

Trita Parsi: Israel's New & Terrifying Security Doctrine

Trita Parsi is the co-founder and Executive Vice President of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. Follow his excellent Substack: <https://tritaparsi.substack.com/> Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glennndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glennndiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glennndiesen> Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Buy Diesen merchandise: <https://diesen-shop.fourthwall.com/en-nok> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back, everyone. We are joined today by Trita Parsi, the Executive Vice President of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, and also an excellent analyst and author on his own Substack. And I've left a link in the description. Indeed, this is one of your articles I want to discuss with you today. So, well, let me first welcome you back. How have you been?

#Trita Parsi

Thank you so much. Really appreciate it.

#Glenn

I see that you wrote a new article, which is based on an article written by the head of one of Israel's most prominent think tanks, Major General Tamir Heyman. Indeed, I had a chance to read through the article published yesterday, and you had your own comments about this. Again, this is about Israel's new security doctrine, which he argues in his article is already here. How do you assess this? What is Israel's new security doctrine, and why has it changed?

#Trita Parsi

So I think it's important, because I made it clear towards the end of my piece—and it's mostly just kind of summarizing what he wrote and then adding a bit of my own comments—that my understanding is that this is not what Heyman is advocating for. In fact, there's a degree of skepticism and caution, but it seems to be a very careful caution that he's reflecting in all of this. But it is, I think, an attempt to describe what is emerging as a new security doctrine, and he's laying out

some of its principles. And some of them may not come as a surprise to people who follow this really closely, who have already seen a certain direction that it's going in. But I think seeing it in black and white as something to embrace is still a bit stunning.

And then there's, of course, principles in it that are absolutely surprising, you know. Now, perhaps a year from now, it wouldn't be. But at this point, such as his fifth point, which I put in as the first point as I was making comments on it, is that essentially saying the Israelis are treating the United States as a declining power and, given social and political shifts, will soon abandon Israel anyways. And this then means that Israel needs to move towards greater self-reliance in order to avoid what he calls excessive dependence on the U.S., since it exposes Israel to the influence of a progressive American value system that is incompatible with Israel's Jewish character, he writes. And again, he's just describing what he's saying.

He's not advocating or saying it, but this is where I think the conclusion is so sharp that he writes, which is not what I would have expected in a description of Israel's doctrine right now. He says, "...severing ties with the United States is therefore not only inevitable, but essential to Israel's independence and the resilience of its Jewish national identity." So he's saying that the new security doctrine that is emerging, or he's saying that it's essentially in place right now already, is one that requires Israel to sever its relations with the United States because it's already a declining power anyways, and because the U.S. is changing, it's not going to allow Israel's, what he calls, Jewish character or national character to survive.

Parts of this, I don't think a lot of people would be surprised by. The decline of the U.S. as a relative power, I think, is a controversial view, but it is controversial if it's coming out of Israel. It is controversial if it's coming out of some of the allies that are dependent on the United States. It may not be controversial to point out that there's a greater need for self-reliance and not excessive dependence. I would argue in favor of that in almost every place because I think it tends to lead to imbalanced relationships that ultimately backfire on both sides.

But for the Israelis to do it, and to use the language he uses, that severing ties with the United States is inevitable, I think that goes much further than I expected. But that's how he described it. That's what he believes the direction is. And I think that would be, you know, to say that it would be a profound change in global politics is quite an understatement. Remember, just a couple of years ago, most people in Europe didn't think that the U.S.'s position on Israel would ever change. Now we're seeing the change happening at a rate that is really difficult to grasp. And it's not just happening on the left. It's happening on the right as well.

#Glenn

I always assumed that when Israel recognized that the U.S. is a declining power, instead of becoming more militant, it would become less, you know, with the logic being, since the 1990s, the Israelis took on a more hostile or aggressive foreign policy because if you have an all-powerful,

unipolar United States behind you, that hegemon will, you know, you don't have to make any concessions. You can just base your security on primacy in the region, much like the U.S. will base it on primacy in the world. So I assumed that once it becomes obvious that the U.S. is in relative decline, again, not sinking into the ocean, it doesn't have to be absolute decline, just you have the rise of other centers of power, that Israel would have an incentive to then embrace diplomacy. Again, if you're going to be in a weaker position tomorrow than you are today, strike a deal with your neighbors. Absolutely. But in this article, you write essentially that Israel considers now peace to be unattainable in the Middle East. How so?

