Pepe Escobar: Iran's New Axis: Tehran, Moscow & Beijing Redraw the Map

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#Pepe

Nothing.

#Nima

I love your answer. No, no, that's not the case, because they had this experience long before these sorts of problems happened in Iran because of the sanctions. There were years that Iran couldn't export any oil to other countries. And they managed. They knew how to manage the situation, you know, with the walls, with the oil, with gas, everything. They have managed that. They have experience because it happened before because of the sanctions, not because of the blockade. That's why they know—the engineers in Iran who are working in this field—they know what the alternatives are and how they can manage the situation with these sorts of difficulties, sudden difficulties, I would say. This is because the blockade is some sort of surprise for Iran. But it's not that much of a surprise that it's not manageable for Iranians. They know how to deal with it, I think. And they... So right now, it's not even one of the biggest issues in Iran. Nobody's talking about it.

#Pepe

You look at that... That's why it's a hoax. You're making something crappy. Nothing, nothing. So this means it's not a real problem.

#Nima

They're making this sort of rhetoric, Pepe. It's not just about this, because they're making it seem like there is some sort of fracture in Iranian leadership, that they're fighting each other in Iran. Donald Trump says, "They called me. They said that we are collapsing here." They're making these things up because they want to influence. Basically, their audience is in the West, not in the East, not in Iran. Iranians know what is happening. They know the reality on the battleground. They know the reality with the case of energy, the shortage that they have. You know, the economy, how it works these days—they totally understand the reality of what's going on. But I think what we are

basically talking about is what is happening in the West, in the mainstream media, in the way that the Trump administration tries to picture the situation for the Western audience, in my opinion.

I don't see any sort of difficulty, any sort of crushing difficulties for Iran. These are difficulties for Iran in the economy, for Iran in energy. Nobody can ignore that. But they know how to deal with that. This is the basic problem. That's why they're not talking about it in the mainstream media or in the alternative media in Iran, because many people think that Iran has just one-sided media. No, it's not that. You can find the worst critics of the Iranian government in Iran or living in Iran. They're not outside of Iran. Many people don't understand that, and that's why nobody's talking about this in Iran. That's not the major issue right now. The major issue right now for Iranians is how nobody can talk, because they're talking about this fracture in the leadership, you know, the left and right.

I don't know what is happening in the mind of Donald Trump. But these people, the basics, they have different tactics for negotiation, for how to deal with the United States. But the strategy remains the same. They know that nobody would let the United States control the Strait of Hormuz. Nobody would dictate anything to Iranians anymore. And if, because of the sanctions, they were able to force Iran for such a long time, to force Iran into some positions, it wasn't a serious position to force Iran to accept something, but they were trying to put a lot of pressure on the Iranian economy to force them into something. That's not happening anymore. Everybody's saying that that's enough. That's not going to happen anymore. This is the outcome of what Donald Trump has achieved so far in Iran.

#Pepe

And this is reflected by the way they turn the game around, where the most important, the key imperative now is not, and it never was, the nuclear dossier. It's to end the war for good, so there will not be a repeat of the war. With guarantees, with guarantors at the level of big powers like Russia and China, then discuss Hormuz, and at the end of the whole thing, discuss JCPOA 2.0. Let's put it this way. And Iran can do that because, for all practical purposes, they are winning this war. Everybody knows that. It's the Americans that wanted this stupid ceasefire. It's the Americans who are trying to find an off-ramp, which they can't. And this strategic defeat is obvious because zero of their initial objectives were achieved. There you go. So no wonder Iran is feeling confident.

#Nima

And nobody wants anything similar or close to the JCPOA anymore. Exactly. That's the point for the Trump administration.

#Pepe

Exactly.

#Nima

Go ahead, Nima. Because they didn't see the JCPOA working for Iran. You remember the case of the JCPOA. Basically, the Americans, together with the Europeans, agreed on relieving or lifting sanctions. But then Donald Trump was elected, and everything just didn't happen.

#Pepe

They didn't do anything, and the sanctions continued. And there were more sanctions—maximum pressure. Exactly.

#Nima

Pepe, the other issue is what the UAE is talking about right now—leaving OPEC+. What is that, and how effective could that be, and how is that going to help Donald Trump in the long run?

#Pepe

Look, I can start with you with not exactly a joke, but in fact, this joke is already circulating in the Persian Gulf. Look, they better get their act together because sooner or later Iran is going to annex it. Okay, it's a joke. Saudi Arabia could annex it. Basically, they are desperate because they made their bets a long time ago. They bet on the U.S. and Israel. So this means they need to sell more oil so oil prices go down. What does that mean? They cannot be regulated by OPEC quotas. So if they're out of OPEC, they can export instead of 2.3, 2.5, a little more than that, million barrels a day—they can export maybe five million barrels a day, which they can. It's possible. So that's it.

