

Marandi: Iran Closes Airspace; US Ready to Strike

Prof. Seyed Mohammad Marandi is a former advisor to Iran's nuclear negotiation team. Prof. Marandi discusses why the negotiations are failing and the US will likely resume its attacks. RECORDED MAY 23, 2026. 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 have the great privilege today of being joined by Seyed Mohammad Marandi, a professor at Tehran University and a former advisor to Iran's nuclear negotiation team. Thank you very much for coming back on.

#Seyed M. Marandi

Hi Glenn, thank you very much for inviting me. It's always a great pleasure being on your show.

#Glenn

I wanted to speak with you today about the peace process or the diplomacy going on because we get a lot of conflicting messages. That is, the U.S. keeps signaling that the U.S. and Iran are getting closer to a deal and the gaps are being bridged, while Iran is essentially pushing back, to some extent at least, arguing that there doesn't seem to be peace, that the two sides are still very far apart. What is actually happening on the diplomatic front? I mean, what is information warfare and what's actually happening?

#Seyed M. Marandi

You know, I always say, and I believe, and I continue to believe, that usually the Iranian side of the story is much more accurate. In general, Glenn, the West lies. On the other hand, the Iranians don't lie. But when they don't want to say something, they won't say it. So the Iranians—I don't see them lie often. But if they don't want to talk about it, they'll just ignore it. So they won't lie about it, but they won't talk about it. So often, when you look at some things in the Iranian media, you have to sort of read between the lines and figure out what's missing. Whereas in the West, the truth is usually missing—in the mainstream media, at least.

I think the Iranian version is quite accurate, and from my conversations with people who are involved, the Iranians see a wide gap between the Iranian side and the Americans. And the Americans also have a much greater sense of urgency. The Iranians don't have that sense of urgency, not because the Iranians are not under pressure. The war has damaged the economy, the strikes on Iranian infrastructure, the siege. Obviously, it has an effect on inflation, on jobs, on the market. But the Iranians do recognize that the situation for the global economy is much worse and that it's on the verge of something very bad. So the Iranians are basically telling the Americans that we have demands. Those demands have to be met. We have not carried out aggression. We did not start this war.

We even had a ceasefire after the war. You did not abide by your commitments. If you had done so, the global economy wouldn't be where it is today. So it is what it is. And the expectation in Iran is that this will be tough and that it could either lead to U.S. strikes, another wave of attacks, or it could lead to the United States becoming more flexible in the coming days. Either route is quite possible, but I think that the working assumption in Iran is that there will be war and that Iran is preparing for war. That's the working assumption. They're not going to be lulled into thinking that we're on the course or the route to peace because we've had terrible experiences with the United States in the past. And it's not just with Trump.

I was on a TV program with a former Obama official, and she was talking about the differences between Trump and Obama. Obama lied to Iran. He cheated with the JCPOA. There were many flaws in that deal, and the U.S. used it to its advantage. But also, before Obama and since the beginning of the revolution, every time the United States and Iran had some sort of dialogue, had some sort of agreement, it was the Americans that betrayed Iran, were dishonest. And so there is great suspicion here. And it could be that as the negotiations are taking place, we'll be attacked. No one is going to put any faith in some message sent to Iran through the Pakistani mediators or through some other third party. That's basically how it is right now. And I'm pretty sure this is an accurate assessment.

#Glenn

Yeah, I find it interesting that Trump could make comments like, oh, we were planning on striking Iran on Friday, but we decided not to because of either the Gulf states or his son's wedding — all of these comments. The fact that he just makes these casual comments like, yeah, we're planning again to strike yet again during negotiations, it does reduce some of the trust, if that's not completely absent by now. But you mentioned that Iran has set its demands. And again, whenever there are negotiations, one usually starts with a set of demands on each side, but one gives them room for maneuver to meet in the middle. But on the Iranian position, what do you think are the red lines? Because giving up the Strait of Hormuz, that seems to be... well, keeping the Strait of Hormuz, that seems to be written in stone.

