

Pepe Escobar: CEASEFIRE OR TRAP? The Truth Behind Middle East Talks

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#Nima

Basically, what Iran is asking for, Pepe, the basic points are the cessation of war on all fronts—just stopping this war. I think that could be achieved through these talks. I'm talking about Lebanon. You cannot leave Lebanon alone; they're part of what's going on. That's why the Iranian government—well, that's why that's the first point, by the way, in the ten-point plan.

#Pepe

In the tenth point.

#Nima

Basically, the first point is that. Then they're talking about other straightforward sanctions. I think, finally, what we're going to get with these negotiations—and Donald Trump is not capable of making any sort of agreement, in my opinion, after all—is that they cannot change the reality of what's going on at this rate. So it's going to stay under the control of the Iranian government. They're going to compensate for the cost of the war and the devastation in Iran by charging, you know, mostly the GCC countries in the Persian Gulf—charging them because of the war, the devastation of the war. And I don't see Donald Trump being capable of removing the sanctions on Iran. They're not going to do that.

#Pepe

It's Congress, and the U.S. Congress will never remove these sanctions. They're eternal.

#Nima

This is going to be some sort of end to the conflict, or some kind of ceasefire—we can put it that way—without reaching a major agreement between the two parties. But the reality is that Donald Trump can't do anything more than that. Because if they go back to war, that's not going to change

the battlefield. I don't see anything happening in his favor, even with a ground invasion of Iran. What are they going to achieve? It's just going to cause more casualties.

#Pepe

And it's not going to change anything in Hormuz. It's not going to bring a regime change. Exactly—and it's going to be an enormous humiliation, because there will be a lot of body bags.

#Nima

It's going to be. It's going to be. And Iranians know how to fight on the ground, Pepe. They're so good—so good. I saw this with my own eyes. I don't know, that's why I don't like this happening, because we don't need these kinds of casualties. We don't need this kind of killing on the battlefield, on the ground, because that's enough. The air bombing—you know, the recent U.S. raid on Iran—has shown Iran's capabilities, even in a location that was supposed to be a surprise attack, by the way. But Iran managed to respond to the United States in a way that even Donald Trump himself could understand. He had to explain the whole operation for more than an hour. He's never done such a thing. Just look at the history.

He was just explaining every detail. You have to understand what's happening—what has happened—that Donald Trump had to go that far to explain what took place during the operation. And I think we're going to learn more as time goes by. We'll learn what the reality was, which is closer to what we understand from the raid, not the rescue operation. What Donald Trump is trying to do right now is put pressure—putting pressure again—on NATO. He's asking desperately, as he tried to negotiate with the CISO, asking NATO countries to send forces to the Middle East, to the Strait of Hormuz. I don't know how in the world he thinks the situation has changed, or that Europe would change its mind about the Strait of Hormuz.

#Pepe

Your understanding. They're scared to death. First of all, they don't have the weapons or the forces for that. Second, they're scared to death. Third, NATO is imploding from within, just like the EU. It's the same thing. By the way, during this visit by that absolutely repulsive Dutchman leading NATO, he was asked directly about the extermination of civilization post, and obviously he dodged the question. He didn't answer. He just said, "I absolutely support President Trump." So how can you—how should we interpret this? There's no other interpretation: NATO basically condones and supports genocide.

Not only the genocide in Gaza—we already knew that—but this threat of exterminating an entire civilization by the President of the United States. And this idiot—well, I won't even say he's just an idiot, he's much worse than that. I can't say it because it would be censored. He basically says, "I agree with it." So this is the official European elite position on genocide of the "other," in a Lévi-

Strauss sense—anywhere, as long as they're not European. It's extremely worrying, because it's a mix of extreme arrogance, an absolutely pitiless view of the world, morally bankrupt, spiritually bankrupt, and at the same time, cowardice. Okay, you don't agree with the Strait of Hormuz?

Okay, go over there with your fleet and try to unblock it yourself. Of course not. They're cowards. They'll never do it. And on that, at least, Trump is calling out their cowardice. He said, look, you're not happy with it, you have a few days to send a fleet to unblock Hormuz. Is it going to happen? Of course not. Everybody knows it's not going to happen. So they can only posture, in their mix of aggressiveness and extreme cowardice—and, of course, moral bankruptcy to the Milky Way already. It's absolutely disgusting. But it's good to have, once in a while, these crystal-clear snapshots, instant photographs of the psyche of the collective West. And this was another case, you know.

