan Heights of Syria, which remain illegally occupied Syrian territory today. And Israel occupied the West Bank, what we call the West Bank today.



But another important detail about that is, after the 1967 war, Israel increasingly became much more of a U.S. ally.

Whereas the first generation of Israeli leaders were much more, many of them were European, whereas the later generations of Israelis have been really American.

I mean, someone like Netanyahu, he is an American. Netanyahu was raised in the United States. He went to high school in Philadelphia. He went to high school with Reggie Jackson, by the way. He spent his most formative years in the U.S. He went to college at MIT.

He then worked in Boston, and he worked with many Republicans that he became friends with, like Mitt Romney, like Donald Trump. And then when he went back to Israel, he was sent to the U.S. to be a diplomat in the United States.

So the new generation of Israeli leaders is much more American, essentially.

And another detail you mentioned about Iran is so important, because, up until the Iranian revolution in 1979, the Iran of the Shah, the U.S.-backed monarchy, was such an important ally in the region.

And in fact, Saudi Arabia and Iran were famously referred to as the twin pillars. Saudi Arabia was the west pillar and Iran was the east pillar. The U.S. used to try to dominate this region, of course, with the support of Israel as well.

Well, with the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the U.S. lost that crucial east pillar, which meant that Israel became even more important from the perspective of the U.S. imperialism to maintain control over this region.

So I just wanted to mention those details of the strategic importance of the trade routes, like the Bab al-Mandab Strait, like the Suez Canal, and also the fact that the Iranian Revolution fundamentally shifted U.S. policy in the region and made Israel even more important from the perspective of U.S. imperialism.

And now we're in a moment where, as you mentioned, the U.S. is even losing control over Saudi Arabia. So it's losing both of its pillars, which is, again, why Washington is so desperate in propping up Israel, despite the fact that the entire region is completely against these settler-colonialist policies and these ethnic cleansing policies that Israel is carrying out right now, as the entire world is watching.

**MICHAEL HUDSON:** Well, to U.S. diplomats, what you call the support of Israel is really the support of the U.S.' ability to militarily control the rest of the Near East.

It's all about oil. America is not giving all this money to Israel because it loves Israel, but because Israel is the military base from which the United States can attack Syria, Iraq, and Iran and Lebanon. So it's a military base.

And of course, it can frame this in terms of pro-Israeli, pro-Jewish policy, but this is only for the public relations view of the State Department.

If American strategy is based on energy in the Near East, then Israel is only a means to this end. It's not the end itself. And that's why the United States needed to have an aggressive Israeli government.

You can look at Netanyahu as being, in a way, a U.S. puppet, very much like Zelensky. Their positions are identical in their reliance on the United States against the majority of their own people.

So you keep talking about America's support of Israel. It's not supporting Israel at all. It rejects the majority of Israelis. It supports the Israeli military, not the Israeli society or the culture, have nothing to do with Judaism at all. This is pure military politics, and that's how I've always heard it discussed among the military and national security people.

So you want to be careful not to be taken in by the cover story.

There's one other means of control, I think, that we should mention, and that is, you've had in the last month or so all sorts of statements by the United States that as soon as Russia conquers the Ukraine and solidifies its control, it's going to bring up claims against war crimes, crimes against humanity, against Russia.

America is trying to use the crooked court system. The International Criminal Court is a branch of the Pentagon in the State Department, and it's the kangaroo court. The idea is that somehow the kangaroo court can give America judgments against Putin as they've declared him to be arrested anywhere he goes of people who respect the kangaroo court, and they can have all sorts of sanctions against Russian property elsewhere.

Well, look at how on earth are they going to justify these claims of war crimes against Russia if in the view of what's happening between Israel and Gaza right now, and in fact, the arms and the bombs that are being used against Gaza are U.S. bombs, U.S. arms. The U.S. is fueling it all.

How on earth can the United States not accuse itself of war crimes on the basis of what it's trying to accuse Russia of? Part of the splitting of the world that you're going to see, whether or not the United States can actually bomb Iran, is going to be a whole setup of parallel courts and an isolation, not only of the United States, but as Europe is coming in.

Basically, there's a fight for who is going to control the world right now, and that's why I mentioned the Crusades.

I want to say I've been writing a history of the evolution of financial policy. I've done two volumes already, one on the Bronze Age Near East, [\*...and forgive them their debts\*](#), and the other on classical antiquity, [\*The Collapse of Antiquity\*](#). I'm now working on the third volume, which covers the Crusades to World War I.

It's really all about an attempt by Rome, that had hardly any economic power at all, to take over all of the five Christian bishoprics that were made. Constantinople was really the new Rome. That was the head of Orthodox Christianity.

The emperor of Constantinople was really the emperor over the whole Christian world. It was followed by Antioch, Alexandria, and finally Jerusalem.

The Crusades really began, before they attacked the Near East it began in the 11th century. And Rome was finally being attacked by the Norman armies that were coming in and grabbing parts of France and had moved into Italy.

So the papacy made a deal with the Norman warlords, and it said, "We will give you the divine right to rule, we will recognize you as the Christian king, and we will excommunicate all of your enemies, but you have to pledge feudal fealty, loyalty to us, and you have to let us appoint your bishops and control the churches, which control most of your land, and you have to pay us tribute".

The papacy all during the 10th century was controlled by a small group of aristocratic families around Rome that treated the papacy just as they treat the local political mayor of a city or the local administrators.