#Trita Parsi

So what he says, and again, he's just trying to describe the direction that Israel is going in. He writes that as part of the principles that are coming out of this: one, primacy of Jewish identity over democracy. Again, this is what, you know, the Labor Party warned about when it was trying to sell the peace process to the Israeli public back in the early 1990s, saying that democracy has to be... To safeguard the Jewish identity and safeguard democracy, you had to have a two-state solution. Otherwise, there would be an apartheid state. And this is the language that the Israeli leaders themselves back then used.

Now, what this head of the main think tank, or one of the main think tanks, in Israel is saying is that the emerging doctrine is to say that Jewish identity trumps democracy. So one of these talking points of the Israelis, which is that it's the only democracy in the Middle East, seems to have an expiration date. But on the issue of peace, it's very important what it says there. It says peace as a means rather than an end, and that a meaningful peace agreement is unattainable in the Middle East, and peace agreements are transactional and temporary anyway. So it is not an intrinsic value that generates security, but a means of achieving other policy objectives.

And then he adds to that another principle, which is rejection of the independent existence of Arab states, saying that Israel is now increasingly questioning the underlying premise that most Arab states are not genuine nation-states, but collections of tribes and ethnic groups, lacking a shared history and foundational national vision. And consequently, undermining their stability is viewed as a natural process by Israel, one that Israel can manage more effectively than if it contends with strong nation-states. And again, this reflects a lot of what many people have said for quite some time: that Israel doesn't want to see democracy in Arab states. It doesn't want to see strong states. It wants to keep the rest of the region weak. But this goes one step further and says they're not even states.

They're just a collection, a hodgepodge of tribes pretending to be states, and that it is a very manageable process to keep those tribes pretending to be states unstable. This is an explicit endorsement of keeping the rest of the region unstable with the excuse of saying they're not nation-states in the first place. They're not genuine states in the first place, and that this is part of how Israel then secures itself, achieves its objectives, by keeping the rest of the region unsafe and unstable. Again, it's very important. This is not written by a critic of Israel. This is written by the

head of one of the main think tanks in Israel, who's himself a high-ranking Israeli military prior to this. And he's not advocating this. There's a degree of skepticism and concern that he's expressing about this, but he's saying this is the emerging doctrine.

#Glenn

Well, the primacy of Jewish identity over democracy, it kind of makes sense now. As you said, you can't be a democracy and a Jewish state if there's only a one-state solution, because how does that work if the Jewish people are less than half of the population? How can you have a democracy and keep the Jewish identity? I think the only option is then apartheid, ethnic cleansing, or genocide. There's not many other options if you want to. You can't be both.

But it's interesting, though, that they elevate the Jewish identity above democracy, because that's one of the things that alienates Israel these days in the United States, that it's the whole premise that they're the only democracy in the region. It seems to be withering away. But besides the relative decline, is it unreasonable for Israel to see that they have to now not just assume that the U. S. is a declining power, but they're also not a reliable ally necessarily because you do have a massive growing criticism towards Israel, which you didn't have in the past.

#Trita Parsi

Yeah. No, I think it's totally reasonable for Israel to see what the rest of the world sees, which is—well, rest of the world minus Europe, perhaps, I should say, since we tend to agree on this—that the Europeans should have woken up to this a long time ago, and they still haven't fully woken up, that making yourself excessively dependent on the United States is not a smart thing. And then he adds, of course, given the changes taking place in the U.S., this relationship that existed before was not going to survive anyways. But it's the response afterwards, right?

So for people like us at Quincy, and I think Glenn, you would be very much aligned with this view, when we were saying Europe needs to make sure that it can stand up for its own security, shoulder more of the security burden, that was an argument in favor of balancing the U.S.-European relationship in order to make sure that Europe had enough independence to be able to go its own way if it needed to. It was not an argument in favor of militarism in Europe. It was not an argument of making Europeans neoconservatives who think that they have to constantly be at war with Russia or whatever else.