#Nima

Yeah. You know, Pepe, the other point that was so interesting was the panic. Since they announced the ceasefire, there was panic in Israel, in the Persian Gulf, in the GCC countries. They were in panic. You saw what happened. I think the way Israel attacked Lebanon was out of panic. It's not out of...

#Pepe

It is. Blind rage. Yes, yes, yes. Absolutely correct. And the UAE... the UAE is complicated, Nima. They are at war with Iran side by side with Israel. So Iran will have to deal with the UAE, I would say sooner rather than later, in a very, very hardcore way. Of course, we all knew they were part of the Zionist Axis. We all knew about all those promises of investment in the American economy and all that. We all know that Dubai and Abu Dhabi are extensions of the empire of chaos and of the Epstein syndicate interests. But now they are at war de facto against Iran. So, you know, they didn't even comment on those meetings in Islamabad or the ceasefire, where we have a lot of Muslim countries involved—Turkey, Egypt, etc.

Saudi Arabia. So how to deal with Saudi Arabia? And Saudi Arabia is a full member of BRICS. How are China and Russia going to deal with the UAE right now? They are at war with a full BRICS member, Iran. So this is going to be one of the, I would say, most complicated issues from now on. And Iran has to find a way to immobilize the UAE—immobilize and marginalize the UAE. This is going to be very difficult, especially because they have a lot of Iranian money over there, right, Nima? Well, if they really promise that they're going to confiscate Iranian assets in Dubai, oh, this will be the straw that breaks the Emirati camel's back. Ah, you're going to confiscate their money? Okay, just wait. What's going to happen to your oil industry?

#Nima

I think if they continue with this sort of attitude—getting closer to Israel and attacking Iran—they're going to disappear from the scene in the Middle East. I'm not talking about the country; I'm talking about the leadership and the people who joined the Omani government. I see they'd be in a much better position if they joined Oman and became, you know, part of Oman.

#Pepe

It's what the Iraqi scholars— I love those Iraqi scholars—have been saying for a few weeks now. Eventually, the only place for them to go is back to Oman.

#Nima

Exactly. That's why, you know, we had General Ken Pepe in that briefing with Donald Trump, and the way he was describing what happened in Iran—he said something really important. He said that everyone in Iran was shooting at us with rifles, with small guns. And this shows how they've been deceived somehow—by, I don't know, Mossad, by the CIA—thinking that Iranians would actually welcome them to invade their country. This is huge, Pepe.

#Pepe

Of course. This is Zionist disinformation, which is something they excel at. They are masters of disinformation. They're very good at infiltrating, very good at cultivating fifth columns. And that's it. Then they're very good in the PR department, selling that to gullible Americans—including gullible American politicians, especially gullible American politicians. It's what they do best. The problem is when they actually infiltrate. For instance, they infiltrated Hezbollah, and I'd say probably a few sectors of the IRGC. This is very, very worrying. Extremely worrying.

#Nima

You know what—yeah, I think you're right. And on the other hand, you see the same thing happening in the IDF. They have spies—Iranian spies—in the IDF. And today we've learned they found another one, another Iranian spy in the IDF forces. But the problem is—or the difference is—Iran doesn't seek any sort of assassination. Basically, they want to find something strategic, something important for their operations against Israel. But on the Israeli side, whenever they manage to recruit someone to spy for them, they want to find the location of the leadership, the location of people to assassinate them. Nothing beyond that is happening. That's why you see two different attitudes on the part of the Iranians and the Israelis. Their policy is mostly based on assassinations. On the other hand, you see—even we had those documents coming out of the Mossad. You remember that?

#Pepe

Yes, absolutely. They look for privileged information. And the Israelis are just like, "Okay, we found this guy—let's kill him." That's it. There's nothing strategic about it. Absolutely. The approaches are completely different.

#Nima

And that works perfectly for their propaganda—that they're capable, they're doing this and that, you know, they're assassinating the leadership. Even in the briefing yesterday, Pete Hegseth was mentioning, "We have destroyed many of the leadership in Iran, together with equipment, together with their army." This is some sort of propaganda machine for the mainstream media. And Iran doesn't need that, because they don't have dominance over the mainstream media.

#Pepe

Exactly, yeah. Another question—go ahead, if you allow me. A very quick one. As you see it, would you say that Iran is not attacking Israel directly as harshly as they could? It's like they're holding back a little, and maybe at a later stage they'll go for the kill. But for the moment, it's just like... compared to the amount of destruction they caused to American military bases and many installations across the Persian Gulf. So when you compare that to the direct strikes against Israel, I'd say there's an element of suspicion—it could be much harsher than that.