They want to make more money exporting more oil, and oil prices going down is exactly what the Trump administration wants. There is, of course, the mega friction between MBZ and MBS, between Abu Dhabi and Riyadh, and this is getting more and more uncontained, considering that Saudi Arabia is theoretically, at least, part of trying to find a diplomatic solution to end the war. They were part of that initial four Sunnis meeting in Islamabad. It was Egypt, Turkey, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. So, in thesis, Saudi Arabia wants an accommodation, at least, with Iran. The UAE, on the other hand—and not the UAE, Dubai and Abu Dhabi—that's a completely different story. Not the other Emirates.

Which brings us to the still unconfirmed but extremely juicy possibility of the Republic of Sharjah coming online soon. Of course, because Sharjah has nothing to do with what MBZ is doing. So... this is Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Dubai, in terms of the business model, is already dead. Everybody knows that. Nobody's coming back to Dubai. So that leaves Abu Dhabi. The oil is controlled by Abu Dhabi, not Dubai. Dubai is a laundering machine, essentially, which has now completely collapsed. So they think that they can preserve their so-called independence and sell more oil and, of course, continue to have their contracts and promises with both Israel and the U.S. on the table, working.

We don't know if this is going to happen. They're also betting that IMEC—the, uh, misnomer once again, mega misnomer—the India-Middle East Corridor, which is the Israel–Saudi Arabia–Emirates–Europe–India corridor. We don't know if Saudi Arabia is going to be part of IMEC. Probably not, not side by side with the Emirates. The Emirates are still betting on IMEC because, of course, they are linked to the Zionist International. So this is their bet. We don't know what's going to happen. But the Russians already said that we are not leaving OPEC+. Saudi Arabia, we continue with OPEC. So nothing changes in terms of OPEC or OPEC+. OPEC+, basically, Saudi Arabia and Russia control OPEC+.

OPEC, the UAE was an important member of OPEC, but it's not going to dismantle OPEC because they're out. And, of course, very, very important, Nima, they do that because they are still betting on the petrodollar because of the Epstein syndicate connections. So they assume that they are going to be protected by the U.S. All bets are off because if Iran, I would say, sooner rather than later, decides that the Emirates—no, not the Emirates, Abu Dhabi—needs to be taught a lesson because of what they did against Iran since the start of the war, and even before the start of the war, they're going to be in deep trouble. But it's a move conditioned as much by greed as desperation. It's a mix of both.

#Nima

Pepe, we had the other meeting with Pakistan together with Russia and Iran, military commanders or military envoys, in Kyrgyzstan. What was that, and what was the necessity of that?

#Pepe

This is immense, Nima. This happened in parallel to Arakchi in St. Petersburg. So we had all the ministers of defense of the SCO meeting in Kyrgyzstan. What does that mean for all of you, our audience? That everybody that is everybody in Eurasia, apart from Turkey, was there at the table. At the table, apart from Russia, China, Belarus, India, Pakistan, and all the Central Asians, India and Pakistan were on the same table. Russia and China were on the same table. Everybody was on the same table. And guess what? They were discussing what's going on in Iran because they know that it's a war against them. The American war, once again, is against the BRICS and the SCO at the same time.

It's against Eurasian integration. It's against Eurasian connectivity corridors. And that means the International North-South Transportation Corridor—Russia, Iran, India—three BRICS, and all the corridors of the New Silk Road, the Belt and Road Initiative from China. The American war is against all of the above. What do they want? Once again, imperial mindset: divide and rule in Eurasia. Pit everybody in Eurasia against each other, and mostly attack the three most important members—what I call the new Primakov Triangle. It's not with India like it was when Primakov conceptualized it in the late 1990s, at the end of the millennium. It's Iran, Russia, and China.

This RIC is the new Primakov Triangle, and it's not an accident that they are the three top targets of the Trump administration and the American system as a whole. So the fact that you are having the ministers of defense of all the SCO full members sitting at the same table in Kyrgyzstan and listening to the Iranian minister of defense saying, among other things, look, guys, we are ready to share our experience in defeating the Americans with all of you at this table. Now, once again, this is also a game changer because it's part of how the SCO from now on has to organize itself, because the next stage of the war coming from the Americans—we're already deep into it.

