

Trita Parsi: Iran War Marks the End of American Primacy

Trita Parsi is the co-founder and Executive Vice President of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. Parsi discusses why a peace deal can be achieved, yet it seems more likely that the US will restart the war. Follow the Substack of Trita Parsi: <https://tritaparsi.substack.com/> Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glennDiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glennDiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glennDiesen> Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back. We are joined today by Trita Parsi, the executive vice president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, who is an award-winning author. The Washingtonian magazine, for five years in a row, named him one of the top 25 influential voices on foreign policy in Washington, D.C. So make sure to follow his Substack, and I will leave a link in the description. Thank you very much for coming on. It's a great honor to have you on the program.

#Trita Parsi

Thank you so much, Glenn. It's my pleasure.

#Glenn

Well, I wanted to ask you about the war in Iran, because this is something you follow quite closely. And I guess a good place to start is, how likely is it that we're going back to war now? Because from what I understand, nothing was really resolved or achieved with the meeting in Beijing between Trump and Xi. So is this essentially a return to war?

#Trita Parsi

I think, unfortunately, the risk of war has significantly gone up. I'm not so sure yet whether it is above 50 percent or not. There is still a bit of time to be able to find an exit. And it's also not clear to me whether some of this rhetoric is part of the theatrics that Trump is putting on in order to pressure the other side and just kind of sharpen the choices. But if we break it down a little bit, you

mentioned the Beijing meeting. I think indeed the Beijing meeting delivered very little to the American side on this issue. You may have noticed that they made a big deal out of the fact that the Chinese said that they would also like to see the Strait open, which is a very vanilla statement.

It is actually a rather meaningless statement. Every country in the world would like to see the Strait open. The question is, what are you going to do about it? And what is your definition of open? The Chinese idea of open is not necessarily that the Iranians do not control it; it's just that the traffic flows. The Chinese themselves have made an arrangement with the Iranians in which they are getting their ships out. So from their standpoint, it is open. But from the U.S. standpoint, there's been a desire to not necessarily end the mechanism that Iran is putting in place, but actually regionalize it. So their definitions of open are very different.

But the larger point I'm trying to make is that if that is the best they got out of the Chinese, that tells you how little they got out of the Chinese at that meeting. Now you're in a situation in which, for the last 48 hours, there's been a significant pickup of very hostile language that, in and of itself—let's assume that war actually is in the cards—is an indication that the blockade of the blockade was a failure. And the blockade of the blockade was an indication that the war was a failure. And the war was an indication that the threats of war back in history were a failure. So what you have is a series of escalatory moves that all have proven to be failures and that are only leading the Trump administration toward the next escalatory move.

I do think the Iranians are more or less almost counting on an attack taking place, because in the negotiations, even though they have moved closer to each other on several different issues, they're still very far apart on a couple of key issues. And Trump has shown very little flexibility and seems to be very adamant about certain things that he needs to get his maximum demands on. Now, the Iranians are quite ready for that war, based on the conversations I've had with them—happy to go into detail about things that they're planning to do in such an escalation, and why the second round of this war would be quite different in some aspects than the first round.

#Glenn

Yeah, no, that's actually what I want to ask you about as well. But regarding this vanilla statement, as you said, from the Chinese, I thought this was quite interesting because the open strait can mean a lot and it can mean nothing. As you said, the idea that this signals support for U.S. military activity, I would say it would be, on the contrary, not, because if the U.S. was able to defeat Iran, destroy it or conquer it, break it up, whatever the victory would look like, it doesn't mean that open access would be a given. I mean, there's no open access to Venezuela, Cuba. So the idea that this would be a statement of support for the U.S., I think, again, people would read into that statement what they would want. Yeah. It seems a bit the same with nuclear weapons, though, wasn't it as well? Because China said Iran shouldn't get nuclear weapons, but that's what Iran says as well. So it doesn't sound like any anti-Iranian statement. Exactly.

#Trita Parsi

Not at all, exactly. And this has been the Chinese position for a very long time. It's the position of every P5 state. They're all signatories to the NPT. They want to keep their privileged status as nuclear weapon states within a treaty that prevents the others from getting it. So there's no meaning in that at all. If the Chinese had come out and said Iran should not have enrichment, that would be a very different statement, a statement that would be in support of the American position. But the Chinese have never said that. I don't find it likely that they will ever say that.