And again, here you have a scenario in which there's a realization, a recognition of a clear reality of where the U.S. is heading, where U.S. relative power is heading. The response, however, is war as a natural action. What he writes is: "War as a foundational state. War is essential to national security and cannot be replaced by a state of peace." That's not the conclusion I think most countries should

or would take. That is the direction Israel has chosen to go. So I think the response to a reality that we can agree on is very, very different from what I think many of us would wish Israel to go, or any country to go, in.

#Glenn

Yeah, also, what I thought stood out was this priority of offense over defense. That is, security is not deterrence and defense. It's preemption and surprise attacks. This is, I mean, if every country adopted such a security doctrine, it would be all-out total war all the time. This is quite extraordinary, though.

#Trita Parsi

I mean, we have the entire body of international law precisely to prevent this, to make sure that there were doctrines of self-defense, doctrines of proportionality, doctrines of when anticipatory self-defense is permissible. By that, and saying that prevention is not permissible, there is a degree of preemption that could be defensible or compatible with international law under specific circumstances. But prevention is completely incompatible with international law, whereas what he now says is that the Israeli security doctrine explicitly is making prevention the first response of Israel's security, and anything that relies on defense is essentially inferior.

And as you pointed out, if every country adopted this, we would be at all-out war all the time. And I think the question that Western states now have to ask themselves, and what I write in my Substack, is that this reality is simply not compatible with U.S. or Western interests, makes Israel a country that is simply not compatible with U.S. or Western interests. And if they still want to retain that relationship with a country that is going in this direction, that is trying to establish these types of principles as acceptable forms of statecraft, then the West and the U.S. itself have to go through a transformation that turns it into a country that treats war as a permanent and desirable state.

#Glenn

Yeah, I picked the wrong word there, actually. Preemptive would suggest that an attack is imminent, and so you hit first before they hit you. Preventive, that's a bit like the U.S. did in Iraq. That is, you know, a future crisis or threat might emerge down the line, so let's take them out today. That falls very far outside international law. Absolutely. Let me pivot a little bit towards the other wars in the region, which I guess help to fuel this kind of, let's say, crazy war rhetoric in Israel. Not just the U.S.-Iran war, but also the war now between the Saudis and Yemen.

But first, how do you see the rhetoric between the Iranians and the Americans keep intensifying? And we see some movements of military hardware and troops. Again, you keep a much closer eye on this than me. Do you see indications that we might be drifting back into an all-out U.S.-Iran war? And if that's the case, just to expand on that question, what would that look like? Because the

Iranians keep warning us that if there's another attack, then they will shed even more constraints. They will be prepared to go further up that escalation ladder.

#Trita Parsi

I've not seen any indications in the last week that would make me feel more comfortable that this kind of lull actually is a preparation for de-escalation rather than the calm before the storm. The most optimistic thing I've heard about the talks is that they haven't broken down, and that, to me, is not sufficient for a very simple reason. If this was normal circumstances, perhaps that in and of itself would be a good sign. But under these circumstances, one has to recognize that, on the U.S. side, because Trump would prefer that no war breaks out before the midterms for obvious reasons.

That having ongoing talks that don't lead anywhere but nevertheless continue to take place serves as one way of creating a buffer, greater difficulty for the Iranians to end up taking preemptive strikes against the United States if the Iranians believe that Trump is just waiting out the clock, waiting for the midterms to be over, and then go for a major escalation. The Iranians have said that they may preempt such an attack, and from the U.S.'s perspective, it would be very problematic if that preemption takes place before the midterms. So if you have talks taking place, even if they don't go anywhere, but you're just kind of continuing them, one purpose for that could very well be to make that preemption less likely.

So as a result, when I hear from inside the talks, well, the best sign is that they're still ongoing. Under these circumstances, that doesn't tell me anything. It doesn't tell me convincingly that we're moving in a direction in which the risk of a major flare-up has reduced. Add to that noises coming out of Israel, in which the Israelis are apparently potentially trying to get a green light that they may actually engage in direct military strikes themselves before their elections, which is roughly a week before the midterms on October 27th, because of the impact Netanyahu believes that could have on his elections.