This blockade is, I would say, the starter of a future global blockade by the Americans, assuming they can implement it. This is a test drive, Nima. That's why it's so dangerous. The first test was Venezuela, but it was very easy. They were basically killing fishermen in small boats, but it was a blockade. Next step, they wanted to blockade the Strait of Hormuz from Iran so the Americans would control the Strait of Hormuz. Total disaster. So what's their plan B? Okay, we blockade all Iranian ports, including the choke point, the Strait of Hormuz. Is this working? It's too early to tell. For the moment, it's mostly a disaster. But they are already implementing it. It's also a test drive. I would say this is more a Nindopak com op than a Centcom op.

Or it's a mix of both, in fact. They had already apprehended Iranian ships outside of the Arabian Sea, in the eastern fringes of the Indian Ocean, near Sri Lanka already, and not far from Southeast Asia. In fact, already in Southeast Asia. And that brings us to the theme of the column that I wrote today, which is probably going to be published tomorrow, Nima. I sent you the original. First, Hormuz, and next, Malacca. Why? Because this is an American obsession as much as it is a Chinese obsession. It's a Chinese defensive obsession because they know—they knew since the early 2000s, in fact—that this is a story that I have been following for almost 25 years in detail. The famous escape from Malacca syndrome. The Chinese looked at the map, they looked at the Strait of Malacca, and they thought, wow, we are in trouble.

All our energy from the Persian Gulf goes through here before reaching the South China Sea and before reaching China. We need to do something about it. So they started, Chinese-style, an offensive on several levels at the same time—cultivating good relationships with both Malaysia and Indonesia, very successful. Building alternative routes. That famous gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Xinjiang was built and paid for by the Chinese. Gas pipeline from Myanmar. Power of Siberia 1, which is at full capacity. And soon, Power of Siberia 2. All that, plus investing in all sectors, every single form of green and sustainable energy on the planet. And they excel in all of that. For instance, once again, when I was traveling in Xinjiang last year, you see the electrification of Xinjiang, you see those forests of wind turbines, solar panels, solar farms, etc.

And the fact that Xinjiang has so much energy that they sell energy to the rest of China combined. So that's it. So this was the Chinese strategy to escape from Malacca, because they knew that sooner or later the Americans would try to do something funny in the Strait of Malacca. And we are approaching that strategy, that juncture, Nima. Sooner or later, they will try something. The first step was that very dodgy military defense agreement that the Minister of Defense of Indonesia

signed with the very drunk, very tattooed Secretary of War in Washington. That's tricky. For instance, in fact, there was a clash between the Minister of Defense in Jakarta and the Minister of Foreign Relations. They said, what the hell are you doing?

We're going to be in the middle of a war between the U.S. and China. And we don't need that. It's the last thing we need at the moment. And the Americans, of course, they are bragging that they're going to have blanket overflight rights over Indonesian territory bordering the Strait of Malacca. If that happens, guess what the Chinese response is going to be? I would not want to be in Jakarta when that happens, if that happens. So we are getting, slowly but surely, this transfer from Hormuz to Malacca and part of what is essentially a global American blockade of everyone that escapes selling energy in petrodollars and everyone that is, in Putin's definition, Iran—independent and sovereign. So that's why what we're seeing now is a test drive, and things can be much more hardcore from now on.

#Nima

I think 80% of their energy, the Chinese are receiving from the Strait of Malacca.

#Pepe

80%? Yes, because everything that comes from the Persian Gulf has to go through the Strait of Malacca. There's no other way. It could go through the Straits of Sunda, the Strait of Lombok, but the easiest way is the Strait of Malacca. So the Indonesians, they have to be very careful about how they manage this thing, because they are now under pressure from the Americans, and the Chinese are looking at it meticulously.

#Nima

It's not just about... We have Japan receiving from using that. Yes, everybody did.

#Pepe

Sure. So, considering that a key plank of the American strategy is we need to control all sources of oil, and all sources of oil have to be—everything has to be settled in petrodollars. So this means they have to—we are already in the first stages—they have to install a global blockade. There's no other way. And this is their strategy, which is now very, very clear, not only for China but for all those people who are sitting at that table in Kyrgyzstan, the SCO nations. But everybody's gonna find ways to dribble that. For instance, it's not by accident that early this week Pakistan liberated the six overland corridors with Iran. Why? Because the transit country between Iran and China, apart from Central Asia, which is the longest way, the easiest way between Iran and China is via Pakistan. And Pakistan has excellent relations with China.

They are part of the New Silk Road. China is building the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, and they have very good relations with Iran. That's why Iran trusted them to be the mediators, trying to find a way out of the war. So, you know, this is going to move a lot. And, of course, all the railway maze from Xinjiang across Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, going to Iran—this is now on overdrive. Especially now that the China-Iran railway is finished. It was finished, what, I think in August last year, less than a year ago. Now you can do everything by train. That's it. And the Chinese are betting on this. It's part of the east-west corridor, the Chinese east-west corridor. And the most important part of this corridor is across Iran, because across Central Asia was easy, since they started building these railways a long time ago.