And I think it's important to understand the Chinese are looking at Trump and his decisions, and they're recognizing that at least one element of Trump's calculation was that he wanted to go to the Beijing meeting having taken control over Venezuela's oil check, and now also taking control of Iran's oil. Not checked. And that in that effort, he has created a massive mess in the region with repercussions for the global economy as a whole. And he has still not managed to get control of that situation, and he has no plan on how to win or how to actually just get out of this. There are no incentives for the Chinese to step in, an instrument of what they see as Trump's failing strategy.

So why would they come in at this point in support of the United States? It makes absolutely zero sense for them. Now, if the U.S. had put a reasonable proposal on the table that was based on a genuine compromise that the Chinese believe is viable, and they believe that the Iranians should accept it in order to get out of this situation because the Chinese would like to get stability, of course. In that scenario, I can see the Chinese coming in and nudging the Iranians towards an agreement. But they're not going to do it if the proposal on the table is a non-starter and then by that make themselves part of America's failed strategy.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, I want to get back to your former answer. That is, what might be different in the cards this time? Because if the U.S. goes back to war now, surely they can't do more of the same, because Trump seemed quite desperate to get the ceasefire last time. You know, he said the Iranians begged him, but given that the U.S. accepted the Iranian 10-point plan as a point of departure for negotiations, it sounds more credible, the position from Tehran, that it was the Americans who were desperate for this. But what is each side planning to do differently this time, you think? Will the U.S. just go, let the dogs loose, and go all out? Or how will the Iranians do differently? Will they be less restrained this time?

#Trita Parsi

Before I go into that, let me just say something about the 10-point plan. So, yeah, on Twitter, Trump came out and essentially said that the ceasefire would be based on Iran's 10-point proposal, which he said is workable or that we can work with it. Once the negotiations started, Trump pursued a very different approach, however. So he kind of signaled acceptance of Iran's 10 points in order to

get the Iranians to agree to a ceasefire, and then it just completely went in a different direction in the negotiations themselves. Now, what will happen in the next round? So from the U.S. side, you're absolutely correct. There are few things that one can imagine that they could do differently that would really break the situation.

What you have the hawks in Washington and in Israel push for is attacking Iran's power grids and oil installations and just trying to destroy the state altogether. They recognize that the assassination of leaders, even though that's a very significant amount, 135, has not led to the collapse of the regime or the implosion of the regime, nor is it likely to do so. The one thing they haven't really done is to go in with ground troops, take an island, or go after the energy grid. Now, if they had done that, of course, if we take the energy grid to begin with, this would have led to an Iranian counter-escalation that would be even more dangerous for the United States because the Iranians would go after the energy and oil infrastructure of the GCC states. What they've done so far is very limited.

What we have at the core of it when it comes to the oil crisis right now is a bottleneck problem. There are tons of oil sitting on tankers in the Persian Gulf waiting to get out. And oil can still be pumped out because the installations themselves are not destroyed. If, however, the U.S. were to go after Iran's power grid and oil installations, and the Iranians were to retaliate against GCC oil installations, then you have a production problem. That means that oil prices are going to shoot above \$180, \$200, and they're going to stay high for a very long time because you have a production problem. It's not just a bottleneck problem. This means that the global economy will be thrown into a recession, perhaps even a depression. And I mean, it will be just simply devastating.

#Glenn

And this is part of the reason why Trump kept threatening it, but never did it.

#Trita Parsi

But for completely insane people like Lindsey Graham, warmongers, you know, I don't know if there are good enough adjectives to describe them. They're pushing for this. They're willing to risk everything, the entire global economy, knowing very well, of course, that they're going to destroy Trump's presidency. But they're still pushing for this. Now, the Iranians do expect that whatever this may be, whether it's taking an island, going in with some ground troops, or whether it is just a massive bombardment campaign on the same scale or larger than it was before, they themselves will also try to retaliate at a higher level than they did before.

This means, in particular, that they will go after the UAE because of the role that the UAE has played during the war in terms of pushing Trump to restart the war, but also because of its increasingly open association and strategic partnership with Israel. Within the UAE, the Iranians are likely going

to target companies and industries that are connected to Trump himself, such as AI data centers that are used by Palantir and all of these different companies that the Iranians believe are involved in the war anyway because of their support for the Pentagon.