As you know, he's already prolonged the slaughter in Gaza, rejected ceasefires so many times because he did not want a state of war to end, because the continuation of something that wrongly is called war nevertheless has been something that has enabled him to stay in power and avoid new elections. October 27th is the last day that you could have elections. There's no way of postponing it any longer. But if you have a new flare-up with the Iranians, the calculation on the Israeli side, or Netanyahu's side, is that it could help defeat his political opponents. And as a result, we're hearing more noise that that is a possibility that could be undertaken.

#Glenn

In addition to the fact that

#Trita Parsi

Also, some noise from the U.S. side that perhaps the U.S. itself will undertake an attack and not wait for the Iranians to preempt them. Because even though the U.S. preference, if they want to have a round three, would be after the midterms, if your choices are between the Iranians preempting you or you preempting the Iranians, the administration may calculate that, at a minimum, if the U.S. preempts the Iranians, then the U.S. comes across as being in control of the situation, which is less problematic than if the Iranians do the preempting a couple of days before the midterms and profoundly embarrass Trump.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, I can see why the Iranians might want to take initiative here, because if both the Israelis and the Americans allow their elections to dictate the timeframe of the war, it's kind of a thing you don't want to hand over necessarily to your opponent, that the escalation can control the decision when the hostilities resume. But also, given that we have a tendency of underestimating the Iranians, well, indeed, it appears that the Iranians underestimated the Iranians in terms of how they would perform. But they're now suggesting that they might escalate further. What is it that the Iranians could do differently? I mean, yeah, they're going to strike these U.S. bases, but many have been destroyed or partly evacuated. They can go after energy fields. I mean, what other cards do the Iranians have to play, you think? I mean, they're not saying that they have to play these cards.

#Trita Parsi

Yeah. Depends on how high, vertically and horizontally, they want to escalate. If they want to go beyond what they've done before horizontally, you might see the Iranians start trying to hit ships outside of the strait, ships that have already passed through, to essentially expand the arena and then, of course, intensify the number of ships that they're hitting. You could see an effort similar to what you saw in the first two days of the war, in which the Iranians very dramatically closed the straits. Right now, there's still ships going through. The Trump administration has made a big deal out of that. And it's not unimportant, but it's also important to recognize that increasing evidence appears to be emerging that suggests that many of those ships that are going through are actually paying off the Iranians.

And that's part of the reason why they're allowing it to happen. Just in the last couple of days, we've seen how they've intensified their attacks, I think signaling that they're still in control and they determine which ships go through and which don't. You could see a dramatic closing of that. You could see strikes against U.S. bases further away, in Jordan and in other places that have not been struck yet. We have even seen them strike at Egypt on one occasion. I don't think they will do this easily or lightly, but nevertheless, if they want to signal that they can still redefine the geography of this war, redefine the very character of this war, which they have done and has further given the impression that the U.S. is not in control of the war, I think there's still options for them to do so.

They could go after energy infrastructure, but that would be a major invitation for the U.S. to then strike at Iranian infrastructure. The only reason I think the U.S. hasn't done it so far is out of fear that the Iranians would strike at GCC energy infrastructure. But if Iran is already doing so, then the U.S. may feel that it has no choice, that it isn't an added cost for them to go after Iranian energy infrastructure. So I doubt that they will do that unless you have a scenario in which either they believe the U.S. is going to do it anyways, but even then I find it not a particularly smart move, or if they do something small right before the midterms.

And they do so as a warning to the United States, to just signal again their willingness to retaliate in kind if the U.S. goes in that direction, in the hope that that will be a deterrent. But that raises several question marks as to whether it would be a deterrent after the midterms, because the U.S. side knows very well that the Iranians are likely to hit energy infrastructure if the U.S. hits Iranian energy infrastructure. I don't think there is any need for additional convincing. What has happened on the American side is a belief that perhaps the U.S. can withstand that cost, whereas prior to the midterms, that was not a cost that the U.S. was willing to risk.

