

Trita Parsi: Why the World Is Quietly Taking Iran's Side in the War

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#Glenn

Welcome back, everyone. Trita Parsi joins us today, the executive vice president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. And, well, to be honest, I wanted to ask a few questions today about articles from your Substack. And, well, on that note, I would like to recommend to all our viewers that they check out your Substack. It's the Trita Parsi Substack, and I have left a link in the description. Well, let me start by welcoming you back to the program.

#Trita Parsi

Thank you so much. Great to be with you again, Glenn.

#Glenn

Well, one of the issues I wanted to ask about was that Trump announced this economic D-Day with a new sense of optimism that he now has leverage. And I was wondering, how are you assessing this? I mean, has Trump been able to find a better bargaining position vis-à-vis the Iranians? I think those are two separate issues.

#Trita Parsi

I think the bargaining position, to a certain extent, has strengthened because I do think that they have managed to get a larger number of tankers and, more importantly, a larger amount of oil out of the strait than they did before. I think some of the numbers that are out there are a bit exaggerated. But using these VLCCs, these massive tankers, they can take up to 2 million barrels of oil. You just need to get about five to eight, ten of them a day, and you actually have recuperated a very significant amount of the oil that used to be going through this strait.

An element that complicates that picture, however, is that it's not so that the Iranians are not shooting at these ships because they can't. It's because some of that oil is Iran's own oil. The Iranians are actually selling some of their oil through Iraqis and others because the Iranians, too, need a way of getting out of the blockade. And so if they can get their oil through the southern channel under the flag of someone else, and then sell it and find ways to get paid for it, of course, then that serves Iran's interest as well. And at the end of the day, everyone knew it is in Iran's own interest as well to make sure that there's at least some opening in this trade.

But nevertheless, I do think that he has created a scenario in which the status quo is probably slightly more painful for the Iranians than it is for the United States. And I think this is where we go to this D-Day announcement. It is precisely this status quo that the Trump administration wants to keep at least till the midterms. And perhaps after the midterms, they'll make a decision as to whether they want to go back to negotiations or war. But they want to keep this for a period now to make sure that nothing major happens until the midterms. They want to get Iran off of the front pages, out of the headlines, out of page two and three in the papers, out of the mainstream news coverage.

Because as close as they get to the midterms, they want to make sure that the connection between Iran and higher gas prices and all of those different things is made as obscure as possible. From a political standpoint, that makes sense. If you have a lot of activity, whether it's escalation or whether it's diplomacy, it leads to a scenario in which Iran is back in the headlines. So I think they're trying to create a new status quo. That means, however, that they're likely not going to try to impose these sanctions in a very, very dramatic way, meaning that there will be far more bark than there is bite when it comes to the announcement of these sanctions.

Far more decibels on the announcement, far less so on the implementation. Because if they really try to implement this in a very firm way, first of all, that means that they would have to take on Chinese purchases of oil. And that's a different conversation that I don't think they're ready to do. But even if they did and they managed to impose a lot of pain on the Iranians, then the Iranians are going to counter-escalate. And I think the administration fully understands this. And as a result, they would break their own status quo and undermine their own interest in making sure that they're keeping these things out of the headlines. But it makes sense from their standpoint to do this big announcement, make it sound as if this is going to be devastating, all of the stuff that Trump actually is quite good at, make a lot of noise, and then there's far less substance behind it.

But this time around, it really, I think, is deliberate, because it serves their interest to keep the status quo until the midterms. And then after the midterms, it's a different story. Perhaps they're using this time to restock interceptors, move them from Europe and from Asia to Iran in order to prepare for a third round. Or perhaps they're going to wait and see, and see if the new situation with more oil going through the strait puts the U.S. in a better negotiating position and, as a result, go back to the negotiating table. But the message that has been sent so far by the administration, privately and publicly, is that they're not interested in lifting the blockade.

