

# Netanyahu Pressures Trump for War on Iran | Trita Parsi

In this in-depth conversation, Trita Parsi joins India & Global Left to analyse the upcoming Netanyahu–Trump meeting and the renewed push by Israel for a war against Iran. We discuss how Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is attempting to shape U.S. policy under a potential Trump presidency, the strategic calculations behind escalating tensions with Iran, and whether Washington is being dragged toward another catastrophic Middle East war. Parsi breaks down the regional implications of a U.S.–Israel confrontation with Iran, including the impact on Gaza, Hezbollah, the Red Sea, Gulf states, and global energy markets. We also examine what war would mean for Iranian domestic politics, Israeli security, and the long-term balance of power in West Asia. This conversation challenges mainstream media narratives and explains who benefits from escalation, who pays the price, and why diplomacy is being sidelined at such a dangerous moment.

## #Mudiar

Hello and welcome to another episode of *\*India and the Global Left\**. If you're new to the show, please hit that subscribe button. Also, consider becoming a YouTube member, a patron, or donating a small amount using the link in the description box. Now, let me welcome our guest tonight, Dr. Trita Parsi. Dr. Parsi is an Iranian-born Swedish writer and co-founder and executive vice president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, and the founder and former president of the National Iranian American Council.

Dr. Parsi writes extensively on foreign policy and, among other works, is the author of *\*Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States.\** Dr. Parsi, welcome back to *\*India and the Global Left.\** My pleasure. Thank you so much for having me again. Last time we had you on, you said that after the June Iran-Israel conflict, by December we could see an Israeli push for war on Iran. We don't really have a war at the moment, but NBC News has reported that Netanyahu is meeting Trump on Monday to push for an Israeli war on Iran. Can you talk about those reports? What updates do we have on that front?

## #Guest

Yes, I wrote in my article in August that the logic for Israel to start another war, from their standpoint, is quite clear. They failed to achieve what they had hoped to accomplish in their first attack. They had three objectives—two of them failed, and one succeeded. The one that succeeded was getting the U.S. into the war. But the other two—collapsing the regime and subjugating Iran

under Israeli domination and military hegemony, similar to what they've managed with Lebanon and Syria, countries Israel strikes at will with impunity and without U.S. involvement—those failed. The Israelis didn't achieve that.

And if you look at it, for almost two years the Israelis had to be dragged into agreeing to a ceasefire. And even when they did agree, they immediately broke it. That was in Gaza. In Lebanon, for more than a year, it was the same story. In the case of Iran, after nine days, the Israelis themselves requested a ceasefire. The reason for that was that Iranian missiles actually inflicted significant damage on them. And if you stop at that point, you've achieved exactly the opposite of what Netanyahu was trying to do. He was seeking dominance over Iran, but instead he ended up creating a situation where he started a war and came out of it with only neutral deterrence.

Both sides can deter the other; both sides can inflict damage on the other—and that's the opposite of what the Israelis were looking for. They were looking for subjugation. So while some people see mutual deterrence as a reason there wouldn't be another war, my argument was that's precisely why there will be another war. Because the Israeli military doctrine doesn't allow for any other country that is hostile to Israel—and Israel essentially views all countries as either hostile or subservient to the U.S., and therefore lacking the capacity to be hostile. But any country in the region that it deems hostile cannot be allowed to deter or infringe on Israel's total maneuverability.

Iran currently does that, and that's precisely why the Israelis are likely to start a war again. What I wrote in the article is that the most likely window would be before the end of December, and that's because of the political calendar in the United States. Now, on December 29th, Netanyahu is going to come to this town, and once again he's going to be pushing for war. What that article pointed out—and I think I also predicted this in my piece—is that it would no longer be about the nuclear issue. The focus would shift toward the missiles, partly because, of course, the missiles were actually effective, and the Israelis don't have to make up a challenge.

But also because, at the end of the day, until Iran is subjugated, the Israelis will find some other pretext for a war to drag the U.S. into until they've achieved their objective. So even if the Iranians were to capitulate, for instance, in negotiations with the U.S. on the nuclear issue, it doesn't matter, because it doesn't end the conflict—it just shifts it from nuclear to missiles. If they were to capitulate on missiles, well, then they would have accepted complete domination. But even if they end up having something else, the Israelis would see that as a new existential threat and use it as a pretext to start another war, which is precisely why the Iranians won't capitulate. And you'll end up having a very significant war if the Israelis start it again.