This could then also lead to a scenario in which the UAE's investment as an AI hub actually gets destroyed, which would, and this is outside of my field of expertise, have some implication for the US's AI rivalry with China. But it would also mean that they're actually deliberately going after things that are of value to Trump's businesses because of a perception that he doesn't care that much about U.S. interests being compromised. But if his business interests, his business empire's interests are being compromised, that will be more painful for him. And they're looking for targets that would impose that type of a cost. But beyond that, it seems like this time around they will be closing the Strait of the Gulf of Aden in the Red Sea.

And moreover, they're also looking at these undersea fiber optic cables that are handling 99% of all internet traffic in the GCC states, including billions of dollars of daily transactions, and they're exploring to see if that could end up becoming like a second Strait of Hormuz for the Iranians. Mindful of the fact that Iran's internet is already cut off and they're relying on an internal intranet that they created several years ago. So we're talking about massive escalation on both sides. And whatever the implications have been so far for the global economy is likely going to be very little compared to what is about to come.

#Glenn

I think that was one of the most interesting parts of the war — how Iran was essentially mirroring the escalation ladder, how they were willing and also capable of going up the ladder. But that also suggests, as you said, if the U.S. decides to destroy its energy infrastructure, there's no reason anymore for the Iranians to hold back. So yes, I've heard a lot of signals come out — everything from shutting down the Red Sea, essentially destroying some of the Gulf states, not just the energy facilities but desalination plants. They could cut off their internet. But with the comments that Iraq could play a greater role as well — seizing Kuwait, for example, or just kicking out what remains of Western troops — do you see this as a likely scenario?

#Trita Parsi

On the Iraqi side, I have to say I haven't followed it as closely. And as you know, we have a new government. But there are also these very, very embarrassing revelations of how the Israelis set up one, potentially two, air bases in Iraq under the guidance of the United States, with the U.S. pressuring the Iraqis to accept it, although the New York Times story suggests that the Iraqis did not understand that these were Israeli bases. But the bottom line is, there's more and more evidence that most of the GCC states, as well as Iraq, their territories were used, their airspaces were used for these attacks against Iran.

Now, whether that was to a very large extent something that they did voluntarily, whether that is something that was being done without their full knowledge, or whether they were just simply coerced into it. I mean, one thing we have to remember is that from the standpoint of someone like John Bolton, this is evidence that the Iraq war was a success. Because it was never about democracy. It was never about human rights, obviously. It was about eliminating Iraq as a geopolitical player on the chessboard and turning it into such a weak state that the United States could force it to agree to all kinds of things, such as opening up two bases for the Israelis to use for attacks against Iran.

So Iraq has essentially become so weak that it has no ability to push back against these types of things. Now, whether the Iraqis would, in the midst of all of this, go after Kuwait, again, I've not heard any of that with any credibility. But the fact that Iraq itself could become one of the theaters of the war in a horizontal escalation by the Iranians is a very, very plausible scenario. I don't know if it's likely in the second round, but it's definitely plausible. Because we saw how the Iranians used horizontal escalation to really throw off the United States. The U.S. side did not expect that the Iranians would target all of the GCC states. They really were surprised by that.

#Glenn

They were also surprised by the closing of the Strait of Hormuz, even though U.S. intelligence had already predicted most of these different things.

#Trita Parsi

It's just that Trump has now gotten into the habit of not listening to U.S. intelligence, but instead listening to the Israelis.

#Glenn

Yeah, I was surprised by how surprised Trump was, to be honest, because in the weeks before the war as well, I had on my podcast interviewed quite a few times Professor Marandi, who is quite influential also in the media. He was always making the same point: if or when the U.S. attacks, the first day we're going to shut down the Strait of Hormuz and attack all their bases. And at least it should have been considered as a... I mean, it seemed quite reasonable that they wouldn't allow the opponent to dictate the conditions of how this war should be fought.