If they're not interested in lifting the blockade, and they're not engaging in any diplomacy, it means that there is no deal right now that the United States is interested in. And I suspect that will be the case up until the midterms. Now, what Iran does is a different story, and it can completely uproot the apple cart here. Let me just add one other thing. I've had a lot of conversations with European and Asian diplomats. Not a single one of the ones that I've spoken to have said that, yes, either their capital or their D.C. embassy was contacted by the U.S. Treasury with some specific demands of relationships or connections with Iranian banks that they needed to sever. And if this was really going to be implemented, I would have expected that we would have at least a couple of those phone calls by now.

#Glenn

Well, I guess I have two questions about that. On one, what will Trump do with this? Is this just politics, you know, making it through the midterms? Or, you know, if you have leverage, wouldn't they have to use it to renegotiate something with the Iranians? Or is this the only purpose, to, as you said, push this out of the media? And also, the idea, as you said, that Iran will not be very passive, especially if the sanctions are enforced. And it seems to me that the Iranians are trying to take a more active position. That is, they want to deter not just countries from striking Iran with impunity, but also the ability to put sanctions on Iran and try to weaken it. Because, well, the purpose is the same: to destroy the country. So they will no longer, at least the message I seem to be getting from Tehran is, they will no longer accept any of this. So any country who goes to use sanctions against Iran, the Iranians will have to fight back in some way. So, yes, how do you see this?

#Trita Parsi

Yeah. No, I think you're quite right in the sense that the Iranians are going to take a much more unforgiving position on these issues. But then again, if the implementation of this actually is very, very limited, then there's also much less for the Iranians to react to. So again, I think the administration is presenting a picture, and then they're pursuing a very different picture. And as long as they're pursuing a very different picture, the Iranian retaliation or counter-escalation will either not happen or will be very limited. Because I think what the Iranians are doing right now is actually a counter to this strategy. One, they're waiting to see if Trump gets over his emotional hiccups at this point and is willing to come back to the table.

And they made it very clear what they want to see. They wanted a return to the MOU. They're not asking for a stronger MOU. They're not asking for a different MOU. They may want more clarity on certain parts of it, but I think that is something that probably quite a few countries would like to see, including the U.S. But they're not saying that they want a different MOU. The U.S. has signaled that they're not interested in the MOU right now. They haven't said that they're not interested in the MOU per se or permanently. So what I think the Iranians are doing right now is, first, they're waiting

to see if there may be a change on the American side. They're waiting to see whether these sanctions actually will be fully implemented, if they're going to be biting, and if so, how much.

If they turn out to be very effective and costly for the Iranians, then I think they will retaliate directly in many different ways. If they end up being impactful, but not in a very dramatic way, meaning that they change the trajectory—the cost of the status quo is more painful to Iran than it is to the U.S., but not in a dramatic way—but it means that over time Iran will be in an increasingly relatively weak position, then I think the Iranians are likely to retaliate or counter-escalate then as well, but perhaps not urgently. In that scenario, I suspect that the Iranians will retaliate sometime closer to the midterm elections in order to get maximum impact on the U.S. So they may just wait until mid-September or early October before they do anything, just to make sure that the retaliation has the maximum political impact on Trump.

In the meantime, they're also doing something else, which I think is very interesting. They are engaged in diplomacy with the Pakistanis, with the Qataris, with the Omanis. They're coming up with the Omanis on a proposal on how to handle this trade, knowing very well that the Trump administration is saying, "We're not interested in anything right now." That's fine. I think the Iranians are doing this for three reasons. One, they want to show their domestic audience that they're the ones that are engaged in diplomacy and are trying to be reasonable.

So if there is a return to war, the population does not blame Tehran and its negotiating position for the return to war, but rather sees Trump as the problem, which is going to be relatively easy given what Trump himself is saying. He's making the Iranian government's job here much, much easier. Secondly, they want to show the regional audience that they're playing ball, they're engaged in this diplomacy, they're coming out with a proposal, and that all of these proposals currently are being nixed by the Trump administration. That too is very valuable for them because, again, it would be very problematic if the regional view was that the Americans are trying to solve this and Iran is the intransigent party.

