



Written by [Paul Dragu](#) on March 19, 2026

How Israel Fooled Trump Into War With Iran, According to Joe Kent

“How did Donald Trump, after 10 years of saying one thing, do, in the pivotal act of his presidency, exactly the opposite?”

Popular commentariat Tucker Carlson posed this question at the beginning of his anticipated [interview](#) with the former director of the National Counterterrorism Center, Joe Kent, who is also a former Green Beret and an 11-tour combat veteran. The interview was published Wednesday.

Kent resigned Monday. He said he did it to protest America’s war on Iran, although there are allegations that it was because the FBI is investigating him. His resignation has stirred a lot of chatter on Capitol Hill, in the commentariat realm, and on social media. It has even prompted coverage in Israeli, Iranian, and Russian media. It’s a big deal. Kent is taking a volley of attacks, not necessarily for resigning, but because of where he’s placing the blame for this war.



AP Images
Joe Kent

Carlson’s question — Why did Trump launch this war?— is one that many Americans are asking, specifically those familiar with Trump’s numerous and persistent campaign promises that, if elected president, he would end the “forever” wars, as well as the “regime change” ones. The latter is exactly what America is attempting in Iran today.

During the two-hour conversation with Carlson, Kent essentially said the reason Trump reversed his stance on regime-change wars comes down to one factor: foreign influence, particularly that of Israel. America’s “best” ally in the Middle East, as far as Kent is concerned, intentionally dragged the United States into war.

Was Iran Close to Having Nuclear Weapons?

“Was Iran on the verge of getting a nuclear weapon?” Carlson asked, trying to get to the bottom of one of the most important factors that justifies or discredits the war. Kent said no. Iran wasn’t close to building nuclear weapons before the current war started, nor last summer before the U.S. hit three Iranian nuclear sites. He continued:

The Iranians have had a religious ruling, a fatwa, against actually developing a nuclear weapon since 2004. That’s been in place since 2004; that’s available in the public sphere. But then also, we had no intelligence to indicate that that fatwa was being disobeyed or [that] it was on the cusp of being lifted.



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However, he also acknowledged that the Iranians had no intention of completely abandoning their nuclear program. They saw what happened to Moammar Gadhafi, the longtime dictator of Libya who was “regime changed” — and killed — after he closed down his country’s nuclear weapons program in 2003, and they wanted nothing to do with that. Kent said the Iranians have always been “pragmatic.” They wanted to retain the ability to develop nuclear weapons in case they needed to do so to defend themselves. Iran could’ve always traded oil to get nuclear weapons from Pakistan or another country, he added, but they didn’t. Moreover, U.S. assessments consistently concluded that the Iranians were either several months or a year or two away from nuclear weapons development.

(The International Atomic Energy Agency reported last year that Iran had enriched uranium to 60-percent purity, considered a short step from weapons-grade levels of 90 percent. U.S. intelligence has corroborated this, and confirmed that it’s far more than needed for civilian use.)

Were They an “Imminent Threat”?

When asked if he knew of anyone in the U.S. government who claimed the existence of intelligence that said Iran posed an imminent threat or was on the cusp of building a nuclear weapon, Kent said no. However, he added, that doesn’t mean Israel didn’t provide intel saying exactly that. “I know the Israeli officials — some in intelligence, some in government — will come to U.S. government officials and they will say all kinds of things that we know from our intelligence just simply isn’t true.” He added that the way Israel infused these ideas into our policy was “pretty slick.” They would tell U.S. officials that they had intel saying Iran was about to go nuclear. But when asked for official corroboration, they would say it wasn’t flowing through the intel channels yet. He said that “a lot of times they’ll sample different things until they find what sticks.”

Kent’s assessment that Iran didn’t pose an imminent threat contradicts what Trump said during his middle-of-the-night message when Washington launched the war on February 28. “Our objective is to defend the American people by eliminating imminent threats from the Iranian regime,” Trump said then.

Kent’s former boss, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, also would not corroborate Trump’s claim that Iran posed an imminent threat. As we [reported](#), she refused to confirm while testifying before the Senate Select Subcommittee on Intelligence on Wednesday that Iran posed an imminent threat to the United States. She also said that last year’s attack destroyed Iran’s nuclear capability and that they hadn’t begun rebuilding. However, perhaps in an act of self-preservation, she added that the president is the one who determines what qualifies as an imminent threat and what doesn’t. Last year, before the U.S. strikes on Iran’s three nuclear sites, Gabbard said our intelligence had indicated that the Iranians weren’t building nuclear weapons.

