

Patrick Henningsen: Negotiations vs. Bombs: The Middle East Paradox

This interview examines the escalating Middle East war, arguing that public calls for negotiations contrast with ongoing military pressure and shifting rhetoric. It explores claims of limited military resources, political time pressure in Washington and Tel Aviv, Iran's longer-term strategy, Gulf states' vulnerability, and the wider economic and geopolitical stakes around energy routes. The discussion also frames the conflict as part of a larger shift in regional power and a possible turning point in the global order.

#Nima

The war in the Middle East is somehow reaching the next level. Donald Trump is now coming out and talking about negotiations, some sort of effort. We had a report on CNN saying that the United States is trying to talk with the Iranians through, you know, the Turks, Pakistanis, and Omanis, and they're doing everything possible to reach the Iranians. And here's what Donald Trump said just moments ago about what's going on.

#Guest

Great. The borders are great. The military is great. We're having, by the way, tremendous success, as you know, in Iran. We had one in Venezuela, and now we're having one in Iran. They have no navy left. They have no air force left. They have no anti-aircraft equipment left, no radar left, no leaders left. The leaders are all gone. Nobody knows who to talk to. But we're actually talking to the right people, and they want to make a deal so badly. You have no idea how badly they want to make a deal. And we'll see what happens. I want to thank Pete Hegseth. The job you're doing over there is really incredible—you and the general, and all of the other generals and colonels and captains and majors and everybody else, right? It's a perfect, amazing thing. We make the best military equipment in the world. Now we're going to make it faster. We want to get it faster. But we make the best in the world. We're doing a job.

#Nima

Yeah, I think the points he mentioned, Patrick—something in the tone in Washington, the way they're talking about the war—has changed since Iran hit the Mona. And the Israeli defense system, well, just yesterday I talked with Professor Ted Postol. He said they don't have any air defense system left in the country to defend Israel. That's a huge, huge factor to consider in the calculations on the part of Washington and Israel. What's your understanding of this new rhetoric going around?

#Patrick

Yeah, it's good that you pointed this out. I do a lot of dialogue analysis—I try to break down and analyze the dialogue, look at the tone, the psychology behind it. And it seems to me Trump is taking evasive action right now. He's trying to create a narrative of victory, like, "We've achieved so much." He's repeating all these boilerplate talking points: we've gotten rid of their navy, we've gotten rid of their air force, we've killed all their leaders—it's a great success. You know, just as an aside, for a president of the United States to be trumpeting "great success" by the level to which he's tried to destroy, or has destroyed, another country is quite disgusting. But let's put that aside for the moment. Let's read into what he was saying there—he's basically saying there are no leaders.

We don't know who to talk to. I've heard this before—I can't remember who says it all the time. I know it's Benjamin Netanyahu. This is the Israeli tactic: "Oh, we want to negotiate, but there's nobody to talk to. They're all terrorists, and we've killed them all," basically. So that's the Israeli strategy—you can't have negotiations if you've killed the opposing negotiating party, which is normally what Israel does, and gets away with because they have the United States backing them up on that. Now the United States has adopted this type of barbaric savagery, this medieval-level sort of diplomacy, if you want to call it that. But this isn't true. The Iranian leadership is intact, but they've stated very clearly on multiple occasions that they're not going to talk to the United States.

There are no negotiations because the U.S. has already burned those bridges by using previous negotiations—which were done in good faith by the Iranians—as cover for a sneak attack. Arachi has said that; I don't know how many times he's said it in the last couple of weeks, at least twenty times publicly. So that's what the president should be repeating if he's being honest with the American people: saying, look, we want to talk, but the Iranians have said there will be no talks with the U.S. because we burned them so badly in the past, and that they're going to settle this on the battlefield—or when they're satisfied that their security interests have been met in Iran, then it will come to an end.

It's not going to be through negotiations. I've not heard a U.S. leader say this, you see, because they don't know how to sell that to the American people or to a Western audience—that a supposedly weak, lesser power is dictating the terms for the settlement at the end. Now, you can argue about whether Iran's going to be successful in those terms. That's an open question. This is open for debate and discussion, and it's an answer we won't get immediately either, because this looks like it's going to be a long, drawn-out drama that could take place over weeks, months—who knows, maybe years. It could simmer down, and it could reignite again once the U.S. and Israel have rearmed, which is what they did eight months ago anyway, after the 12-day war.