**#Mudiar**

And this shift from the centrality of the Iranian nuclear program to, as you've written and many others have pointed out, the Iranian ballistic missile program—do you think that's the result of Iran's performance during the June conflict, or has this always been the case, but Israel just hasn't been able to find a legal or moral narrative around the missile system as opposed to the nuclear program?

## #Guest

I think the latter point you're raising is quite important. I'd point out that there's no legal justification the Israelis have found. The centrality of the nuclear program was always the most effective way to get the West to focus on Iran and to push toward some kind of military confrontation. It wasn't that the nuclear program itself was central—not to diminish its importance—but it wasn't the core issue. What was central was whether Iran had the ability to challenge Israel's domination. This isn't about Israeli security; it's about securing Israeli dominion. And whether it's missiles, nukes, or something else, the central goal has been to make sure no country in the region can challenge that dominion.

Now, if the Iranians were to build nuclear weapons, of course that would be a challenge to it—but that's not what they were doing, and the Israelis knew that very well. In the public messaging the Netanyahu government used, they said they had to attack because they had intelligence showing that Iran would build nuclear weapons in a couple of weeks, or would have them in a couple of weeks. But in the minutes from the internal Israeli cabinet meetings that were leaked, Netanyahu doesn't say a couple of weeks—he says a couple of years. Huge difference, because that means it's not imminent.

But also, the Israelis have been saying since 1992 that Iran is a couple of years away from a nuclear weapon, so apparently nothing had changed. This was entirely cooked up. There was no real justification for the war based on any nuclear progress the Iranians had made. If anything, the urgency was that the Iranians and the U.S. might actually reach a nuclear deal, based on the last proposal the Iranians were planning to present to the U.S. on that Sunday—after the Israelis' bombing on Friday. That proposal was apparently quite attractive and might actually have been accepted by the U.S., and that may have been a key trigger for the Israelis to attack—not that the Iranians were actually close to building a bomb.

So from the very outset—again, I'm not saying these issues aren't important—but they're pretexts for confrontation. Part of the reason they're shifting it now away from the nuclear program is because Trump declared that he obliterated the nuclear program. He specifically used that language to make sure the Israelis wouldn't come back and use the nuclear angle as another reason to start a war. But he didn't quite figure out that the Israelis would just shift the goalposts to some other issue, which is exactly what they've done now.

## #Mudiar

What's your reading of Trump's response to Netanyahu's proposal to restart a war with Iran, given the split among U.S. power holders or power brokers? On one side, you have the Iran hawks—the Republican caucus in Congress, people like Lindsey Graham, and the donor class, Miriam Adelson and others. Then there's Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who's quite an Iran hawk. And on the other side, you have people like Tucker Carlson. What's your sense of the balance between these two wings? Because that would be central to Trump's response to Netanyahu's proposal.

## #Guest

I think it's not the balance between those two sides that matters, but rather Trump's perception of that balance. And that's what makes it so much harder to predict. My impression is that the balance has clearly shifted in favor of Tucker Carlson, Steve Bannon, and many other voices who were against the first attack—maybe they let that slide—but they're certainly against any new attacks. Also, in the midst of all this, the other major agenda item is Gaza and everyone's patience. Even Netanyahu's friends in the White House are running out of patience with his sabotage of the ceasefire. So he's facing major resistance on that issue as well.

But on the other hand, as you pointed out, you have major donors who are very supportive of Israel and their voices carry weight. The question is, how does Trump see this balance as he enters a midterm election that's likely to be very, very difficult for him? You know, he didn't raise as much money as Kamala Harris did, but he beat her quite handsomely. Money is important, but it's not the only thing. The most important factor, especially in this midterm election, is turnout. And turnout is going to be low on the Republican side because Trump himself isn't on the ticket. So there are a lot of things working against Trump's favor on this issue. Pumping more money into it isn't necessarily going to fix it.

He actually needs to energize the base, get them to go out and vote. Being dragged into yet another war, twice in his first term by Israel, after having said he's the peace president—the one who doesn't start wars—I personally think that's going to work to his detriment. But I don't know if that's how he perceives it. He perceived the idea of acquiescing to the Israelis in June 2020 as attractive, completely abandoning diplomacy. I thought that was a huge mistake, but that's how he saw it. He still thinks that was a major success for him, even though the nuclear issue isn't resolved. And now, six months later, the Israelis are back knocking on his door, saying, "Hey, we've got another war we want to sell you."