#Trita Parsi

Just to explain a little bit why the U.S. side, as well as the Pentagon, really underestimated the Iranians, is that there was this massive campaign by the Israelis to depict Iran as much weaker than it was. The Israelis recognized that if they wanted to convince Trump to go to war, something that he's unlikely to agree to because he doesn't take huge foreign policy risks usually, the only way you

could convince him was by convincing him that it was easy, because he's very much in favor of doing easy things. Things that are easy, low risk, are his forte. So they really went at trying to depict the Iranians as very weak, incapable of doing something, afraid of having a direct confrontation with the U.S. Iran's own behavior had also reinforced that.

Everything from strategic patience for the last couple of years, in which they were taking hit after hit after hit from the Israelis and never really struck back hard until the June 12th war. Every time they struck back, it was kind of polite. It was kind of aimed at showing that they could, but without escalating—it was actually a de-escalatory move in some ways. All of this just reinforced a very strongly held view within the American system that the Iranians simply do not have the guts to face the United States. Then there's another element that comes to Trump's own psychology. It's one of the biggest mistakes, in my view, that the Iranians committed prior to all of this, which is that they refused to talk to Trump directly. There were numerous opportunities when they could have just engaged with Trump directly.

And I personally believe that had they done so, this war could have been averted altogether. And part of the reason why this reinforced Trump's view of Iran as weak is precisely because of Trump's own belief that he is willing to talk to everyone. He saw himself coming in as president and said, I'll talk to anyone. I'll talk to Kim Jong-un. I'll talk to the founder of Al-Qaeda in Syria. I'll invite him to the White House. And, you know, I do all of this because I'm strong. Because I'm strong, I'm willing to talk to everyone. And this is a very significant shift in the American political culture, because for years, the idea of talking to various leaders was taboo. Trump is a key reason as to why a lot of that has been broken. It was also broken to a certain extent by the Obama administration. But in Trump's world, he is capable of doing this because he is strong.

So when the Iranians refuse to speak to him, they think they're doing it and showing strength. They're refusing to talk to the superpower of the world. That's not how Trump sees it. Trump interprets that as weakness because he is talking to everyone because he's strong. If someone else is not willing to talk to him, it's because they are weak. So Iran's own conduct also reinforced the American view that Iran is weak, is incapable, it will never dare to escalate in this horizontal way. It actually doesn't even dare to have a direct confrontation with the U.S. That's part of the reason why Trump thought that this war was not going to last more than four days. Of course, he was completely mistaken, but I think it's important to understand that some of Iran's own behavior had reinforced that view in Trump's mind.

#Glenn

I referred to Trump before as the president of low-hanging fruit because he does like the easy, low-risk, in-and-out, ideally one-day operations. That is, for example, the threats against Panama. And then they folded, and then they gave him something for nothing. And that was a one-day

achievement. And same with Venezuela — in and out, some prize to show off. And if something goes wrong, like Yemen, I thought his strength was that he could just say, well, oops, that didn't work, and claim victory and go home nonetheless.

It appears the problem with Iran, though, is there is no going back to the status quo. There is no claiming victory and going home, because as long as Iran has the Strait of Hormuz, that changes the U.S. position, not just in the region, but yeah, possibly in the entire world. So, and well, I guess this is something you have argued as well — that Iran essentially threatens, or already undermined, the global primacy of the United States. I was wondering if you could, I guess, unpack that argument.

#Trita Parsi

Sure. So I think when we take a look at some of these important events in the world that have kind of moved us closer and closer into more accepted and internalized multipolarity, oftentimes we're looking at the impact and the strategic folly of the Iraq War as a very important inflection point that really moved the world faster towards multipolarity because of the manner in which it dramatically weakened the United States, destabilized the region, all of these repercussions from the creation of ISIS, etc. But when you take a look at that war and what the U.S. has now done in Iran, I think it's quite striking that nevertheless, in the Iraq War, the United States was militarily tremendously successful. The entire country was taken in three weeks, and even the political objective of overthrowing Saddam Hussein was achieved.

Now, of course, all the other problems came afterwards because the United States could not stabilize the country, could not control the insurgency. It ended up becoming a 10-year occupation. And then, of course, you also had a 20-year occupation of Afghanistan. But in Iran, the United States cannot even point to these things. It did not win this war militarily. In fact, it lost it. It's been a strategic defeat. The Iranians escalated horizontally, established escalation dominance. The United States had to essentially beg for a ceasefire, got out of the ceasefire, then committed a major mistake, which was to impose the blockade. Had it not done so, the U.S. would actually be in a stronger position now because the ceasefire disproportionately favored the United States.