Also, I can't imagine Iran willing to abandon or reduce its conventional deterrence, be it ballistic missiles, drones, or its relationship with its allies. And indeed, I often make the point, I don't think it's in America's interest to do this either, because then Iran will be more reliant on a nuclear deterrent. So I say, you know, accept that Iranians have a powerful conventional deterrence to the extent they feel safe. But how about the nuclear program? Because Iran previously agreed to the JCPOA. So where do you think Iran's position has hardened? Again, I know you don't speak for the government. Where do you think Iran's government is, where they won't move an inch? And where do you think there might be some leeway?

#Seyed M. Marandi

Well, one thing I'm very careful about doing, Glenn, is that I don't ask about details, because since I am in the media, I don't want to know certain things, even if they tell me. And of course, there are things that obviously I won't be told anyway, even if I ask. So a lot of what I'm going to say now is basically my understanding, but it's not based on knowledge. The Iranians are in a much stronger position now than before. I think that's a general assessment. Even when Robert Kagan admits this, then I don't think anyone could call this a fringe assessment or an exaggeration. So, the Iranians are in a much stronger position. They feel that the need for flexibility on the Iranian side is much less.

On the other hand, Iran's demands are much more reasonable than the American demands. So that's another reason why the Iranians will feel that flexibility can only go too far. Why? Because Iran is not demanding the United States give up its sovereignty. It's not demanding that the United States give up its military presence in the Gulf of Mexico. It's not doing anything like that. It's not demanding anything like that. So the Iranian demands are reasonable. The Iranians are in a stronger position. And also, Iran has a very, very powerful tool, and that is the Strait of Hormuz. At the end of the day, the whole defensive and offensive military engagement with the United States during the war more or less revolved around the Strait of Hormuz.

#Seyed M. Marandi

How to take control and keep control of the Strait of Hormuz.

#Seyed M. Marandi

So U.S. bases in the region were destroyed. Escalation—when the Zionist regime carried out escalation, of course, the Zionists were regularly targeted day and night. But when there was escalation, the Iranians would respond with escalation against the Israeli regime, but also against U. S. proxies in the Persian Gulf that were part of the war. But all of this, at the end of the day, the big prize was control of the Strait of Hormuz. And that is something that the Iranians—that is a major, that is one of the most important tools in the Iranian toolbox. And if Iran wants to give anything on

that front, then they are going to be demanding a great deal in return. And also, the very fact that Iran didn't start this war gives the Iranians not only the moral high ground—they didn't shut the Strait of Hormuz, they didn't create this global crisis.

It creates a strong sense of Iranian victimhood. And Iranians, being Shia Muslims, already have a strong, very powerful sense of standing up to oppression, supporting the oppressed. So you're a victim of war, you have that ideology of supporting the oppressed, you yourself are being threatened, so you stand up against the aggressor. All of that combined makes the Iranian position at the negotiating table much stronger, because the government knows that the economy is facing major difficulties, but the Iranian people are resilient too. We could have trouble ahead. Some people may come to the streets saying we need jobs, we have difficulties, but it will be manageable. Whereas on the other side, it's not going to be manageable.

So all these together make the Iranians adamant that they're going to have to have a better deal than before. Whether it's on the nuclear issue, whether it's with regards to the Strait of Hormuz, whether it's with regards to Iranian sovereignty, things will be very different than before. Iran can be flexible. For example—and this, again, is just me—but let's say Iranians and Americans, Iran opens up the Strait of Hormuz, right? Which Iran never closed. I always have to stress this: Iran never closed the Strait of Hormuz. It only closed it to those countries who were with the U.S. in its assault on Iran. But friendly countries, their ships were passing through this whole time. Like these five regimes in the Persian Gulf—for them, it was shut. But for Iraq, for Oman, it was never closed.