## #Mudiar

I wanted to ask you a bit about your thoughts on the Israel–U.S. relationship when it comes to the question of Iran. On one side, there's what we just discussed—the view that divisions within the U.S. administration, or the perception of the balance of power between these two sides, are critical in determining what decision the U.S. ultimately makes. But there's another view, which I think is predominantly an Iranian one, that says this is really one large empire and those divisions are largely

immaterial. The United States and Israel's interests in the region are essentially the same. We might talk about some differences in investment strategies, infrastructure projects under the Abraham Accords, and so on, but when it comes to security, intelligence, and the military wing of the empire, it's one and the same. I wonder what your thoughts are on these two ways of looking at the Israel–U.S. relationship from an Iranian perspective.

## #Guest

Yeah, I think you're quite right that the predominant view on the Iranian side is to look at Israel and the United States as two sides of the same coin, and that whatever differences may exist between them tend to be tactical, marginal. At the end of the day, the U.S., you know, acquiesces to Israeli desires, and what the Israelis do ultimately is in the U.S.'s interest. There is an element inside the U.S. for which this type of reading would be accurate—John Bolton or the neoconservative wing. I mean, in the case of John Bolton, he doesn't even consider himself a neoconservative; he's just a neo-imperialist. And for them, Israel is a useful outpost in the Middle East, an extension of American power.

It's an entity that amplifies American power. But for many others—and this has not only been a difference but a growing one—the interests of the United States and Israel are actually diverging, and they have been for some time. Part of the reason we haven't seen this manifest clearly in policy is because of the power of pro-Israel voices in Washington. But if the Iranian conception—and it's not entirely true that it's only Iranian—but if that second conception were true, then we would never have had the JCPOA in the first place. There we saw the Obama administration really take on the pro-Israel forces, take on the Israeli government, take on AIPAC, and win.

And then, since then, of course, we've seen the Trump administration in his first term completely aligning itself with the Netanyahu government—getting rid of the JCPOA, allowing the Israelis to annex the Golan Heights, moving the embassy, agreeing to the Abraham Accords, which were basically about giving the Israelis everything they wanted and throwing the Palestinians under the bus. The U.S. gave a bunch of concessions to other countries for them to recognize and normalize relations with Israel. What's in it for the U.S.? So once you see things like that, clearly it's not difficult to draw the conclusion that perhaps they're just two sides of the same coin. But there's another side to this.

And look at what's happening right now. The only time the Netanyahu government has agreed to any ceasefire is when the Trump administration has threatened them with consequences if they don't. The problem, of course, is that the Israelis agree to it but then very quickly start to negate it and violate it. Unless the U.S. applies prolonged and sustained pressure, the shift in Israeli policy simply won't be durable. And this is part of the challenge with the Trump administration. Unlike Biden, they know how to put pressure on Israel and how to say no to Israel. Biden never did that. But Trump's attention span isn't particularly long, and he doesn't sustain the pressure.

And the Israelis know it, and they know exactly how to play that kind of situation. But I think it's very clear that the interests of the U.S. and Israel are diverging. Look at the Trump national security strategy—it says their interests in the Middle East will recede. This is the nightmare scenario for the Israelis. They've constantly fought that strain in American thinking, the one that says the U.S. should shift toward Asia, that the Middle East is no longer that important. Why are we so overextended? This is something the Israelis have been fighting against for the last four or five presidents. And those last four or five presidents have said the same thing, more or less, but haven't acted on it.

Trump has said it too, and he's put it in the NSS, but he's not acting on it. Because if he agrees to another war—tomorrow, or two days from now when the Israeli prime minister is here—then once again the administration is talking a big game about leaving the Middle East but ultimately allowing itself to get pulled back in. But there is that difference. And the other thing that's really changing, which is crucial to understanding this, is that it's not just on the left anymore that there's a significant portion who've turned against Israel. That already happened 10 or 15 years ago. The fusion between, particularly, the Black Lives Matter movement and the pro-Palestinian movement is very powerful on the left.

This is the first time we're seeing how things have shifted on the right. People on the right are now turning quite dramatically against Israel, partly because of how Israel is treating Christians in Palestine. But more than anything, it's because of this perception—validated over the first nine, now twelve months of Trump—that Israel is the country constantly pushing the United States into more wars. And people on the right have turned sharply against war for many different reasons. The main one is that they're the ones paying the cost for these wars. Where do American soldiers come from? They're not being recruited out of Brooklyn or other major blue districts.