The church was just sort of run by a family. It had nothing to do with Christian religion at all. It was just, this is the church property, and one of our relatives, we're always going to have as the pope.

Well, the popes didn't have any troops in the late 11th century, and so they got the troops by making a deal with the Normans, and they decided, okay, we're going to have an ideal, we're going to mount the Crusades, and we're going to rescue Jerusalem from the "infidels", the Muslims.

Well, the problem is that Jerusalem didn't need a rescue, because all throughout the medieval world, throughout Islam, no matter what the religion of the governing classes was, there was a religious tolerance, and that continued for hundreds of years under the Ottoman Empire.

There was only one group that was intolerant, and that was the Romans, that said, "We have to control all of Christianity, in order to prevent these aristocratic Italian families from taking over again".

And so they mounted the Crusades, nominally against Jerusalem, but they ended up sacking Constantinople, and two centuries later, by 1291, the Christians lost in Acre.

The whole Crusade against the Near East failed.

I think you can see the parallel that I'm going to be drawing.

So most of the Crusades were not fought against Islam, because Islam was too strong.

The Crusades were fought against other Christians. And the fight of Roman Christianity was against the original Christianity for itself, as it existed over the last 10 centuries.

Well, you're having something like that today. Just as Rome appointed the Normans as feudal rulers, William the Conqueror in Sicily, the U.S. appoints Zelensky, supports Netanyahu, supports client oligarchs in Russia, supports Latin American dictators.

So you have a U.S. view of the world that is not only unipolar, but in order to have unipolar U.S. control of the world, the U.S. has to be in charge of treating any foreign state, any foreign president as a feudal serf, basically, that they owe feudal loyalty to the United States' sponsors.

And just as you had the Inquisition formed in the 12th century, really, to enforce this obedience to Rome as opposed to independent southern France, and independent Italy, and Arab science in Spain, you have today the U.S. using the National Endowment for Democracy, and all of the organizations controlled by Victoria Nuland with her cookies, to support things.

Well, you're having the whole strategy of the Roman takeover, how it was going to take over other countries, how it was going to prevent other countries from becoming independent of Rome, is almost

sentence for sentence what you get in American national security reports, how to control other countries. And that's really the fight that we're seeing there.

And against that, you're finding the fight of other countries, the global majority. But in this case, whereas Constantinople was looted in 1204 and sort of destroyed by the Fourth Crusade, Russia, and China, and Iran and the other countries have not been looted.

The only thing that the United States can do right now is it's setting up this military plan to attack Iran. What is the role going to be of, for instance, India? The attack on Iran and on oil is at the same time an attack on the Chinese-led Belt and Road Initiative, the whole attempt to control transportation, not only oil, but transportation by the global majority for each other's mutual growth, mutual gain, mutual trade.

And the United States is trying to have an alternative plan for all of this that would run from India, essentially largely through Israel, and making a cut right across Gaza, which is one of the big problems that are being discussed now, to the Israeli control of Gaza, which would control its offshore oil and gas.

So you're having the wild cards in the U.S. plan, India, Saudi Arabia, what will it do, and Turkey, because Turkey also has an interest in this oil and gas. And if the Islamic countries decide that they're really under attack, and this attack by the Christian West against Islam is really a fight to the death, then Turkey will join with Saudi Arabia and with all of the other countries, the Shiites, and the Sunnis, and the Alawites will join together and say, what we have in common is the Islamic religion.

That is really going to be essentially the extension of America's fight against China and Russia.

So what we're seeing, I'm going to try to summarize now, what we're really seeing is having fought Russia to the last Ukrainian, and threatening to fight Iran to the last Israeli. The United States is trying to send arms to Taiwan to say, wouldn't you like to fight to the last Taiwanese against China? And that's really the U.S. strategy all over the world.

It's trying to fuel other countries to fight wars for its own control. That's how Rome used the Norman armies to conquer southern Italy, England, and Yugoslavia.

Israel, and what is in the news over the whole attacks in Gaza, is only the opening stage, the trigger for this war, just as the shooting in Sarajevo started World War I in Serbia started everything.

**BEN NORTON:** Well, you raised so many interesting points, Michael, and I think your analysis is very fresh and unique and very insightful. I wish we had more time to go into some of these topics, but we've already been speaking for about an hour.

So I think we're going to wrap up here. But I do want to thank you, Michael, for joining us. And of course, we'll be back very soon for more analysis.

For people who are interested, I actually have interviewed Michael. I did an [interview recently on classical antiquity, and Rome and Greece](#). And he has also written about the history of debt up through the creation of Christianity in his book *And Forgive Them Their Debts*. And now he is working on this political, economic, materialist history of the Crusades.

**MICHAEL HUDSON:** I didn't realize when I began the book in the 1980s, drafting it, I didn't realize how critical the Roman papacy was, and how similar it was to the State Department, and CIA, and the blob today in its plans for world conquest.

**BEN NORTON:** Well, I'm sure in the future we will have many opportunities to discuss that research. Of course, for people who want to get more of Michael's very important analysis, you should check out the show that he co-hosts here with friend of the show, [Radhika Desai](#), and that is [Geopolitical Economy Hour](#).

If you go to our website, [geopoliticeconomy.com](#), or if you go to our YouTube channel, you can find a playlist with all of the different episodes of Geopolitical Economy Hour. So thanks again, Michael, and we'll definitely have you back very soon.

**MICHAEL HUDSON:** It's good to be here. Thank you.