Moving the Bar

According to Kent, neoconservatives and other elements of the pro-Israel lobby had moved the bar on what was acceptable for Iran to have, the intention being to spoil negotiations between America and Iran and to trigger conflict. The lobby turned the new red line from *some* acceptable enrichment to *none whatsoever*. “Enrichment became the narrative,” he pointed out. “So that hung up and that short-circuited and really sabotaged the entire negotiations. ... The Israelis came in, they moved that red line, and they would do a lot to say, ‘Oh, they’re enriching.’”

After that, the propaganda “ecosystem” jumped in to provide support for the new narrative, he said.



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Broadcasters like Mark Levin and Sean Hannity, “they would say basically the exact same thing.” Or *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* would jump in with support for the new talking points. Carlson asked for clarification: “So Israeli government talking points laundered through Fox News and *The Wall Street Journal* — is that the ecosystem you’re talking about?” Yes, Kent said, adding that Israeli officials including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would also follow up to hammer in those same points.

If anyone could’ve negotiated with the Iranians, it was Trump, Kent noted, because he had proven he was willing to take out their leaders — he mentioned Qasem Soleimani, whom Trump killed in 2020 — and go after their proxies. The Iranians had no appetite to test Trump, he said, but the president was essentially bamboozled into war.

Kent also floated a theory that Trump may have felt threatened into green-lighting this war. He brought up the security failure in Butler, Pennsylvania, which the public still knows little about. There was also at least one instance when a random person was able to get past Trump’s security and walk right up to greet the president, Kent added. Then there was the assassination of Charlie Kirk, which Kent said Trump *may have* connected to his security vulnerabilities. The idea, Kent summarized, was not necessarily that Trump felt afraid for his life, but perhaps for his family.

Role of Israeli Intelligence

Kent reaffirmed the common perception that Israel has a top-notch intel service. “They’re very proficient, they’re very good.” Washington receives a lot of Middle East intel from Israel, he added. “However, whenever we get information from a liaison service, I think it’s incredibly important to realize that it could be given to us to influence us as well as to inform us.” He suggested that U.S. officials are overly trusting of the Israelis, forgetting that sometimes their agenda is not aligned with ours:

When it comes to what’s our strategic goal in a war that’s going to have ramifications for our nation, for the region, for global energy supplies, I think most folks right now at the Pentagon and the intelligence agencies, would say us and the Israelis actually have a different objective here.

Kent confirmed for Carlson his suspicion that no one has a plan for what comes after possible regime change in Iran. “The Israelis are completely fine with Iran slipping into chaos,” he said, because it won’t be a threat to them anymore. For the United States, however, a chaotic Iran is problematic. It disrupts the global energy flow, shuts down the Strait of Hormuz, triggers more migration chaos for Europe, and causes problems for America’s partners in the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Confirmation of Israeli Influence

The notion that Israel dragged America into this war has been repeatedly corroborated. Early in March, when asked why we went to war against Iran, Secretary of State Marco Rubio told reporters, “We knew that there was going to be an Israeli action, we knew that that would precipitate an attack against American forces, and we knew that if we didn’t preemptively go after them before they launched those attacks, we would suffer higher casualties.” House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) said the same thing. Israel was determined to act on its own, which left the White House with a “very difficult decision,” said the speaker. Like Rubio, Johnson framed the U.S. action as a defensive necessity. Moreover, there is



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highlight reel after highlight reel of Netanyahu warning American policymakers that Iran was just weeks or months away from having nuclear weapons; his warnings go back decades. Also, since January 2025, Netanyahu has visited the Trump White House more than any other foreign leader. (Second on that list is Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Is it a coincidence that both men's agenda has been to drag the U.S. into conflicts against their regional rivals?)

Kent pointed out that this all leads to the big question: Who is in charge of America's foreign policy? In this case, the Israelis "drove the decision to take this action, which we knew would set off a series of events."

There Was an Alternative

He suggested that Washington could've reacted differently. We could've told Israel not to attack, and warned them that if they chose to anyway, we would take something away. He said that since we provide defense services for Israel, "we get to dictate the terms of when they go on the offensive, otherwise they stand to lose that relationship." Kent also pointed out that, if the Israelis had gone at it alone, we could have simply told the Iranians that we had no role in the attack, and that therefore it would be in their best interest not to retaliate against any U.S. assets. Instead, what happened is that the Israelis "felt emboldened" that, no matter what they did, America would fall in line with support.

Carlson summarized: "Israel got us into this war. Its lobby in the United States pressured the president and its prime minister in Israel told the president, 'We're going without you. Join us, because if you don't, your troops in the region, your interests in the region, your citizens in the region, will all be at risk. You have no choice.'"

He concluded that the reason Kent is incurring so many attacks is because he's telling the truth. Among the attacks that Carlson waved off is the allegation that Kent was leaking classified information to the media. The FBI is indeed investigating Kent for allegedly leaking classified information, and reports say the probe kicked off before he resigned. Is the investigation retribution for what he is doing now — or is he lashing out against the government for its investigation into him?



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