#Glenn

Well, in terms of the horizontal escalation, that's a reference again to widening the war. How do you think other... would they deliberately pull more countries into this conflict? I mean, because the whole war between Saudi Arabia and Yemen, it was largely initiated by the Saudis by striking the airport in the capital of Yemen. But I'm not saying that Iran doesn't, I guess, enthusiastically support this. But nonetheless, do you see them being prepared to spread it into other countries, using Iraqi militias to head into Kuwait? I mean, if the Saudis are able to convince the Syrians to send troops to Yemen, would they encourage Iraqi militias to head into Syria? I mean, how do you see the possibility of expanding horizontally here?

#Trita Parsi

I see there's huge risks there, but I think that the Iranians are going to stick with what they have said so far, which is they will not strike at Saudi Arabia if Saudi continues to prevent the U.S. Air Force from using Saudi airspace for attacks on Iran. But if that changes, then I think, yes, you will see attacks against Saudi Arabia. But I think they're trying to stick to that principle. And as a result, yes, you will likely see attacks against Kuwait and Bahrain because those states don't have the agency to be able to say no to the U.S. But you're not necessarily gonna see it against other states if there's no evidence that their soil or bases or airspace have been used in those attacks.

What you might see, which would definitely be a major horizontal escalation, is if evidence emerges that bases in Cyprus, in Bulgaria, are being used. The Iranians have been very clear about warning about that. It appears that they do have the ability to reach those bases. Whether they have the ability to do it with the precision, et cetera, it's not clear to me whether they have the ability to hit

those and escape numerous layers of air defense systems up until they reach that point. Again, not clear to me.

But I can see that, because I think there's also a desire on the Iranian side that if they can avoid inflicting further damage onto the GCC states and instead expand the war outside of the GCC, that is to their benefit at this point, given the fact that there are conversations, diplomacy taking place between the Iranians and the GCC states about what will happen after the war. And just as much as the Houthi escalation has complicated matters between Iran and Saudi Arabia, if the Iranians go back to attacking those states, it will obviously complicate it. But again, if the Kuwaitis and the Bahrainis cannot stop the U.S. from using their airspace and their territory for attacks, the Iranians will obviously strike them as well. The question is, as part of a further escalation horizontally, where else would they go?

#Glenn

Yeah, well, that's the thing. It could be unpredictable, but the Iranians seem to have several cards to play. But one—well, part of this conflict, the wider one in the region, the conflict now between the Saudis and Yemen, I mean—this seems to be only getting worse for the Saudis. I see now that the Houthis are threatening to strike the Aramco oil fields in Saudi Arabia again. And the Saudis today hit some—yeah, they hit some, I think, refinery or something along those lines in Yemen. Again, you would know better. But where do you see this headed? Because this... this is becoming almost more important than the U.S.-Iran theory seems. Do you think the Saudis could actually begin to crumble? Because you hear a lot of internal tensions now within Saudi Arabia as well.

#Trita Parsi

Yeah. I don't know enough about the internal situation in Saudi Arabia to say anything meaningful on that, Glenn. But let me make a couple of points. First, I think it's very important to remember that this was a huge mistake by Saudi Arabia. They had, through the Saudi-Iran normalization, managed to pacify Yemen. They could focus on 2030. Obviously, major challenges. Iran were a major problem. But at least they were not back at war with the Houthis. But then I understand that the Saudis viewed the Iranians flying airplanes to Sana'a to pick up the Houthi officials for the funeral of the late Supreme Leader of Iran, Khamenei, and saw that as an effort to breach the blockade, and then struck at Yemen, struck at the airport there, killed people, and felt that they were restoring the blockade, whereas in reality they started a war.

And now we see how that war has gone into Saudi territory, and I think the Saudis are very, very surprised. And they didn't see the significant maneuvers the Houthis would do inside of Yemen either. So I think it's important to first recognize that there was no need to be—there was a huge Saudi miscalculation that led to this point. Secondly, in regards to the Iranians, this is part of the

reason why the Iranians, contrary to the narrative in the West that Iran's about to collapse economically and everything Bessent is saying, the Iranians seem to be profoundly confident about the future.