They're coming from Alabama, from Arkansas, from these red districts. And it's in those red districts that these soldiers are coming back—either in coffins or without limbs, with PTSD—coming home, committing suicide, coming home without a job. So they're the ones paying the cost for these endless wars. And that's part of the reason why you have such a dramatic shift in the anti-war direction among Republicans and through Trump. That's not necessarily manifesting itself—I'm not saying he's living up to it—but now you have a very strong anti-war movement on the right. And they've also increasingly turned negative toward Israel because of Israel's crucial role in constantly pushing the United States into wars in the Middle East.

## #Mudiar

What's your sense of the Arab states in these conflicts? It seems to me that while the Arab states have completely surrendered—or capitulated—when it comes to the question of Palestine, they don't want a hot war with Iran. How do you think the Arab states are negotiating around this issue? An Israeli war on Iran, or a potential Israeli war?

## #Guest

The Arab states have grown increasingly worried about Israel, and I'm talking particularly about the GCC countries. It's understandable that they've done so—not just because of the attack on Doha, and certainly not just because of what's been happening in Gaza, the genocide in Gaza—but also because they saw under Biden that all restraints on Israel were lifted and Israel got a complete carte blanche. And if you're sitting there, they must have started thinking, "Hold on, this could become really dangerous for the GCC countries." Because if the U.S. is now completely unwilling to say no to Israel—I'm talking about the Biden years—what if the Israelis wanted to go after one of the GCC states? Which is exactly what happened when they bombed Gaza, as they bombed Doha.

And as one prominent GCC official said in a private setting, the GCC has learned how to manage their relationship and their tensions with Iran. They've even managed to collaborate with Iran at times. So this is a more complex relationship. They're not all warm and fuzzy about Iran—they still see it as a threat—but they know how to manage it. How do they manage Israel, though, when Israel has no constraints and the U.S. is only episodically willing to put any on it? It's only natural for them to have that perception. That's why the Omani foreign minister, Badr al-Busaidi, said at the Manama Dialogue earlier this year—in September, I think—that we have long known the main force for destabilization in the region is not Iran, but Israel. It's a huge statement, because he wasn't saying it's something new.

He said, "We have long known." Now, other states in the GCC may not come out and say it so explicitly, but my impression is that this view is becoming increasingly strong among them. They don't want a war with Iran because they know they would pay the price for the destabilization. Also, Iran has been weakened over the last year and a half and, as a result, is no longer seen as such a big threat. But Israel is. Israel is seen as a threat. And I think it's important to understand that part of the reason the Arab states came together and pushed Trump for what ended up being called the Trump Peace Plan was partly because of what was happening in Gaza, but really because the Gaza war was starting to spill over into other states.

And they were terrified that unless there was a change in the trajectory of Israel's behavior—which required a change in the U.S. approach to Israel—war would spread to their territory. So I think it's important, when we look at how this isn't really benefiting the Palestinians, to understand that it wasn't designed to. That wasn't its main purpose. Obviously, they wanted to see a ceasefire. I think they're very disappointed that there isn't a real one. But what they wanted was something that more or less ended the slaughter in Gaza—not to solve the issue, and certainly not to solve it in favor of the Palestinians. That wasn't how far they could go. They just needed a change in trajectory, because otherwise their own security was really at risk.

## #Mudiar

Despite the GCC countries' suspicion of Israel, it seems to me that they've long believed the U.S. can discipline Israel. And that's one of the reasons why I think they've always ended up capitulating to

the Israeli project in the larger region. Even during the 12-day conflict—actually, even before that—we'd been covering how the GCC countries were worried about what Israel was doing because of its previous actions in Palestine, in Lebanon, and also the bombing of Syria. But in the end, they did nothing. In fact, they did quite a lot—they supported the whole campaign of attacks on Iran. One of the reasons is that they've relied on the United States, thinking it would be able to rein in Israel. My question to you is this: particularly after the 12-day war, do you think Israel can start a war on its own without a U.S. green light?