And thirdly, I think it is a preparation for a potential return by Trump to the negotiations, by getting as far ahead as possible on what potential solutions can look like. And if Trump then comes in after the midterm elections thinking he is in a better negotiating position and wants to make a lot of changes, he's going to have to unravel a lot of the diplomacy that already has happened, a lot of the agreements within the region that may already have occurred. And that will put him in a weaker position, or at least in a more problematic position, because he's not coming into a scenario in which there's not been any talks held, there's not been any principles established. But in fact, a lot of it has already been established, and he's going to have to abide by that or try to dismantle it. And that, again, is going to put him in a potentially negative situation vis-à-vis the regional countries.

#Glenn

Well, I saw a Bloomberg article arguing that the U.S. was considering the possibility of passing a law or returning to a law which would make it legal under American law, that is, to seize Iranian tankers and essentially claim them as U.S. property and sell their oil as a way to offset the economic pain of this war. It just seems if the blockade would turn into piracy, essentially, that this would be one of the triggers for Iran to directly attack it. But do you see this as likely? And also, why isn't Iran attacking the ships of the United States? Many people are asking this because they've been pounding the U.S. military bases. They're hammering anyone who assists the United States. But somehow the blockade, which is, you know, it's allowed to stand. How do you explain this, though?

#Trita Parsi

On the first part, yes. If you start seeing U.S. military, U.S. Navy intercepting and taking Iranian tankers on the high seas, the vast majority of them going to China, if that were to happen—and again, we have to keep in mind, this is not just a provocation against Iran; it's a provocation against China ahead of Xi's visit to Washington. And I'm not so sure that this is what the administration ultimately is going to be doing. But if it does, yes, in that scenario, I see the Iranians going after a lot of things in the region and potentially kinetically, not just economically—a strong counter-escalation. And I think we have to remember this has already been done by the U.S., by both Trump and Biden in the past, not on a large scale, but on a couple of occasions.

And the Iranians back then, which was with a different leadership, with a different mindset that was much more restrained, did respond strongly, but not as forcefully as they probably could have. This time around, I have no doubt they will respond very, very forcefully if that happens. And they will have China on their side in that, most likely, as well. The second question, though, I think, is a really interesting one. I don't have an answer as to why they haven't, given the fact that the Houthis just shot a ballistic missile at a Saudi ship that was moving in the northern part of the Red Sea, 1,200 kilometers, and hit it. And if the Houthis have that capability, then certainly the Iranians have that capability.

Why they haven't used it, I don't know. And particularly if the blockade ends up becoming very, very problematic for them, it makes it very difficult to understand why they haven't done this, given the fact that they have been very aggressive in targeting bases, etc. So it's a very good question. And perhaps it is one of those things that the Iranians have decided to save for worst-case scenarios within this already very bad scenario. But in the worst-case scenario, similarly to the Houthis, for instance, closing the Strait of Aden, that was also something, a card that they wanted to keep for a later stage of this conflict.

#Glenn

I did want to ask something else. Well, a different article you were writing on, which points out, I guess, the international community—well, let's say the public around the world—is having a

surprising sympathy with Iran in this conflict. Because, well, there's been a lot of interesting developments in terms of sympathies, or at least the extent of support for the United States. Because early on, it was pointed out that there's a lack of support by the U.S. public for this war, which is kind of unusual because usually in the beginning of wars, the public would be a little bit gung-ho on war. And then as it drags on, they begin to drop off. So it's important to get the war, I guess, wrapped up early.

But this time around, it was unpopular, well, pretty much from day one. And also, we see the military in the United States—they're not too happy about this either, it seems. You posted a picture of some comments about the war and Netanyahu, which apparently made some rounds around the internet, in which they expressed profound dissatisfaction with this war overall. Well, several angry messages. But your article, you know, it focused on the last part—that is, the wider world. And I, you know, I never thought I would see the day when public opinion around the world seemed to side with Iran. And, you know, also given the demonization of Iran over the decades, this is quite extraordinary. I was wondering, yeah, how do you explain this?

#Trita Parsi

I think it's a very important question. And let me answer the last part, but I want to just say a couple of things I think you might be quite happy to hear about, actually. On the first thing that I put on my Substack, which was, I've been in touch with U.S. service personnel in the region throughout all of this. And I can tell you, they're watching your show, and they're watching a lot of other YouTube shows because they're very upset, and they're trying to make sense of this. And for them, the most immediate thing is they want to understand, when am I going home? Because they've been put on this indefinite mission that just has, you know, never come to an end.