So this could be part of a similar cycle here. But the U.S. cannot say—cannot admit to the world—that somebody else is dictating terms. It just can't. The fact that Iran is even doing this, or attempting to do it, is really a big challenge to U.S. authority, to U.S. hegemony in the region. And if you look at how the Gulf states and their so-called allies in the region are in total disarray at the

moment, and also torn between people within countries like Saudi Arabia, and even the UAE and Bahrain, and others who are basically saying, "Actually, no, U.S. bases are posing a direct, existential risk to us—even to our existence as countries—not to mention the damage to our trade, our markets, our energy, and so on."

They're making those statements at the same time, so there's not even a consensus or unanimity within the Gulf states about whether they're going to lean heavily toward the U.S.—their traditional ally, you could say, meant to protect them—or whether they're going to lean away from the U.S., seeing it as a potential risk because of hosting U.S. bases and what that means for their relationships across the Gulf. In Iran right now, yes, you could say on paper that it's weak, but the fact that Iran is still fighting after four weeks, dictating terms, and managing the Strait of Hormuz—that doesn't look like it's losing. You can't say Iran is losing. It's not a clear designation.

I think, if anything, this conflict is probably in a kind of stalemate at the moment—on the escalation ladder. We'll see what happens. But those factors you mentioned before, Nima, are the important ones. There aren't infinite resources for the U.S. in terms of armaments and munitions, or for the Israelis in terms of Iron Dome, Patriot missile interceptors, U.S. interceptors, and anti-aircraft systems. These are finite resources, as is maintaining a full package of naval attack groups, carrier strike groups, all the air-to-air refueling, and the logistics that go with that. This is not infinite. You can't keep doing this.

This is not George Orwell's continuous war against East Asia. It's not going to work. They have a finite timeline—the United States does. Trump himself has a shorter timeline, which is the political one. Israel has a finite timeline, and Netanyahu has a very short political timeline. He has to declare results, or they have to draw a line under this—surrender, declare victory, or whatever. They have to do it in a very short space of time because they're in danger of political collapse in Israel. The Netanyahu regime is in danger of delegitimization by his own hand, as is Trump, with the upcoming midterms.

Compare that, Nima, to Iran's timeline. Is Iran working on a short timeline, or are they working on a very long timeline? I would say they're working on a very long timeline. So if this is a war of attrition, I'm probably not going to bet against Iran at this stage. By the same token, I never bet against Russia with the proxy war in Ukraine, because it's a similar type of dynamic. The public appetite for an unpopular war is limited—you have a limited window to achieve your military or political objectives if you're the West, if you're the U.S. That was true in Ukraine with that proxy war, and it's true here. In a way, the U.S. is using Israel as a kind of proxy, but what they're doing is a fake tag-team wrestling act.

Good cop, bad cop. "Oh, we're talking with the Iranians," says Trump on Truth Social. And then, as soon as he says that, the Iranians say two hours later, "No, no, no, we're not talking with them." And then an hour later, Israel strikes energy infrastructure. And the U.S. says, "Oh, we had no idea Israel was going to do this. I mean, wow, Netanyahu, we need to have a talk with him. He's being

very naughty.” Yep—and we’re supposed to believe there’s no coordination between these two staunch allies. It’s just not credible at this point.

Anybody who still believes these are two separate actors and that they’re not working absolutely in concert—I mean, I think Israel is leading here, definitely setting the pace in this tag-team act. But I’ll say, Nima, this reminds me a lot of the Suez Crisis on many different levels. Not least because during the Suez Crisis, the British and the French teamed up with the Israelis to attack Egypt and retake the Suez Canal, but they did it with a fake tag team. They had secret agreements that were later exposed.