## #Guest

So, first of all, what you said—I think it's quite important. The GCC has relied on its relationship with the U.S. to discipline and restrain Israel. Under Biden, this was completely unsuccessful, and there were deep frustrations. Under Trump, on at least two major occasions, it was successful. And again, that's part of the reason why I think many of these states are quite silent—or quite forgiving—of the fact that the Israelis are violating the ceasefire. Because at the end of the day, it's a lower level of violence than before, and it changed the trajectory. They're just so happy to see that Trump was susceptible to their pressure, whereas Biden was not. Is it enough? Clearly, it's not enough in any way, shape, or form. And privately, many of them say this is a disaster.

## #Mudiar

But it was even more disastrous. You're referring to the ceasefire with Iran.

## #Guest

The ceasefire and the entire peace plan—it's a terrible, terrible plan. But it was the one that was needed to change the trajectory of the U.S. approach toward Israel, which it did, at least momentarily. And now, part of the reason Netanyahu is back is to discuss that issue. Apparently, patience is running out in the White House, but whether they'll actually pressure Israel once again to return to a real ceasefire remains to be seen. On the second part of your question—can the Israelis start this on their own?—I've spoken with former Israeli officials who served under Netanyahu, and they believe that, from a military standpoint, it would be disastrous for Israel to do so.

But that is something Netanyahu may nevertheless do in order to start a war, with the calculation that once the war begins, it will become easier for him to drag the U.S. into it—particularly if there are major attacks by the Iranians or high-casualty events on the Israeli side. You could have essentially a second mini-October 7th, even though it was the Israelis who started the war. The Israelis would once again play the victim card and really strengthen the forces inside the U.S. that favor Israel, pressuring Trump to enter the war—even though it's a war Israel started without coordination with the U.S., and probably after explicit American statements to Israel saying, "We're not going to join you in this war." Once the war starts, Netanyahu may calculate that the dynamics will shift in his favor.

And this is part of the reason why a lot of Israelis are worried that not only will Netanyahu do so, but that he'll do it despite the fact that it would have significant costs for Israel itself. If you're sitting in Netanyahu's position, it's important to keep in mind that in about ten months there are going to be elections in Israel. These are not elections he can postpone by continuing or starting another war. He's been able to postpone new elections before, in terms of his coalition falling apart—uh, through these wars and by sustaining them—but these set elections he cannot change. And if he doesn't start a war with Iran before then—and by then you'll also have the midterm elections, and things could change quite dramatically on the U.S. side—if he doesn't start a war, then he will have accepted a new normal. And that new normal would be his legacy: a mutual deterrence between Iran and Israel.

So despite starting the war—despite inflicting significant damage on the Iranians, killing a large number of their senior military officials, nuclear scientists, and another thousand Iranian civilians, and causing tremendous infrastructure damage as well—all he achieved was mutual deterrence, which is the exact opposite of what he wanted. So I think, if you're sitting in his shoes, he's desperate to start a new war, with or without the U.S. to begin with. But his calculation is that he'll drag the U.S. into it once it's started.

## #Mudiar

I want to end with a couple of broader questions. My first question is: how central is Palestine in the Iran-Israel relationship? We know it's a big part, but is it all about Iran's support for the resistance in Palestine? Is Israel's belligerence—its intention to establish dominance, quote-unquote, in the region—only limited to its "Greater Israel" project, and to the extent that Iran acts as a deterrent against it? Or does it go beyond Palestine, covering a region that extends into the Persian Gulf and beyond?

## #Guest

I would actually say that it's not even secondary—perhaps a third-rate issue in all of this, not a big part of the relationship at all. If it were central, then you would have had a very different situation in the 1980s, when the Iranians were much more aggressive in their rhetoric against Israel and more active in supporting certain groups on the Palestinian side. But that was also the time when the Israelis were pushing the U.S. to make friends with Iran, sell weapons to Iran, and not pay too much attention to the rhetoric coming out of Tehran.

What you see in the 1990s is when things get really harsh between Iran and Israel. And it's not because of Iran's support for the Palestinians—that actually intensified afterward. It's because of a new geopolitical situation in which the Israelis were quite afraid that Iran would emerge as the new major power in the region. They thought Iran might make friends with the United States, and the U.S. would lose Israel as a pivotal nation in the region. Because, out of the Cold War context, what

really was the strategic value-add of Israel to the United States? This is also the moment when the Israelis shift their language.

They used to talk about how strategically important they were to the U.S. as an outpost of the Western side in the Middle East, pushing back against Soviet penetration of the region. After 1992, however, when there was no Soviet Union to point to as a justification for this relationship, that's when the Israelis started to talk about how the basis of the Israeli-American relationship was these mutual values between the two states. This isn't a term you even heard in the 1980s. But in the absence of any strategic reason for it, they shifted the language to say that these are two states so intertwined in their values, and that this is the basis of their relationship.