They believe that whether there is a deal, it will be good for them, or whether there is a continuation of the war, their position actually will strengthen. Because the trajectory of regional circumstances is such that the U.S. position and the position of U.S. allies are being weakened by this continued warfare and will eventually lead to a stronger Iranian position at the negotiating table, if necessary. They go back to the table three months from now compared to today. I mean, just look at where things are right now in Saudi and Yemen.

I think the danger here that I think the Iranians also should be aware of, of course, is that the situation is very dynamic, very unpredictable, and is bringing us into a territory in which the escalation may end up becoming uncontrollable. Everything we talked about before, about what would the Iranians do to counter-escalate, is nevertheless within a context of very well-calibrated escalation by both sides, including by the United States. But I think this war brings us into a territory in which the variables are increasing and control over these variables is becoming weaker. And as a result, uncontrollable escalation can happen. In that scenario, you're losing your leverage because your leverage is based on your ability to control the escalation.

#Glenn

Well, you're describing a vertical escalation, horizontal, as well as diminishing escalation control—that is, all sides losing control over this. And given that the war doesn't have any convincing story in terms of how this can be a success, I mean, both the war against Iran and the Saudi-Yemen war, but given that probably both the U.S. and the Iranians, the Saudis as well, all of them would like to put an end to this. Well, hopefully. Just a last question: How do you see the possibility of China assisting in this? Because the U.S. has kind of thrown away some of its credibility here and also doesn't have that strong hand. But I'm assuming if the Chinese could put an end to this, they wouldn't mind.

#Trita Parsi

I think the Chinese at this point would... Let me put it this way. Tom Pickering and I wrote a piece for Responsible Statecraft last week in which we argue that China may be the only country at this point that can actually step in and prevent it. And we explained why circumstances are getting so bad that the Chinese instinct of staying out will be overridden potentially by a realization that the cost of staying out is actually higher than the cost of intervening diplomatically. In subsequent conversations we've had, it's become quite clear to us there actually is an active Chinese effort to try to find ways to play a role.

But the Chinese are not going to step in unless the U.S. welcomes them. They're not going to go into this in a manner that really dramatically reduces the likelihood of success, only adds to the conflict, and gives the Chinese a bad track record. So they will need to feel a genuine desire from the U.S. And by the way, the Chinese don't have to intervene openly. They can actually do a lot of things behind the scenes, which may be more preferable from an American side. But I do personally think that one of the key reasons why China is needed in this is because Trump is in a misinformation space. He's drinking his own Kool-Aid.

His administration, by and large, is drinking their own Kool-Aid. They're believing in an image of reality that does not exist, just as they did back in January and February, when they were lulled to believe that the war would take no more than four days. And here we are eight, nine months later. Trump is once again in that space. All of these headlines about the Strait is open and the oil flow is back on, Iran's economy is about to collapse— all of these things, if you scratch the surface just a little bit, it falls apart. But Trump genuinely seems to believe it. And I'm not seeing any signs that anyone inside the administration really can challenge this at this point.

And I don't see anyone in the region. I don't think MBS's relationship with Trump is sufficiently strong to be able to challenge this, or Erdogan's, or Putin's, for that matter. But I think Xi is the one world leader that may actually get Trump to really focus and listen. Not to say that he would immediately be convinced, but just add a little bit of doubt to it so that he can slowly but surely move towards a more realistic assessment of what actually is taking place, adjust his negotiating position and demands accordingly, and then not give up, not cave, none of that, but just a negotiating position that has some sort of a relationship with reality.

#Glenn

Yeah, the detachment from reality is becoming a key theme. I saw even him leaning in on the war now, the Ukraine war, and he was making the point, "Oh, we have an energy ceasefire deal." And, you know, the Ukrainians and Russians, you know, they genuinely don't know what he's talking about. And when he was asked by a reporter, like, "What do you mean? They said there is no deal." "It is a deal because I say it is a deal." I mean, well, what is this? This is, I mean, to hear this from the American president, it's like—I think I said things like this when I was angry when I was five years old. It's very strange to hear this coming from the U.S. president. Just adding a last question. Again, China, yes, I agree. It seems that it is the most, well, the best possible country-state to mediate some of this.