So let's say, hypothetically speaking, the Americans and Iran ultimately agree under certain conditions, different conditions, to open the Strait of Hormuz. Iran will still be in control. Iran may not openly, on the peace agreement with the Americans, get a fee, but Iran will get a fee. So it doesn't have to be something written down with the Americans that, yes, we will agree to have a fee or not to have a fee. But in reality, those ships that go through will have to pay a fee for whatever reasons—global warming, environmental protection, or security costs, whatever it is. But the Iranians will get a fee. And also, the Iranians will no longer allow the United States to turn the Persian Gulf into a military zone. So there can be some things on paper, but other things that won't be on paper.

#Glenn

It's interesting what you said about Kagan because the information space in Europe is very restricted. And I often made the point that, well, Iran is winning. You can't defeat Iran for a variety of reasons, first of all. And the weapons, you know, Trump makes the point we destroyed the Navy, the Air Force. But at the end of the day, even if all of that was true, the weapons Iran required to shut down the Strait of Hormuz, you know, it doesn't require necessarily what Trump is referring to. But when I said that Iran was winning from the beginning, I was told this is, you know, repeating Iranian propaganda. But as you said, now we have the king of the neocons, Kagan, coming out essentially writing articles with the title "Checkmate."

You know, the Iranians won. But also, I made the point that the Iranians not only have protected a lot of their weaponry below ground, but also that they have a very powerful industrial potential, autonomous as well, in which they could ramp up production to replenish their stocks—either what has been fired or what has been destroyed. And now we see, well, this was also told, I was just spreading Iranian propaganda, but now we see the US intelligence community coming out and arguing that the Iranians are rebuilding and replenishing much, much faster than they had expected. So I guess the lesson here is that any reality which people don't like is propaganda.

But I wanted to ask, though, about the meaning of the sanctions, sanction relief, because if I was advising the Americans, I would say that this would be, you know, an area where they have something to offer. Because even if the U.S. is defeated, Iran comes out on top and America has to go home, then there wouldn't be any reason for them to give up on the sanctions. And of course, Iran could benefit if all the sanctions are removed, not gradually, because I think gradually means it's not going to be removed. But if it's all removed, then, you know, this would be a situation where the Iranians would be willing to show some leniency in other areas, not... But again, it's... How important are the sanctions? And do the Americans hold any other cards in terms of, well, essentially, yeah, offering something to Iran instead of just threatening and pressuring, you know, peace through strength, as NATO likes to call it?

#Seyed M. Marandi

Well, the Americans have stolen significant amounts of Iranian assets. That's worth—I don't know the real numbers—but obviously it's in the many billions of dollars. But since Iran doesn't have control over those assets, it's like they don't exist. So there's not a lot of leverage in that sense. The leverage, of course, is mostly the sanctions. The threat of war is not really something that the Iranians are fearful of, for the reasons that you just explained. Everything that we were saying earlier has now been acknowledged by The New York Times and The Washington Post, even though they're no friends of Iran.

And I would say with a great deal of confidence—I'm very confident about this—that Iran's military today is more prepared for war than it was at the beginning of the war. In other words, Iran is, militarily speaking, significantly stronger than it was three months ago. And so if there is another war, it's going to be worse for the Americans. And Yemen is much more prepared than Iraq last time around. Though it was active, the resistance there, this time around it's going to be much more active. So there will be rapid escalation.

#Seyed M. Marandi

And the capabilities on the Iranian side and its allies are greater than before. And of course, Iran's allies really didn't participate that much because that was not the plan. They wanted to manage escalation. But this time around, it will be different. So if there is war, it will end very badly for the

United States. So the Iranians are confident about going back to a military confrontation. It's not that they want it. Iran didn't start the war. They don't want war. But Iran knows that it has the upper hand if war restarts. And it would turn out even worse for the Americans and the Israeli regime than the 39 days of fighting that we had before. But again, at the negotiating table, what Iran has to offer is passage through the Strait of Hormuz.