But they were afraid that would collapse if the United States made friends with Iran, which, at the time, the Iranians were trying quite hard to do—to make up with the U.S. At this point, I mean, take a look at what happened during the JCPOA negotiations. The Rouhani government stayed more or less silent on the Palestinian issue, said almost nothing about Israel. When the Israelis attacked Gaza in 2014, the Iranian profile was very, very low. Compare that with 2009—it made no difference. The Israelis were as aggressive as you could imagine, because the big threat was not Iran's position on Israel and Palestine. Not to say that it was minor, but it wasn't the big threat. The real threat was that the U.S. and Iran might actually end their enmity and bury the hatchet.

That was what the Israelis were dramatically working against, and it's because of what they call their "fear of abandonment." In their view, if Iran and the United States made friends, U.S.-Iran tensions would recede significantly. It wouldn't turn into a lawless region, and then the U.S. would have a much easier time leaving the Middle East and shifting its focus to Asia. From the Israeli perspective, they asked themselves a crucial question: if the U.S. and Iran more or less make friends and the U.S. leaves the region, will that reduction in Iranian-American tension be accompanied by a proportionate reduction in Israeli-Iranian tensions? Their answer was no. Now, I think they're quite incorrect there, but nevertheless, that's how they felt.

Iran and Israel's rivalry will remain, but now the Israelis will no longer have a U.S. that automatically sides with them, because the U.S. will shift its focus toward Asia. As a result, Israel would be left facing a hostile Iran. So, however you look at this, the Palestinian issue is more of a public justification at times—more of a tool that the Iranians use to rally support against Israel and to rally around their own leadership of the Muslim world—but it's not the core issue. In fact, take a look at Iran's profile over the last two years when it comes to what the Israelis are doing in Gaza. Sure, they've been more vocal than many of the Arab states, but that's a very low bar, given how badly those Arab states have performed.

But the Iranians have constantly worked to de-escalate the situation and prevent the war from spreading beyond Gaza. That's why they kept telling Hezbollah not to attack Israel—they didn't want that to be used as a pretext for the Israelis to expand the war. Now, the Iranians completely failed, because Israel has bombed seven countries in the last two years and has even expanded the war

into Iranian territory. But if the Iranians were really in it for the Palestinian issue alone, if that were truly central to them, their conduct would have been very different. They might have done what Hamas thought—or hoped—they would do, which is that once Hamas started the war with Israel on October 7th, Hezbollah and Iran would automatically join in. Neither of them did.

## #Mudiar

Yeah, I hear your point on this. I've often thought about this question on multiple occasions—when the entire Western imperial system is directed at a third country like Iran, how much of it is really a moral question to ask whether Iran did enough, to the extent it could? How much of it is even the right question to ask—that Iran didn't do enough to help or show solidarity with the Palestinians when the Israelis and Americans were conducting genocide in Gaza?

## #Guest

Well, I mean, what you're pointing to, again, I think is quite correct. What you're saying is that, at the end of the day, the Iranians are looking out for their own national interests. That doesn't mean the Palestinian cause is irrelevant, but it's not the central piece motivating them to act—which is quite natural. It's not the central piece for any other country. There's no country that's actually fully sacrificing itself for the Palestinians. If they were, the Palestinians would have had a state by now, arguably. Have the Iranians done more than most Arab states? Many Iranians would argue that. I was moderating a panel with former Iranian foreign minister Javad Zarif at the Doha Forum, and he very strongly made the case that the Iranians have done far more than many of these Arab states.

In fact, all of the Arab states, in his argument. And this is part of the reason why he is personally sanctioned by the United States, whereas you don't have many Arab officials—if any at all—being sanctioned for it. So I think it's fair to say that they have done a lot, but I don't think those things were done out of charity for the Palestinians. They were done because they—and this is where I probably disagree with Dr. Zarif—were acting out of their own national interest. At the time, at least, the Iranians viewed it as part of their rivalry with the Israelis to support the Palestinians, as it was one of the instruments they needed against Israel.