But that favor, the manner in which oil prices were lowering and that gave Trump a reprieve, was erased by his own blockade of the blockade. And we see now that we have higher oil prices during the ceasefire than we did during the war. And the 10-year yield is now at 4.6% or so. So bond markets are now in very bad shape as well. All of this during the ceasefire because he nevertheless escalated and made it a very contentious war. Had he not, he would have been in a good position because he had achieved the key thing he wanted to do, which was just get out of this war, whereas the Iranians had still not achieved their key objective, which was to get sanctions relief. But nevertheless, in the Iran situation, you have a situation in which the U.S. lost the war militarily.

It did not achieve its political objective. The repercussions are not just regional, they're global. We're seeing how in Australia you have fuel shortages, how there's an energy crisis in India, in Pakistan, in

Bangladesh, in the Philippines, how countries like South Korea and Japan are in very dire straits right now because so much of their energy is coming from the Persian Gulf and they're not getting any oil right now. So the global economic repercussions are far, far greater as well. But he also then points to another thing, which is if the United States cannot establish escalation dominance in the Persian Gulf, and it cannot actually assert its military domination there, because yes, it could technically open the Strait of Hormuz, but it's not willing to pay the price for it.

Because we're talking about the occupation of all of southern Iran in order to be able to open the Strait of Hormuz. And that will require more than 500,000 troops, which will take more than a year to amass, etc. And the entire premise of America's military organizing principle has been that it's able to fight two wars on two continents at the same time. But right now, it cannot even win one fight on one continent. All of this is now putting into question the ability of the United States to assert primacy and hegemony in various corners of the world.

And in the past 20 years or so, you've had a scenario in which the American public has turned against primacy—American primacy to a very large extent. And you have pressure from the American public against these endless wars, no longer a strong belief that global hegemony provides security to the United States. It's just not cost-feasible any longer. But now you may also have a scenario coming from the very states that used to lobby for this global primacy, who benefited from America's security umbrella, because the security umbrella has proven itself to be neither reliable nor effective.

So if the public is turning against it and the external benefactors of it are also abandoning it, that in and of itself, I think, will put a new type of pressure on America's grand strategy of liberal hegemony that we have not seen yet. And it's all coming down to the fact that if you cannot win that war militarily against Iran, then again, really, what is the basis of American primacy? How is the United States going to be able to conduct itself in the South China Sea vis-à-vis China in case of an invasion of Taiwan or whatever? Bottom line is, this is putting a tremendous amount of question marks about the capability of the United States to sustain primacy.

#Glenn

Well, it seems, though, at some point it would make sense for the U.S. to reconsider this strategy altogether, because a lot of the conflicts it has now seemingly could be resolved by walking back the objective of global primacy. Essentially, if you look at a lot of the conflicts the U.S. is in at the moment, a lot of it seems unnecessary or could be challenged. So again, if the U.S. wants to face its threats, it can look at both capabilities and intentions. But the intentions of many of its adversaries have shifted. That is, if you go back to the 90s, the main objective of the Chinese and the Russians was to be as close to the U.S. as possible.

Even the Iranians were seeking to improve relations. But if you shift to the aspect of capabilities, if they're growing more powerful, this is a threat to global primacy. So they would have to be

balanced. But it just seems like the U.S. hasn't been able to take yes as an answer, because they could have had very different relations with all these countries, but all of it is premised on the idea that the U.S. would then have to accept them to, I guess, be peers or to reside in a multipolar world. And I have to say something very interesting again.

#Trita Parsi

You know, during the Biden administration, you could not talk about multipolarity in Washington. It had become a dirty word. It had become a Putin talking point, which was bizarre, mindful of the fact that in 2010, Hillary Clinton, as Secretary of State, already declared that the world was becoming multipolar. But 10 years later, it apparently became a Putin talking point. But one of the first things that Secretary of State Marco Rubio said when he came in, in February of last year, is that he not only said that the world is multipolar, he also said that unipolarity was an aberration, that it was a historical accident. And this is a very important statement if this is truly what the administration believes. First of all, if it's an aberration, it tends to then suggest that restoring unipolarity should not be an option, because you're not going to try to.