#Nima

I think one of the crucial points for the SCO is how to secure, how to protect these routes for the future of the East—Eurasia, the whole concept of Eurasia. And I don't see India being in that, Pepe. India is so tricky. I see Russia, China, and Iran being together in that concept because, whether we accept it or not, this blockade is just bringing some new points to the mind of the Chinese government, for example.

#Pepe

Yes.

#Nima

So what would happen, you know, how would we react if the United States tried to do the same thing to us, to the Chinese government or to Russia, for example? Because we know they started with Russia. You remember the attacks on the Russian tankers, and it's not just the United States. They were talking about NATO trying to do something with Russia. And right now with Iran, I think we can be sure that they're going to continue with this sort of attitude, because in the Western Hemisphere—I'm talking about the United States and North America, South America, here in Brazil—we know what's going on. What's the game on the part of Washington? They're not that dependent on oil coming from outside.

#Pepe

Yeah, yeah.

#Nima

That's why they can totally break down this whole system in the East to bring this empire, as they call it, the empire. I think what Ambassador Charles Freeman brings out is about how the world is reshaping itself as the multipolar. Because you look at the nature of the relationship between China

as a giant—you look at China economically, militarily, it's a giant country—the nature of it is that they're not putting pressure on Russia or Iran because they understand the relationship, the partnership...

#Pepe

But that's not the case. All of them have a strategic partnership, so at the highest level they are aligned, which this trip by Araxi to St. Petersburg was a reaffirmation of the strategic partnership. But India is very, very tricky because they made their bet even before the attack on Iran. They made their bet on Israel and the US because, of course, of the Indian business interests behind the Modi government. They will regret it sooner or later. And obviously, the other SCO members, they look at India and they say, should these guys be here at this table with us? And from an Iranian point of view, it's going to be very hard for India to mend its ties.

I would say that this could even involve India being out of the Chabahar project, you know, replaced by China. The Iranians will not trust India anymore, especially investing in one of their key ports. And it's all India's doing. They did that to themselves. And of course, once again, BRICS is in a coma to a large extent because of what India has been doing. It's not because of China or Russia. No, it's because of India. And they didn't say a word about one fellow BRICS member being attacked by the US. Nothing. So this will have consequences, serious consequences.

#Nima

Pepe, the other issue we know is in Lebanon. Do you see Iran talking with the United States? How does Iran want to bring in the case of Lebanon? Because the case of Lebanon is so serious. We know that the United States...

#Pepe

But the problem is, how can you deal with the fifth-columnist traitor government in Beirut? What are these people doing? They should be out. They should be thrown out. If these people continue in power, nothing is going to happen. And, of course, the death cult will continue to bomb whole villages and small towns in southern Beirut and exterminate them from the map, literally, without one peep from the international community. Same with Gaza. It's Gaza 2.0, now applied to southern Lebanon as a whole. Yes, it's absolutely disgusting, and it's not going to change. And the only ones who are resisting are Hezbollah, for obvious reasons. We all know that. Hezbollah will always resist.

And now, with their new leadership and the cadres, you know, second rank or third rank, as competent as the previous ones who were assassinated, they can resist this very, very long term. But obviously, it's very hard to resist when whole areas are being literally bombed from above. The only war that the death cult knows how to conduct, apart, obviously, from killing women and children, is to bomb from above and erase populations literally from the map. It's absolutely

disgusting. And we should not expect anything coming from the United Nations, no question about that. We should not expect anything coming from the collective West. So the only ones who are actually defending Lebanon are, once again, Iran.

#Nima

I think that's why we're not going to have, basically, any agreement between Iran and the United States. That's impossible.

#Pepe

It's impossible.

#Nima

Because the first point for Iran is to permanently end the war, which is Iran and Lebanon and the acts of resistance, the whole acts of resistance. I would say it goes to Gaza as well. They're not going to... Yes, of course, it's going to be all together. That's why Donald Trump doesn't have that sort of power. He hasn't practiced it so far. That's why I don't think he's going to be able to do anything to somehow convince the government in Israel to do something differently.

#Pepe

They're literally destroying... No, he's controlled by them, Nima. How can he even try to do something? He's totally controlled by them. And now, with, you know, signs of progressive dementia, compounded with that intergalactic narcissism, it's even worse. And, of course, lies, lies, lies, lies nonstop. Lies and bragging. And then bragging lies. That's it. That's the only narrative.