The Sèvres Agreement was a secret pact between the French, the British, and the Israelis, where they’d use Israel as the lead attack dog and pretend to restrain it while they maneuvered their British and French assets into position to ultimately checkmate Egypt. But it didn’t work, because the United States and the Soviet Union moved in to support Gamal Abdel Nasser at that time, in 1956. And why this is significant, in terms of historical comparison, Nima, is because the Suez Crisis marked the end of the British Empire and the end of British domination in the Middle East and Central Asia, where the United States then took over the role of the lead superpower with custodial stewardship over the region.

And I think what’s happening now with the Strait of Hormuz is very similar to the Suez Canal in that sense, where we could be watching a change in the world order—where the United States is losing its hegemonic, dominant position in the Middle East that it’s enjoyed since 1956. And we’re watching the end of an era here. Who takes over that role? That’s a whole other question and a whole other debate. But I would venture to think this could increase China’s involvement, and Iran itself as a regional ally and potential hegemon. And who knows what will happen as a result of this—whether Pakistan’s role will also increase in terms of the security architecture of the Persian Gulf, providing some kind of support for the Iranians.

But again, these are all open questions. I will say that in both cases—Suez and Iran, and the current war we’re seeing right now—we’re witnessing a procession, a change in the global order that’s in progress because of this conflict. And for similar reasons, it started and has been executed in a similar way. The debacle, the failure—if it turns out to be a failure—by the U.S. and Israel shows they haven’t learned some of their lessons from history, if you really look at the dynamics of the Suez Crisis. That could be a whole other discussion; we could do a whole show on that.

#Nima

I think Iran has adopted the Russian strategy in Ukraine, which is no ceasefire until all objectives are reached. And that’s exactly what we’ve heard several times from Iranian officials. How do you see the role of the Arab countries in that scenario? Because right now we’ve learned that Saudi Arabia,

the UAE, and Kuwait are gathering—they want to form some kind of unified force against Iran. But that's not going to happen anytime soon. So how do you see Iran's approach, the way it's setting out its objectives?

#Patrick

First of all, I do see talk of—and most of this is goading, by the way. This is goading from the West and from Israel. They're trying to goad the Gulf Arabs in the media, basically in the political space, saying that, well, you know, Iran may have had the Gulf countries on their side before, but after what the Iranians have just done, it just doesn't make any sense why they would turn the Gulf states against them—and that they could join the fight against Iran. I highly doubt that the Gulf states are going to join any kind of military action against Iran, for the simple reason that that would basically give Iran the green light to start demilitarizing Saudi Arabia and demilitarizing the UAE. And Kuwait—it's just a U.S. base, as is Bahrain. And I don't know if I've left anybody out.

#Nima

Iran doesn't need to go to Kuwait. The Iraqi resistance is there.

#Patrick

Yeah, it's not a real country anyway. That would be the death knell for the Saudi regime—they'd be finished. I mean, they might even be finished already. Time will tell. So yeah, it's just not credible. And also, look, Saudi Arabia, in their infinite wisdom, when MBS was defense minister—he was like 32 years old—and the Obama administration convinced Saudi Arabia to go to war with Yemen in 2015. They fought that for seven, eight years. How did that end up for Saudi Arabia? They couldn't even beat the Houthis. And this was before Yemen had developed the kind of fighting units they've had in the last couple of years, before they had missiles and drone tech—and they still couldn't subdue Yemen.

Saudi Arabia, with a modern, full-blown American military and U.S. personnel basically running the war for them, still couldn't beat the Yemenis. So what makes you think Saudi is going to put up any kind of credible fight against Iran? It's just laughable to even think about. You know, as soon as Iranian missiles land and take out Saudi Arabia's air force and a couple of their main bases, you'll see so many people fleeing that country—heading off to Paris, to Miami, to Montreal, to London, to the south of France. That's where the Saudis are going. And whoever stays, I mean, it would be the end of the regime. Now, that raises an interesting question, which I think we spoke about before: is this part of the master plan—to weaken and ultimately achieve regime change?

I'm sure the United States and Israel might be entertaining that possibility. Maybe Iran might benefit from it as well. We'll see. But to me, that's a natural consequence of what we're seeing now. If the Qatari regime can't extract any meaningful profits from their gas sector for the next five years, I

don't think there's going to be a royal family there in five years, quite frankly. I don't think there's going to be much of anything in Qatar in five years. I mean, where's the money coming from? It's not going to be from tourism. I just can't see how these Gulf states are still towing the U.S. line after what's happened in the last four weeks. If they're that incompetent and don't have the courage to stand up to the United States after the last four weeks, then I think they're toast.