It's just not worth the cost of reestablishing an aberration. But also, it means that the United States then absolutely needs to get serious about adjusting itself to that multipolarity and see what it is that the United States needs to do, and its conduct needs to change. One of the question marks that was never really addressed is, in a multipolar world, how should the United States' relationship with the UN and its attitude towards multilateralism change, perhaps be revised, because it may have a far greater need for those types of instruments than it did during its unipolar moment. None of those things happened. The only thing we saw was that an NSS came out that suggested that the United States should not give up hegemony.

It should just give up hegemony globally. It should redefine the parameters of hegemony and just focus on the hemisphere. And that was, in and of itself, a shift. That document had the strongest language I've ever seen in any American government document denouncing global hegemony. But nevertheless, it seems to have had absolutely zero impact on American strategy, because it also said that the United States should deprioritize the Middle East, with some of the strongest language as to why the U.S. should no longer be that active in the Middle East. And three months later, the United States starts a war with Iran. So clearly, that document was not instructive in any way, shape, or form for the actual decisions that the president was going to make.

#Glenn

Well, that's why I thought that this could be a victory if they go back to this document. Because the National Security Strategy of December 2025 essentially put the Western Hemisphere and East Asia as the focus. And then essentially they would have to deprioritize Europe and the Middle East. Now

I'm thinking if the U.S. would then more or less come to an agreement where Iran does hold on to the Strait of Hormuz, where they essentially recognize that it's an important regional actor, the U.S. could do many things.

It could distance itself from the Middle East. It could blame the Europeans for things going south and pull out of Europe as well. This could be a major motivation to actually do what that security strategy suggested. But it seems to be quite strong, though, this impulse to just try to revive the empire, which begs the question how serious it was to begin with. But besides leaving the Iranians the Strait of Hormuz, what are the other options for the United States diplomatically at this point, or militarily for that matter?

#Trita Parsi

The military options, I just cannot see them being any good ones. Again, the U.S. could try to take one or two islands. It would come at a huge cost, not because it's difficult for the U.S. to take the islands per se, but because at the end of the day, defending the islands is going to cost the U.S. a lot. Because then suddenly you would have a lot of U.S. troops on those islands, and those islands are static. And the Iranians would just rain down missiles and drones on them and get a lot of American casualties, something that they have not been able to do on a large scale, precisely because most U.S. bases were emptied.

And most of the U.S. Navy has been keeping itself 3,000 kilometers away from the Iranian shores in order to avoid being struck by any of the missiles. All of that would change. So you may take an island, you're going to lose a lot of American soldiers, and eventually you will have to give up that island and achieve nothing. So again, this is part of the reason why the U.S. never did these things, despite the fact that they were threatened and Trump seems to have seriously considered them. And again, if we want to open up the Strait of Hormuz militarily, it's not about just demining the place and taking one or two islands.

The entire control of the straits is coming because of the manner in which the Iranians have put so many military assets throughout their entire coast, 1,500 kilometers. And you would have to essentially invade the country and take control of the entire southern coast of Iran in order to be able to truly open the Strait of Hormuz. And the U.S. is not going to do that. So military options I see as very limited. Diplomatic options, there are actually plenty of them. And in many ways, Trump is in a better position to actually strike a deal than previous presidents, not because he's trustworthy—he clearly is not from the perspective of the Iranians—not because he knows how to negotiate.

That's another point. It seems like he's not really achieving because he's dictating more than he is negotiating. But because he actually is willing to put all sanctions on the table as part of a deal and really lift sanctions, particularly primary sanctions. It's important to keep in mind that in the JCPOA, no primary sanctions were lifted. Those are the sanctions that prevent American companies from

going into the Iranian market. The sanctions that were lifted—or not even lifted, they were waived—were secondary sanctions. These are the sanctions that target European, Russian, Chinese, and Indian companies going into the Iranian market. And that was also part of the reason why it was easy for Trump to walk out of the JCPOA afterwards.

There were no business interests in the United States that had any stake in the survival of the JCPOA, with the exception of Boeing, which was written into the deal. But Boeing was bought out because the Emiratis made an order of—I forgot how many—\$42 billion or something like that in airplanes from Boeing as a way of just replacing the Iranian contract. But other than that, there was no pressure. There was no real cost to pulling out of the JCPOA. If Trump puts primary sanctions on the table, or if there's a deal in which that becomes part of it, first of all, it's important to understand primary sanctions on Iran are primarily through executive orders, which means Trump can lift them himself.