We saw that, for instance, the folks on the Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier had been on water for more than nine months, which is a record, with still no sign of it coming to an end. And the only reason why they were pulled back was because their family members went public about this. And they're watching the regular news, making no sense of it. No one can, because it doesn't make any sense. So they're watching a lot of this alternative media, your show and other shows on YouTube. And through that, they've gotten in contact with me. And one of the things they shared—one service person shared with me—was an image of what soldiers had been scribbling on the dust of an aircraft flap, I think it's called, which was quite revealing.

I posted it, and it went viral, showing the comments of the people in the region, the servicemen themselves, which was very critical of the war, very critical of the administration, and particularly critical of Israel, viewing this war as being something that was done for Israel. And one of them sent a comment to me about how difficult it is for them to remain motivated in what is a very difficult region and an indefinite mission, for a mission that doesn't have any moral backing in the first place. And I think all of these things kind of come together in that sentence that he sent to me, because it is about making sure that if you feel like there's a moral reason for you to do this, then you can

soldier on. But when there isn't, and there is no end date, there's no plan, there's nothing, it really creates a tremendous amount of problems for the servicemen and women that are out there right now.

And I think this is also a missing piece of this. As you mentioned, the public was never in favor of it. But you also now have clear evidence that, at least at this stage, the servicemen and women don't seem to be particularly favorable towards it either, which, frankly, at the end of the day, is not surprising. And then you have this other dimension. You mentioned the public opinion, which I'm not as surprised by, but I agree with you, it is quite stunning, given the demonization of Iran, given what the Iranian government did in January and the clampdown of the protests, the large number of people that were killed, even though a lot of the numbers that are circulating are most likely highly exaggerated. Nevertheless, something very, very bad happened there, and this is not a government or system that, in any way, shape, or form, has much of a positive image. But now we're not just talking about public opinion having shifted in Iran's favor.

What I've come across, and what I wrote about on my Substack, was how stunned I was to see senior officials in private conversations with me from countries that are squarely in the American and Western camp secretly rooting for Iran. And this needs a bit more of an explanation. I think there's a very clear realist logic as to why this is happening, but it's still a little bit difficult for a lot of folks, I think, to wrap their heads around. But the bottom line is that, at the end of the day, states are looking to see where the most acute threats are coming from and trying to balance against them. And the current situation, particularly mindful of how Trump is conducting himself, is that being an American ally is by no means a protection against Trump's mood swings.

It's not just about Trump, but on this specific element, I think it is obviously crucial. And for many of them, they saw what happened in Venezuela. They saw that this was seen as a major success, and militarily it was. And it really put Trump on a sugar high, and it made him overconfident about his ability to replicate it elsewhere. He thought that he was going to bring down Iran in four days. And as one person told me, had it not been for the resilience of the Iranians at this point, the United States would likely have invaded Cuba by now and potentially have annexed Greenland as well. The only reason this appears not to have happened is because Trump got stuck in the Persian Gulf and in the Strait of Hormuz.

So it's not necessarily that they are rooting for Iran, but they're seeing a value in the U.S. not succeeding in this because otherwise the U.S. would likely have gone after other countries. So what you're seeing is a picture of a world that is yearning for balance. And the country that right now needs to be balanced against more acutely than anyone else is the United States because of the conduct of the Trump administration, which has led to a lot of senior officials in Western governments who otherwise are very close to the U.S., that even they are secretly rooting for Iran to at least be able to get the U.S. to disabuse the U.S. of ever trying this again.

#Glenn

About the servicemen, I can understand why they would lose some heart in all of this. I remember in the 1990s, I was quite optimistic about the Cold War being over. I thought, a bit like after World War II, you're going to see Russia integrate into Europe and this whole idea of unifying Europe. So I joined the army in 1998 and '99. In March of 1999, you saw NATO expand, essentially cancelling a common Europe. And a few days later, we went bombing Serbia—you know, German planes again bombing a European capital. I don't know. I find it kind of disheartening when you see these wars you don't actually believe in. Indeed, you see it as being very destructive. But on that note, they're not necessarily rooting for Iran, but they would like to see the U.S. face some resistance. So, again, they go off Trump's sugar high, as you framed it.