Honestly, I don't think there's a future for them. They're not accountable to their populations anyway. And there aren't many of them in the Emirates or Qatar to begin with. How many native Qataris are there living in Qatar—what is it, 200,000? How many Emiratis live in the Emirates? The other four million or whatever are all foreigners: slave labor, management class, retail class, financial class—all foreigners, from the U.S., from Europe, from the Far East. There are no Emiratis there, and there are no Qataris in Qatar. So what are you dealing with here? What exactly are these countries, other than glorified U.S. outposts and maybe tax-free offshore havens for money laundering and other kinds of offshore finance?

I mean, that's kind of what they are. That's not really the basis for a real country. And having no independent foreign policy—not even being able to stand up for your own basic interests—that doesn't bode well for your long-term future. So they should be very worried the longer this war goes on, and the fact that their energy infrastructure and economies are going to be damaged to some degree. They're not going to be able to, uh, flex or show the kind of largesse they're used to, which is very inefficient. It just means you've got more money than you need.

So you're able to do things that normal countries wouldn't be able to do, because you don't have to think twice about it. You can make mistakes, like building, uh, The Line in Saudi Arabia—which is this futuristic wall city that runs through Neom, a concept city. You're able to do this stuff because you've got more money than you know what to do with, and you're not really accountable. It's just like, the king has a vision, MBS has a vision—let's all get on board with his. He's so forward-thinking, this MBS. That's basically Saudi Arabia. I don't think this is going to happen anymore in the region.

I think the region has changed now, in the last month. I don't think it's ever going to go back to this fairytale land of fake civilizations in the desert that are completely unsustainable—environmentally, economically, and politically. That's the reality. And Iran has exposed this. So either they get on board with reality in the Gulf, or I think they're finished. Eventually, they're going to be gone. It might take a year or two, maybe three, four, or five, but I don't think you're going to see these same regimes in the future at the current pace—unless they adapt, unless they adapt to the new reality. Then maybe they have a chance to survive.

#Nima

Patrick, we had a new assassination in Iran—a scientist, a university professor, was killed by the Israelis. And many people in Iran are arguing that if Israel continues with this kind of approach, we'll have to take out an entire building of researchers connected to the Israeli military. You know, this is

becoming really sensitive in Iran. If Israel keeps up this kind of behavior—these attacks on Iranian civilians—these aren't military people, they're university professors, mostly academics. But how do you see it, in terms of a long-term strategy for Iran? What would be the solution? Because these people, they assassinate everyone they choose to. The Netanyahu administration, as you mentioned before, they're bragging about these assassinations, bragging about all these heinous acts on their part.

#Patrick

It's beyond the pale at this point. Israel has proven to the world that it is a despicable criminal regime, and the level of savagery and absolute barbarism on display is staggering. I mean, basically—yeah, we're going to kill an entire apartment block of people to get one academic or one scientist, because we want to take out the intellectual leaders in STEM fields in Iran, since they might be helping with the civilian nuclear power program. And therefore, we're justified in killing an unlimited number of women and children around them as criminals. We'll call it collateral damage, and we don't care, because we are Israel.

And yeah, this kind of ethno-supremacist mentality is the same—you see the same sort of barbaric, racist mindset, violent state terror. Just look at Gaza, look at the hellscape of Gaza. That's a direct result of this same criminal, murderous, genocidal mentality. That's the problem with the state of Israel. And the problem as well is that the United States supports this. The U.S. backs it; they endorse all of these actions by Israel because they themselves share the same values as Israel. It's very deeply held—racist, anti-Muslim, anti-Arab, anti-Middle Eastern, anti-Central Asian.