He does not need to go to Congress to get those sanctions lifted. It's the secondary sanctions that are imposed by Congress, which is the flip of the Cuba embargo, in which the embargo itself—the primary sanctions there—are through Congress. So Trump can do this with the stroke of a pen, and that would have a profound impact on the Iranian economy. It would be much, much more effective than the secondary sanctions relief. In fact, in many ways, secondary sanctions will start withering away once the primary sanctions are lifted. So he's willing to put all of these things on the table, but he wants much more on the nuclear front.

And the Iranians have offered much more on the nuclear front. The fact that they are now open to—they won't call it a moratorium, that's the American language—of not enriching at all for 12 years is a remarkable shift in the Iranian position. They never agreed to that since 2005, not even for a week of actually stopping enrichment. And part of the reason is precisely what happened between 2003 and 2005. In 2003, the E3 negotiated with Iran. They were terrified that George W. Bush was going to start a war with Iran, and they knew that as long as Iran was enriching, that risk was there. They managed to get the Iranians to agree to voluntarily suspend enrichment.

And that voluntary suspension was connected to continuation of negotiations for a final deal. But once the Iranians suspended it, the Europeans had no incentive to actually conclude a final deal because they had already achieved their main objective, which was to make sure that the Iranians were not enriching. So the Europeans dragged out the negotiations. And this is then part of the reason why, by August of 2005, the Iranians announced that they were going to restart enrichment because they felt that they had been fooled, that this was a trap. By January, they restarted enrichment. By February, their file was sent to the U.N. Security Council, and eventually several U.N. sanctions were imposed on Iran.

So there was a very high cost, in their view, of agreeing to that suspension, because once you broke the suspension, you were heavily punished—perhaps more heavily than you would have been had you never suspended enrichment. This is part of the reason why they've been so adamant about not

agreeing to this in previous negotiations. But now they have agreed to, at least in their last proposal, a 12-year moratorium. The way they're framing it is very different. I can go into the details of that, but that is a significant concession from the Iranian side, and it's all aimed at being able to get to a deal.

So both sides actually have shown some flexibility, but they're also very maximalist in some other variables. And right now, both sides are very maximalist on the issue of Iran's 60% stockpile. And as long as that is the case, these talks are currently deadlocked over that issue, and we're not even seeing this murmur of a potential return to war. But in many aspects, they've actually made significant progress, and if real sanctions relief is put on the table that goes beyond the JCPOA in many ways, it will be tremendously valuable to the Iranians. They absolutely need sanctions relief. They needed it before the war, but after this war, with \$300 billion in damages, they need it even more.

#Glenn

I was in Iran in May of last year, before the bombing, and I also went to one of the nuclear facilities there. And they were making the point—I forgot who we were speaking to—and he was making the point that the nuclear deal had included very intrusive inspections by the IAEA, and they essentially didn't trust them because they were handing over information to the Israelis and Americans, at least that's what they claimed, and all this appeared to have been correct. But also there was some frustration that, as you suggested, the American side didn't deliver on the JCPOA. So if they come to an agreement on sanctions relief, one could expect that it would simply be replaced by other sanctions later on. In contrast, if they can hold on to the Strait of Hormuz, they would be able to extract by force almost a lot of the things they want. But, of course, the sanctions are an important deal.

#Trita Parsi

What you're pointing to is very important because there is a very significant lack of trust. Everyone's seen how easy it is for the U.S. to impose more sanctions. I mean, this is what Congress does better than anything else. And there is a very legitimate concern that once these sanctions are lifted, they're just replaced by new sanctions that are imposed at a later stage. But I think it's also important to understand the control of the Strait of Hormuz. I don't think the Iranians are going to give that up at all. It's just going to be what type of arrangement there will be and how regionalized it will be.

Even if the Iranians open up the Strait altogether, they've already proven their ability to reclose it and take control of it again. They're not losing that as part of a deal. Because again, the reason why they have that control is because of the way that they're using their entire coastline. So it's no longer mining the Strait as it was 20 years ago. It's the combination of mining, using drones, using missiles, etc. So they're not really losing that ability whatsoever. But also, it's important to

understand that if there is a mechanism that ensures some sort of a payment system, there is one proposal from one of the GCC states that says it would not be a toll, but rather it would be an environmental management fee.