There's some similarities, though, to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. I remember Kishore Mahbubani, the Singaporean diplomat who became then the—sorry, butchered his name there—who became president of the UN Security Council. He was making a point back in '22 or '23 that the reason why the majority of the world did not join in on the sanctions was not because they supported the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but, uh, he argued that if NATO and the United States were able to break Russia and essentially return to a unipolar moment, this would be a horrible situation for the world. Nobody wants to go back. And he used something like the words, "Can you imagine how intolerable or suffocating the U.S. and NATO would be if they could break the Russians and, again, we'll go back to the '90s, but with more arrogance?"

So this was kind of the argument for why it was better to not see NATO succeed in this proxy war. But in terms of the framing, though, because for the U.S., it's kind of selling the idea of the war against Iran being, you know, the liberal democracy versus the theocracy, while, you know, the narrative in many other parts of the world is this is the hegemon versus the counter-hegemon. Do you see the Iranians kind of leaning into this struggle of the Global South or the East? How do you see this in the wider conflict? Because, you know, it's not only narratives. There is something, you know, to this, that the U.S. is being balanced by China, Russia, Iran. I mean, is this, you know, how close is this to reality now?

#Trita Parsi

So, on the first thing of what Kishore wrote, I think that's very interesting. I observed something slightly different, which was not necessarily rooting for the Russians to somewhat succeed because he didn't want to see NATO become too powerful again and go back to an American unipolar moment. I think there were a lot of countries in the Global South who were very concerned about what this would mean for international law and the territorial integrity of countries, and didn't want to see that norm being further weakened.

But I think it was also a scenario in which, very quickly after that war, five days after Russia invaded Ukraine, the United States took Russia completely off the international financial system. And this rang alarm bells around the world because it showed a capacity that the United States has because

of the use of the dollar, because the international financial system has essentially become an American instrument of statecraft rather than being an international one. Yes, what Russia did in invading a country was a violation of international law, but Russia cannot replicate that in many places. It is certainly not in many places in the Global South. So what Russia did is wrong, but it's not a threat to a country in Africa, for instance.

What the U.S. did in taking Russia off of the financial grid is not necessarily wrong, but it is a threat to a lot of these other countries because the United States has already proven itself to be quite unreliable. And even though the Biden administration did not necessarily behave the way that Trump did, the world had already tasted what an unpredictable America could be like and what it could do. And now, with this capacity, it terrified a lot of countries. So again, the desire for balancing against the U.S. was emerging there, not because they thought Russia was right, not even because they thought it would be good for Russia to come out of this somewhat successful, but because of what is the more immediate threat to them.

And Russia was not that. That's not an endorsement of Russia. But America's ability to just strangle a country economically that is completely dependent on the dollar for trade was terrifying for a lot of these different countries. On the issue, it was very interesting that you said that there's a narrative of—or in the past, I think perhaps it would be accurate to say that there would be a narrative of—the liberal American democracy against the theocracy. I don't know anyone who believes in that these days because it's not as if the Trump administration itself is using that language or that its conduct is what people expected of a liberal democracy.

I think what the Iranians are using more than anything else is the struggle against a foreign hegemony in the region, and a hegemony that has underwritten and enabled a genocide in that region. This is the narrative that they've had for a very long time. And I think now that narrative has far more—there's far more receptivity for it in many different places, including in pockets of the West itself, than there was just years ago. And I think Gaza is a very critical element of that. And Israel's critical role in starting this idiotic war is, of course, a very critical element as well.

#Glenn

Yeah, I feel like often the Europeans, they're willing to go along with any of America's wars as long as it's dressed up in the right language. I mean, with Venezuela, you know, in this country, the Norwegians gave the Peace Prize to Machado. You know, everything was lined up in terms of legitimacy. All Trump had to do was come up with some catchphrase about democracy and human rights. But he wouldn't stop talking about oil, right? "This is our oil." And European leaders, as long as they can walk around and embrace this sanctimonious rhetoric, they're willing to join any war, it seems. But Trump didn't give it to them. He just hammered on about oil, which was a problem.