#Nima

Definitely, because they're trying to be measured in how they respond to Israel. They don't want to go 100% on Israel; they don't want to reveal everything. That's why they say, "We have surprises." If the escalation continues, those surprises are coming. They know what they're talking about, but they don't want to use them yet. They don't want to put them out because that would reveal everything they have. That's why they're thinking strategically—you're not going to do that to yourself, because you'd disarm yourself before using them. That's the reality.

Because one part of the attack on Dimona—you know, they just attacked Dimona to show the Israelis they can hit the target, they can hit everything in Israel. You know, there are a lot of surprises on the part of the Iranian army if they continue, because they were talking about it. They were honest about it. Everything they said, they meant it, and they used it. So I have no doubt that they have a lot in their arsenal to be used against Israel and against American aggression if the war continues. And this is... somehow it seems to me that Donald Trump has perceived that so far. I don't know how deep that goes, but let's see. Yeah.

#Pepe

Well, certainly nobody in his mediocre entourage. And he himself is, because he's fed extremely filtered information every day, Nima. He never knows anything in depth about what's going on on

the battlefield, not to mention the political chessboard. He has no idea. And, of course, the people around him, because they are so mediocre—sycophants and ass-lickers—so he can never have a true picture on any front whatsoever. The only thing he actually pays attention to, and we know this by observing how he reacts, is the stock market, the oil market, and the bond market. Apart from that, nothing else.

#Nima

If he were a wise person, I'd say he would just dismiss Pete Hegseth right away, right now. Because Pete Hegseth is one of the biggest problems. The guy comes out, and it seems like he's playing in a movie or something. He's not real. The guy is not real.

#Pepe

Proud, horribly misinformed. Prejudiced, with the brains of a four-year-old once again, etc. You can imagine this guy making decisions for the whole gigantic Pentagon machine. No wonder most of these generals are appalled—and there's nothing they can do about it.

#Nima

Exactly. Pepe, how do you see the way China and Russia perceive the reality of the Strait of Hormuz? Do you think China has any particular difficulty with the Strait of Hormuz? Or Russia—how does Russia see it? Go ahead, what's your understanding?

#Pepe

No, Russia—they're reaping the benefits because they're selling oil like crazy. For them, this is a perfect arrangement. China is immensely complicated. For instance, I spend a lot of time reading some of the best Chinese analysts, translated from Mandarin to English, and most of them are too cautious. I'm generalizing a little bit, but among the best ones—Fudan University, Renmin University, Tsinghua, etc.—they still hold the U.S. in, they still deal with the U.S. with some sort of awe. They're still under, you know, all that glimmer and glitz of the superpower. And some of their analyses are conditioned by what they learn from American mainstream media.

It's horrible. They're Chinese analysts, you know. Once again, I'm not talking about all of them. I like the really radical ones, but there aren't many. Because in China, as you know, the directives about what can be published are very strict. You have to align strictly with the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Foreign Relations, and so on. So deviations are very, very hard. In terms of independent critical thinking, it's very hard. When you find a Chinese analyst who breaks the mold, it's a breath of fresh air—but there aren't many, unfortunately, right?

For instance, many of them still don't understand the proxy war in Ukraine in detail—and they should. It's their neighborhood. And in Iran, of course, their main worry is China's energy security, so most of the discussion is focused on that. And of course, you won't get much information on how China is actually helping Iran in practical terms. It's very hard to get that. You have nuggets here and there, right? And now they're in an extremely complex position, because as much as some elements of the semi-closed Strait of Hormuz help China in terms of the petroyuan, payments on CIPS, etc., not all the tankers going to China pass through the Strait of Hormuz.

So China is getting less energy via the Strait of Hormuz than before, and they have to compensate for that. Of course, they have different sources. Gas—they can get more from Turkmenistan, from the Power of Siberia, from Myanmar. Oil—they can get more from Kazakhstan, through the pipelines that arrive in Xinjiang. But obviously, they were always counting on that free flow of energy via the Persian Gulf, not only from Iran but from the other Persian Gulf players. So they're squeezed into a complicated position, and at the same time, they don't want to antagonize the U.S. frontally.