And I think this is, again, the strategy of the Palestinians, even when they have been supported. Right now, there's a lot of rhetoric coming out of Turkey about how supportive they are of Palestine. On a public level in Turkey, of course, public opinion is very strongly in favor of the Palestinians. Turkish officials adamantly tell me how much they've done for the Palestinians—and they have done some, there's no doubt about that. But it's also very clear that, at the end of the day, it's about Turkey for the Turks. And that's not an abnormal situation; that's a totally normal situation. Right now, you're going to see more tensions between Israel and Turkey, and it's not because of Gaza—it's because of Syria.

It's because of how Turkey and Israel interact—they're encroaching on each other's newly established spheres of influence. Their rivalry is going to play out not just in Syria, but also in Somaliland, in the Horn of Africa, where the Israelis are the only country recognizing Somaliland as an independent state—an area where the Turks have been quite active. They even have a base there in the Horn of Africa, which is crucial for their Africa policy. So you're seeing these geopolitical rivalries playing out in several different areas. Did the Israelis recognize Somaliland out of sympathy for it, or did they do so because of a larger geopolitical calculation—one that increasingly involves competition with Turkey as well as with Iran?

## #Mudiar

My final question is about the narrative—specifically, the Western media's narrative on Iran. We've seen a significant shift in public opinion in the West when it comes to Israel and Palestine, particularly because of the livestreamed genocide they carried out. Of course, the mainstream legacy media has been complicit in that genocide, just as they've been complicit in shaping hostile narratives against Iran. But my question to you is: when it comes to Western narratives on Iran, it seems to me that not much has changed. Maybe to some extent, yes, but not nearly as much as it has with Palestine, for various reasons. One of those reasons is the campus protests and the centrality of the Palestinian cause that has spread across American universities. As a scholar on Iran, what's your sense of Western public opinion regarding Iran?

## #Guest

So, the shift has occurred on Palestine—no doubt—particularly among younger Americans. I haven't seen any opinion polls that connect this to other states in the region. Meaning, has their view on Iran, on Qatar, on Turkey shifted in any significant way as a corollary to their change of opinion on Palestine and Israel? It would be very interesting to see if that has happened. I would suspect that among younger people there may be a bit of that, but certainly not in a way that suggests those countries that have championed the Palestinian cause have benefited greatly, or that young people in the United States or Europe have fundamentally changed how they view Israel-Palestine.

If it is there, I would still suspect it's not very significant. But again, I'm just speculating here because I haven't seen any polls, and I think it would be very interesting to do such a poll. In general, the narrative on Iran has actually hardened, because the media and government narratives have grown more pro-Israel and, as a result, more anti-Iran as well. I mean, you have the German chancellor saying that Israel and America's attack on Iran—he said Israel is doing Europe's dirty work. Israel is doing Europe's dirty work by bombing Iran. I mean, we're talking about a case in which the Israelis started a war illegally, and they also broke the Geneva Convention by attacking nuclear sites.

And all of this is happening between the fifth and sixth rounds of negotiations. So, not just failing to condemn a clear violation of international law, but actually embracing it and justifying it. And to a large extent, this is because, as the war in Gaza intensified, Germany in particular became almost an annex of Israeli narratives. It's also because of Iran's role in supporting Russia against Ukraine, which had already poisoned the relationship between Europe and Iran. So, in both the state and media narratives, it's become even more aggressive and negative than before—to the point that...

The Germans were, of course, condemning Russia when it attacked Ukrainian nuclear facilities and really relied on international law then. Now they've completely set that aside and even embraced a war when the Israelis were starting it. So, on the one hand, you have that. On the other hand, you have the situation in which Iran's support for Russia had already made things so much worse. But is the gap between the public's view of Iran and the government's narrative on Iran as large as it is on Palestine? Not at all. I would say the gap is much, much smaller. It may have grown a bit because of Palestine as a secondary effect, but I would suspect it hasn't grown that much.

## #Mudiar

I guess part of the reason—maybe a small part, I don't know how small or big—but part of the reason is also that the kind of liberal left, their view on Iran, is extremely negative. Their view on Palestine—they may still take the framework that Netanyahu's far-right politics are the problem in Israel, and not the whole Zionist project. They wouldn't concede that Hamas or any part of the resistance is a genuine anti-colonial project. But nevertheless, they do support a slice of the Palestinian resistance and the anti-colonial and liberation project. While on Iran, they're so hooked on liberal feminist projects, liberal notions of democracy, elections, religion, and so on, that their view on Iran becomes extremely negative. So you have this, quote-unquote, left-liberal project whose view on Iran is almost intolerant—while these are the same people who would be anti-Israel, not necessarily in the same way we are, but in other ways.