#Trita Parsi

And I think the European conduct on this, particularly the pattern that we've seen now, in which in Iran in June, in Venezuela in December or January, and on Iran in February, international law was very conveniently set aside. It was even attacked. It was deemed an academic conversation. This is not the time for it, et cetera. And this came from Germany, came from Greece. It came from several European countries. And as you mentioned earlier, it came, at least in Venezuela, from even Norway, even though Norway was very clear on the Iran war later on.

And that, again, I think is part of the reason I'm taking the conversation in a slightly different direction, was a very critical part of the reason as to why Germany failed to win an elected seat in the Security Council just a couple of months ago. It lost to Portugal and Austria for the two elected seats that are allocated for Europe. And this was the first time ever that the Germans had lost such a campaign. And, you know, the Germans still have a claim for a permanent seat, but now they couldn't even get elected to a temporary two-year seat. And this was devastating, a huge blow to Germany. And a lot of that has to do—I would say the overwhelming majority of the explanatory factor here is not that the Germans joined the race a little bit too late.

They did. That partially explains it. But what really is behind this is the manner in which Germany completely collapsed in terms of its support for international law. This is no longer the Germany of 2003 that stands up against an illegal invasion of Iraq. This is a Germany that applauds an illegal war against Iran, that says that Israel is doing its dirty work for it, that sat right next to Trump a day or two into the war in the Oval Office and was endorsing this war and saying that international law doesn't matter, was saying that they're going to study the ruling of the ICC when it came to the arrest warrants of Gallant and Netanyahu.

And I think the expectation on Germany has always been much stronger because traditionally it's been very fiercely in favor of international law and stood up for it even at high costs, such as in 2003. And now it's completely caved and turned into something completely different. Even though just months earlier it was referencing international law as being completely holy in terms of the context in Ukraine, but suddenly nowhere to be found in the context of Gaza. So I think overall, internationally, you've seen a complete collapse of any confidence in the Europeans actually standing up for principle, despite the fact that countries like Spain, Ireland, Slovenia, prior to this election, still held up that flag and tried, but the big European countries have completely failed at this point.

#Glenn

No, that's a great point. Well, if the Iran war hadn't been preceded by the genocide, then things might have been different. But as you said, the US and many of the larger European countries very enthusiastically backed the genocide. And then the Iranians were almost all alone in leading the pushback in support of the Palestinians. So after you have that genocide and we kind of threw away our entire moral compass, and then to try to legitimize us, who backed the genocide, to attack the Iranians, I guess it does put it in a different light. Yeah. But I just want to pivot a bit back to what we discussed first about—because you mentioned Israel as well in terms of the war with Iran. And if

Trump now has this leverage, he can negotiate. He has a temporary window to try to get a little bit of a better deal. I can't imagine that Netanyahu has a very strong interest in this, to see Trump take advantage of this improved bargaining position. How do you see that dynamic working out?

#Trita Parsi

You know, we're going to go back to where we were before. Of course, this would be after the elections. So the Israeli elections are in October. The midterms are the first week of November. So we will have a scenario in which Trump will likely have lost the House, potentially the Senate. He will be on the defensive, but he may end up becoming more reckless after the midterms and more disregarding of other interests. Not that the midterms seem to have constrained him that much, but perhaps there was a constraint on him that wasn't very visible that will be lost. And particularly if he loses the Senate as well and you have impeachment, we should remember that some of the most dangerous moments with Trump were actually after he lost the elections in 2020, in November of that year.

That's when he was actively looking for an opportunity to start a war with Iran, absent any provocation, but simply because he was looking for ways of making sure that he could remain president and essentially avoid a peaceful transition of power to Joe Biden. And this is, of course, the same period in which we see the January 6th protests, etc. So I think he may end up becoming more reckless after that. But if he chooses to go down the path of diplomacy, it will obviously be interesting to see who is in power in Israel at the time. Not that I think it makes a huge difference in terms of the direction of Israeli policy, but it may make a difference in one specific aspect. Netanyahu is more astute than the other candidates for prime ministership in Israel in dealing and maneuvering the American political space.