A fee that is paid to whatever countries are part of the mechanism because of the amount of resources they have to put into managing the environment of the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, given the fact that there is this ridiculous traffic of old tankers going through it all the time. At the end of the day, it is a toll. It's a fee. But it's just a different way of framing it that also then prevents it being replicated elsewhere in a manner that could have very problematic implications for other straits. But even if that were to take place in that manner, that money is not going to be able to compete with the amount of investments Iran can attract if sanctions are lifted.

Yes, the fees coming in from the Strait of Hormuz may not be negligible. It may be in the billions of dollars. It's not unimportant. But the billions and billions of dollars of investments it can get over the course of a long period of time if sanctions are lifted are just simply—there's no comparison there. So in my view, it would be quite a significant mistake for the Iranians to have managed to get so many chips through this war, but then fail to cash that in by securing a new order in the region, a new uncontested order in the region, in which their position is accepted, but also sanctions are fully lifted on them. That would be the true victory in my view, to be able to translate that military victory into a new peace that is beneficial to them.

#Glenn

That's a great point. Often I don't hear much optimism about the possibility of peace, but this, of course, makes a lot of sense. A concern, though, is the rhetoric, I think, because when I hear from the Trump administration this insistence that they're destroyed, they're weak, we killed their leaders, their military, they're desperate for a deal, whatever we give them, they will take. If there's also a possibility to walk this back a little bit and shift a little bit, because this is a hegemonic rhetoric—that is, this is what we dictate—if we can shift this to a multipolar perspective in which they recognize that, well, the other side has some security concerns, we will meet some of theirs, and in return they will give some concessions to us and we'll meet halfway. You know, diplomacy as we used to have before the post-Cold War era—it might be achievable.

#Trita Parsi

And if I could just say something on that, I mean, some of the rhetoric that Trump uses is just so counterproductive. And there have been key moments in the war when there were actually breakthroughs being worked out in the background, and then he comes out with a tweet and just completely ruins it. So I think in many ways, his social media handle has been his worst enemy during this war. And his lack of discipline or control has also been noted on the Iranian side—they're looking at his inability to control himself on social media, particularly with some of these angry 4 a. m. tweets he posts.

And they're asking themselves, if he can't control his own social media, how can he control and be trusted to live up to an agreement? They're just not seeing that type of discipline. At the same time, it's also very fascinating that the spectrum of Trump is just complete. He just covers the entire 360, because he can be absolutely terrible on social media and counterproductive. But he's also a president that doesn't have any inhibitions and can go out and say, I want Iran to be a completely and amazingly successful country. I want them to flourish. No other American president would ever say something like this. It's very important to remember that.

The idea that you would say, "I want Iran to be successful," was a complete political taboo. Even if you wanted to get a deal, even if you wanted to have a win-win deal, you would never say something like that because it would seem too costly politically in the United States. Trump doesn't seem to have an understanding of the concept of political cost and just says these things. So he is someone who actually could shift towards a narrative or rhetoric that could be win-win and could pave the way for this. But when he is losing, that's when you see him become as win-lose as possible, as zero-sum as possible, which ultimately, in my view, is counterproductive to his own objectives.

#Glenn

I thought that was always his strength, that he's a breaker of narratives almost. Only he could meet with the North Koreans. Only he would be able to break this boycott of diplomacy and talk to the Russians. This is important, the fact that he doesn't... he doesn't have to conform to narratives. I remember he was speaking with, I forgot, Sean Hannity on Fox News, and he was saying, well, how can you talk to Putin? He's a bad man. It's like, hey, we've done some bad stuff too. I mean, no one else could say this. And that's important because once you demonize your opponent for so long, that you're fighting evil, it's very hard to walk this back and then return to diplomacy. So I think this is his strength. His, as you say, 4 a.m. tweets, that's probably not his strength. Anyway, thank you so much for sharing your thoughts. I love your articles and, of course, Responsible Statecraft also. Excellent. So yes, everyone, please make sure to check out Substack, as I do. So, thanks again.

#Trita Parsi

Thank you so much. Really appreciate it.