But of course, the United States keeps pointing out that a lot of this war in Iran is intended to weaken the Chinese as well, cut off their supply, their access to energy, all of this. And in contrast, if the U.S. is unsuccessful in Iran, we would see essentially a shift of the regional order, one which might end up giving the Chinese a lot of influence, given that this war between Iran and the U.S. is largely about shaping the regional order, which then also shapes the global order. What are the

considerations on the American side? Because how much wouldn't they want to keep the Chinese out of this? I think that's a fair argument, but I doubt that the Chinese are going to enter into the region militarily as a result of a mediation effort.

#Trita Parsi

The Chinese have been very smart. They've not run around the world building 750 military bases as the core infrastructure of their global influence. That's not what they're relying on. They're smart enough to understand that having bases or a military hegemony in the region is far more of a headache than a benefit. This is my line. I stick to it. I wouldn't wish military hegemony in the Middle East on my worst enemy. I have no idea why people think it's attractive. And I don't see the Chinese being dumb enough to go for it. I know there's been a concern, for instance, in the early years of the Biden administration. Sorry, there was this... Lost my voice.

There was this force posture review that Secretary Austin was doing. And the original draft of that, or one of the early drafts of it, would actually have had the U.S. leave 17 out of 19 bases. This is before October 7th. The reason why that did not end up becoming the final draft, and the whole draft ended up becoming a nothing burger—nothing changed, frankly—was an argument that the competition with China would not take place in the South China Sea; it would take place all over the globe, including in the Middle East. And as a result, anywhere you would withdraw from would create a vacuum that the Chinese would fill.

It's a logic that, you know, on paper may make sense, but has, again, a very questionable reality in the Middle East because it presumes a Chinese desire to go in this direction, which we have not seen any evidence for. And I would doubt that we would see any evidence for it at this point. I mean, after seeing what 19 American—or 17 American—bases in the region managed to achieve, why would anyone want to rebuild that? I mean, the U.S. itself is unlikely to rebuild those bases. So why would the Chinese? Will the Chinese increase their influence? Yes, that's, at this point, unavoidable. It's a result of the United States making war plans based on completely false perceptions, false premises, and failing.

That genie's out of the box. That cannot be reversed at this point. The question is, what can be salvaged? And by the way, if the Chinese really wanted to screw over the U.S., they could have pushed for mediation or other forms of intervention a long time ago, not just in Iran, but also in Ukraine. The Chinese have not been looking for that. On Gaza, there were plenty of opportunities for that, to really undermine the U.S., given the role that the U.S. was playing in all this. And you didn't see the Chinese do this. And to the disappointment of certain people or countries who actually wanted to see the Chinese take on a much stronger role, they didn't.

#Glenn

Yeah, that's a good point. Well, I didn't mean the military challenge. I thought more the economic influence being able to enter because the U.S., of course, can use its security role as a security provider to gain a very privileged economic foothold. That being said, I got the same impression from China that overall they just don't want to be locked into some kind of a strategic rivalry with the U.S., where indeed the U.S. feels like, oh, if we let go one place, the Chinese will come in. This kind of security competition doesn't serve security interests. I think that's the sense from China.

#Trita Parsi

Absolutely. And again, on your point, the Chinese economic influence is going to continue. It's going to grow because the U.S. is no longer the security guarantor of the region. That's just the reality. It's going to take some time before people fully internalize it. It's going to take some time before some of these infrastructures are replaced with something else. And it's going to take some time before the official reality is changed. The unofficial reality has already changed. But I see no scenario in which the United States goes back to the role that it played before February 28th of this year. I don't think there's any return to it. Frankly, I think there's plenty of people in the administration and beyond that will see it as perhaps a small and unfortunate development, but nevertheless a silver lining in all of this.

#Glenn

Well, thank you very much for taking the time. I always appreciate your insights. And yeah, for our listeners, please check out the Substack of Trita Parsi in the description. So thanks again.

#Trita Parsi

Thank you so much for having me.

#Trita Parsi

I really appreciate it.