I'm not saying that he's a genius in any way, shape, or form, because Israel has clearly lost most of the American public. But when it comes to maneuvering the electoral spaces, when it comes to maneuvering the donor bases, I think he's actually quite a bit more effective and has far more experience in doing so than any other potential Israeli prime minister. And that may have an impact. But the bottom line is, if Trump wants to go back towards a deal, the deal is not going to look particularly different from what the MOU did, and the Israelis will be dead set against it. And they will do everything they can to, at a minimum, make sure that the next deal does not include Israel and Lebanon. And I just have zero confidence that the Iranians will agree to an MOU or any other form of a deal that does not include Lebanon, because I think Lebanon is essential from Iran's standpoint, from their own security needs.

#Glenn

I also find it difficult to see the Iranians being willing to renegotiate the fundamentals of the MOU because, as you said before, the Iranians would like to deter further aggression against Iran. If this is now a reason for getting a better deal, they're sending out the wrong signal, I think. One thing

they were hammering on about was the idea that if someone goes down this path, then every time Trump goes back to the negotiation table, he will get a worse deal. This is essentially how they would incentivize him to negotiate—well, stick to diplomacy. So this, you know, if this is a possibility, it might go against what Iranians are willing to accept.

Just a last question, though, about Yemen, the Iraqi militias, and all these other actors in the region, because they're often very, you know, casually—and I would argue incorrectly—dismissed as simply being these Iranian vassals or satellites. They just, you know, Iran picks up the phone and they start taking orders. But, you know, they have their own interests. And of course, the conflict between Yemen and Saudi Arabia has a life of its own. So how would that work out now that if, well, let's say Iran and the U.S. destabilize itself a little bit, it seems like the Saudis are intent on hitting back against Yemen. And, well, I guess in Yemen, the sentiment is the same. So how does this affect the wider conflict between the U.S. and Iran?

#Trita Parsi

Well, if there is another deal, I think the Iranians will insist on a regional ceasefire. And the regional ceasefire goes both ways. It means that the Israelis need to stop bombing Lebanon and get out of Lebanon. But it also means that Hezbollah has to stop shooting at Israel once Israel is out of Lebanon. And the Houthis have to stop shooting at the Saudis. So there will be responsibilities on Iranian shoulders to use whatever leverage they have. I agree with you fully. They don't have control, but they do have leverage to pull the Houthis back, and American leverage on Israel and potentially on Saudi Arabia to also pull back.

And I would say that if I was in Saudi Arabia right now, yes, clearly the Saudis did not want to see a new situation emerge in the region in which the Houthis would be able to be strengthened because of their relationship with Iran becoming less constrained, in the sense that the blockade of Yemen would be, you know, there would be bigger holes in it, etc. We saw that, you know, the airplanes flying from Iran to Sana'a Airport is part of the reason why the Saudis intervened militarily at that point. But ultimately, I would think that the Saudis are looking at the situation. They have a Mecca pact with Pakistan and Turkey, but what has that done so far? The Houthis are striking at Saudi ships.

Turkey and Pakistan are not intervening on behalf of Saudi Arabia. The Israelis are striking Turkey and Syria, and Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are not intervening on behalf of Turkey. So far, that agreement doesn't seem to have any practical implications yet, and perhaps they won't for some time. So if I was Saudi Arabia and there's a deal on the table that would compel the Iranians to hold back the Houthis to the extent that they can, and they will be incentivized to do so because it's part of the equation that would also then get the Israelis to pull back on Lebanon, I would rather go with that than to see a restart of the war with the Houthis, and we know exactly how that ended up last time for the Saudis.

#Glenn

Fair enough.

#Trita Parsi

Well, thank you for taking the time.

#Glenn

Thank you, Glenn. I hope you have a great weekend, and again, I left a link to your Substack in the description, so keep producing those excellent articles.

#Trita Parsi

Thank you so much. Really appreciate it. Thank you again for having me. Talk to you soon.