That's not the Chinese strategy—it's more of a diplomatic, playing-Go kind of way. But at the same time, they're doing the best they can to profit from the situation, because they see the empire enfeebled, going crazy. And this was provoked by a mid-sized power, not even a superpower. It's not China or Iran or Russia—it's Iran, a mid-sized power. So they're trying to profit from it as best they can. But it's a very complicated position. And this decision they made—to suggest to Iran, "Go to Islamabad and try... try to examine where this ceasefire comes from and where it could possibly lead"—this is a very risky position, because now China is directly implicated in this process. Directly. Directly. This was China telling Iran; it was not China telling Pakistan. That's a completely different story.

Before, it was the Muslim countries—Pakistan, for example—they went to China. Remember the first time when Dar, the foreign minister of Pakistan, went to Beijing to talk to Wang Yi, and they had that five-point plan declaration about peace? That led nowhere. But this time, during the negotiations over the past two or three days, the Chinese, at the last minute, suggested to Iran explicitly: go to Islamabad. So now they have skin in the game. And they have to assure—of course, you won't see that in Chinese media anywhere—but basically, they told Iran, "Look, we're going to be your guarantor in the background, whatever happens." And obviously, Tehran agreed. So if things start to derail, Tehran is going to pick up the phone to Beijing and say, "Okay, where's your help now?"

So China is now in a very delicate position, which they weren't in just a few days ago. I was trying to find some nuggets about that on Guancha—I follow Guancha a lot. They've republished my articles; I met the director in Shanghai and all that. But I couldn't find anywhere, not even a paragraph or two, talking about this new Chinese position. So it's complicated, Nima, and for all of you in the audience, to follow China as a foreigner. It's extremely complicated. It depends on us cultivating and establishing relationships of trust, which is something I've been doing for years, actually. But it takes

time. You have to meet them in person—it's not just email. No, you have to go there, have lunch together, talk off the record. And when they start trusting you, that's when you begin to get privileged information. But it's a long process.

#Nima

Because they're not that vocal about what they think.

#Pepe

They're not, not at all. But this is the way the Chinese handle extremely sensitive foreign policy issues. It applies to everything. And in some cases—this is something I heard, I can't say from where, but from diplomatic sources—they told me, "Look, sometimes the Chinese bet on the wrong horses and they don't realize it. And when they do, it's too late." This has nothing to do with Iran. They know exactly who they're dealing with because there's a strategic relationship. There's that \$400 billion, 25-year plan—energy, infrastructure—it's different. And Iran is the key Chinese ally, I'd say, in the western part of Eurasia.

No question about that. That's different. But they refuse to be directly involved—especially now—in a war that isn't theirs. Ultimately, it's an indirect war against them as well, because if Iran falls, no question, they lose their major ally in West Asia. This would be a mega, mega blow for the Chinese, and they know it very well. So they have to protect their ally. The most challenging aspect is that it's very hard to know how far they'll go. None of us know, you see? But I'm sure the conversation at the highest levels between Tehran and Beijing is very, very good. It's very, very good. This helps. Yeah.

#Nima

I think, before wrapping up, Pepe, we have to look at the alternative in West Asia. This war has diminished the image of the GCC countries in the eyes of the Russians and the Chinese. That's a huge factor right now.

#Pepe

Enormous. Wow. Especially because one of them is a BRICS member. Yes. And Egypt, which is close by, is also a BRICS member. And Saudi Arabia is on the fence. We don't know what Saudi Arabia is. Is Saudi Arabia in BRICS or not? They don't know because they're hedging so much. But we already see the split, Nima. And I'm sure all of you, our audience, are already split. Qatar and Oman have made it very clear that they'll align with Iran, whatever happens next. So the GCC is already broken in half. Bahrain is broke, right? And the whole thing is collapsing. So Bahrain has no future. Bahrain

is a non-player in the future of the GCC. Kuwait still hangs in the balance; they could be reabsorbed into Iraq in the near future. Everything is possible. So once again, the big question is, okay, what about Saudi Arabia and the Emirates?

And the Emirates isn't the whole thing. We're talking basically, for instance, Sharjah, cool; Fujairah, cool. The problem is Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Dubai's business model is dead—we already know that. And we don't know if they'll be able to reinvent themselves. Doing what? Nobody will want to live in Dubai anymore or do business there. Forget it. And Saudi Arabia—that's the key to the whole story. MBS has some very serious decisions ahead. Everything he promised to the Trump administration, all the deals related to the IMEC corridor, which has collapsed, everything tied to the Abraham Accords and all that—this whole thing is collapsing in front of them. So how they're going to... we don't know how they're going to play their next hand. And they don't have many cards left. The GCC is already a mess, Nima. It's already split.