## #Guest

So I think for us, we do have to recognize what the Iranian regime is doing against its own people, and the repression of women is a real thing. Naturally, that leads to a lot of opposition and resentment, particularly in certain parts of the left. So you're quite right about that. I think the bigger problem is the way certain politicians—quite influential ones—are using that, not to actually stand up for women or for the Iranian people, but as part of the larger pro-Israel project they're committed to. This is especially true when it comes to some German voices on the issue. The very same people who are banging their fists on the desk about human rights in Iran, about the rights of women in Iran, are at the same time going out of their way to justify a genocide in Palestine.

So any moral standing they claim to have is completely a fantasy. They've been quite influential on large parts of the European left, shaping perceptions of Iran in general. But I think for the

perception of Iran to change dramatically, Iran itself would also have to change quite dramatically. Now, there are changes taking place. For instance, in many ways, the Mahsa Amini protests and demonstrations led by people inside Iran were actually quite successful, because there's a huge cultural shift happening there right now. The government doesn't even dare to try to impose the hijab any longer. They're not picking that fight anymore, because there wasn't even support among Iranian conservatives for it. A majority of Iranian conservatives supported the hijab, but not mandatory hijab.

And they saw this overreaction and this terrible repression as something that only weakened Iran's geopolitical situation—both because of the tensions between society and government, and because of the way certain voices, many of them on the liberal left, took advantage of it to further escalate tensions or pressure on Iran. So you have that element. But again, I think—sorry—we're seeing a situation in which, in my view, much of the liberal left right now is kind of lost. They put so many of their eggs in the idea that, you know, you have to defeat Russia and that NATO expansion had nothing to do with the war. And that's come back to completely explode in their face, because NATO expansion certainly had something to do with the war.

In fact, it had quite a lot to do with the war. It's not the only factor. You have Amanda Sloat, the NSC director for Europe under Biden, who inadvertently admitted this when she thought she was speaking to some Ukrainians who were actually Russians pretending to be Ukrainians. It's all over the Internet right now. But they put so many of their eggs in that basket and, by doing so, abandoned their anti-war credentials that they had built up opposing Afghanistan, opposing the Iraq war, and so on. Because now, suddenly, they had found a "good war." And it turns out it wasn't a good war—it was another war that could have been completely avoided had the West taken a much more reasonable position in the negotiations. Because NATO membership for Ukraine was never in the cards. It was always an illusion. NATO was never going to let Ukraine in.

So the only thing they were essentially defending was the concept—not the actual membership, but the concept—that Ukraine could join NATO. And for that, we've now had four years of war, total devastation, more than 200,000 or 300,000 people dead—and for what? I think there's a huge crisis on the liberal left, and they're going to have a hard time finding their moral standing again, and an even harder time finding their strategic standing, because they've ended up being wrong on that issue. And on Palestine, they were dragged to that position by their progressive wing—at least in the American context. They didn't go there themselves; they were dragged to it. And even then, we saw under the Biden administration that the progressive wing didn't have the power to force a change of policy on Biden.

In fact, not only under Biden, but also during the DNC and during the election, they pushed those voices out—and they lost the election as a result. That was a key reason why more than 19 million voters who had voted for Biden in 2020 didn't show up in 2024. They stayed home. They didn't vote at all. They didn't vote for Trump. They didn't vote for Jill Stein. They just stayed home. And 29 percent of them—the plurality—said they did so because of Biden's Gaza policy and the DNC's Gaza

policy. And that's, again, the very same liberal left who claimed such moral high ground because of the position they took on Ukraine, which turned out not to be moral at all.

## **#Mudiar**

We'll leave it there, Dr. Parsi. This was a wonderful conversation, and thank you so much for your time.

## **#Guest**

Thank you so much for having me.

## **#Mudiar**

All right, I'll send you the link once we upload it tomorrow.

## **#Ayushman**

Hi, my name is Ayushman. I, along with Mudiar Jyotishman, have started this platform. Over the last two years, we've tried to build content for the left and progressive forces. We've interviewed economists, historians, political commentators, and activists so far. If you've liked our content and want us to build an archive for the left, I have two requests for you. Please consider donating to the cause—the link is in the description below. And if you're not able to do so, don't feel bad; you can always like and share our videos with your comrades. Finally, don't forget to hit the subscribe button.