And this is just, to me, if you really step back and look at it, not much has changed since the colonial era. And quite frankly, if we go back further—since the Crusades—it's unfortunately the same mentality. It's the Eurocentric, racist, ethno-supremacist mindset, and they dress it up with religion to sell the idea that they're somehow better, when in fact they're carrying out the most heinous crimes against humanity on a daily basis. I mean, look at what the Israelis are doing in Lebanon right now. Nobody cares. Nobody has a word to say about them. They can just kill, maim, plunder, and commit genocide their way through the entire region. And nobody in Europe has the courage to stand up.

No government is saying, "No, we're going to sanction Israel now." Because let me tell you, if enough countries started sanctioning Israel, you'd start to see things wind down pretty quickly. But they don't have the courage to do that, for various reasons. Either they're being co-opted, bribed, blackmailed—who knows. But the results are pretty clear to see. And the other, unfortunate part about this is that it does show Iran is prosecuting its war differently. From the beginning of this conflict—and we can go back to the 12-day war, we can go back to True Promise 1, 2, 3, 4—Israel attacks civilians with impunity and brags about it.

When Iran retaliates, they've always done so in a very measured way to avoid civilian casualties, because Iran's been vocal and very clear that their fight is not against the people but against the regime—the government—and the source of the aggression, which comes from the military, intelligence, and defense establishments in Israel and the U.S. But unfortunately, the U.S. doesn't have the level of honor to reciprocate in kind. They're quite happy to just ignore the rules of war. I mean, you even have this sort of psychotic U.S. Secretary of Defense who's self-styled himself as a "Secretary of War," in a kind of D.C.-comic, cartoonish way. He's basically saying, "We need to get rid of the, quote, 'stupid rules of engagement,' so that our warfighters can implement maximum lethality," right?

We need to unshackle our warfighters. They don't even call their soldiers "soldiers" anymore. I mean, even the Nazis still called their soldiers soldiers. But the U.S. is rebranding them as "warfighters." That was even a bridge too far for Goebbels. That's how far gone the American administration and the military establishment are at the moment. They're so deep in their own sort of delusional fantasy land, thinking they can bomb and kill their way to victory right now, because that's the only discernible strategy coming out of Washington. They're bragging about how many people they've killed, how much deprivation they've caused. The same with Cuba.

We're so proud of the fact that we've starved the Cubans and their hospitals aren't running. We've really shown them a lesson. We've shut down all their hospitals, and people are dying in the corridors. "It's been a great success," says Trump. "It's been a great success. We're winning in Cuba. Look at this famine, this starvation—we're winning." It's just deranged, depraved. This is the low point in American history right now. This president is the worst U.S. president by far in the history of the country, and he has brought the nation into such dishonor and disrepute.

And unfortunately, he's surrounded by cowards—Democrats and Republicans in Washington—who are afraid to restrain him because they might hurt their own stock portfolios, since they're all getting rich off this. Trump himself and his inner circle are placing bets on the price of oil. Look at the S&P stock market: it goes up when Trump tweets, "Oh, I've done a deal with the Iranians, we're having talks." He did that yesterday—total lie. Total lie, because the Iranians came back at noon and said, "No, what the hell is he talking about?" So the market went up when Trump put his "truth" out. What he calls truth is so stupid. Truth Social is basically a platform for lies and propaganda. But Trump puts that out.

He knows the market's going to react. All his buddies on Wall Street have already done their call options, and then the market surges—two trillion in market cap. Then suddenly Iran's denial comes, and the market drops a trillion in market cap; it crashes. But all his buddies probably put their put options down, so they're making money on the surge of the market and they're making money on the dip. And then Israel goes in as well and attacks Iranian infrastructure, while Trump and Witkoff and the fake negotiations team do their usual shtick of pretending to negotiate a ceasefire when all they're really doing is running cover for an Israeli attack. Every single time.

Their pattern of behavior is almost predictable. I would always bet against them, the same way I'd bet against Jim Cramer on CNBC whenever he gives a stock market tip. I mean, always go against Cramer and you'll do well in the markets—that's the old adage. It's the same with these two Israeli operatives. And quite frankly, Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner—what are they but glorified Israeli operatives who probably should register under FARA as foreign agents? And those are our head negotiators for the Middle East. That's a bit of a problem. Do you think they have a conflict of interest between American interests and Israeli interests? I think that's a legitimate question at this point.