And the Americans have made a number of major miscalculations. But the biggest, I think, of all—well, one of them, if not the biggest—goes back to that book I mentioned before, **Going to Tehran** by Flynt and Hillary Mann Leverett, which I think everyone should read. The biggest miscalculation is their misunderstanding of Iran. And of course, you've been to Iran, so you know what I'm speaking about. That book, I think, explains it very well. And also, they predicted what would happen if the United States didn't change course. So that is the biggest mistake. The second biggest mistake, I think, is that through misunderstanding Iran, the whole notion of decapitation or regime change is just ridiculous.

And in the New York Times article about Ahmadinejad, it sounds more like a joke here in Iran than anything else. And it just shows that if it was serious, these people have no idea what they're doing. And if it's not serious, it just shows how unserious the New York Times is and how it thinks that its audience would believe something that is in reality so ridiculous. And that means that their comprehension of Iran and the narrative on Iran is so strange and abnormal and warped and detached from reality that they cannot make objective assessments. And that's why when they carry out operations, when they implement policy, they hit a brick wall because they're not dealing with reality. They're dealing with something that they created through their imagination.

The second is, of course, the second biggest mistake that they made was with regard to Iran's military capabilities and its ability to defeat the United States in the Strait of Hormuz, and to hold back and take control of the flow of oil and energy, and so on. But I think beyond that, tactically speaking, the Americans' biggest mistake in the war was that they didn't impose the siege on day one. And the Iranians were expecting that to happen. They were expecting the United States to impose a siege on Iranian ports at the very beginning. And they had contingency plans, but it would have been very difficult. But the Americans did not do this. And they even removed sanctions on Iranian oil, which helped the Iranians sell their oil at a higher price, because the Americans thought this would be a quick win, and they didn't want to disturb the markets.

So they wanted to keep the price of oil down so that when they defeated Iran, you know, everything would move on. And it was a catastrophic miscalculation. So only after the war, the hot war, and a week or so after the ceasefire, I think, did the Americans start imposing the siege. That strength, I mean, even if the Americans had done that on day one, Iran would still have the upper hand at the negotiating table. But since they delayed this, the pressure on Iran began later and grew more slowly than the pressure, the economic pressure, on the United States. So while, let's say, I'm just—this is just pure speculation.

If Iran can wait it out, I mean, I think a month ago the Americans, American intelligence, said Iran can last four months or whatever. I mean, let's just, let's say that's the case. We know, so let's say it's three months now, let's say. I'm not saying it's a correct assessment, but I'm just saying that, you know, let's assume it's correct. Then, from what we're seeing on your show and other shows, the U.S. economy, the global economy, cannot wait three months. That's definitely out of the question. So let's say the United States had started the siege earlier. Let's say the three months would have been two months now, and we would have still been closer. I don't know if I'm making my point in a meaningful way, if it makes sense.

So the Iranians have the upper hand at the negotiating table, not just because they have control of the Strait of Hormuz, not just because they were effective militarily, not just because they showed that their state institutions and their popular legitimacy are much higher than anything the Western media would like to admit. Again, going back to the book **Going to Tehran**. But also another book that's good to read is our mutual friend Alice O'Crook's **Resistance: The Essence of the Islamic Republic** or **Islamic Revolution** or something like that. That's a good read too. But in any case, in addition to that, the Iranians can outlast the Americans in the waiting game. So whether we go back to war, the Iranians have the upper hand. Whether it's wait and see what happens, the Iranians have the upper hand.

At the negotiating table, the Americans have a sense of urgency that I know, and the Iranians do not have that sense of urgency. The Americans want an immediate answer. The Iranians are saying, well, let's think about it. Let's think this through. So this is a, you know, there's no good solution for Trump. This is not going to end well for Trump. And it's not going to end well for the United States, thanks to Trump and thanks to the Israeli regime and thanks to the Zionist lobby. But again, my response to your question doesn't provide you with any answer, whether we're going to have military conflict tonight or tomorrow night or the day after tomorrow in the morning or whenever, or have some sort of agreement. To me, it's completely unclear.

#Glenn

Well, I do see that Iran has been put on high alert. There are reports that Iran has shut down its airspace, at least over the weekend now. What prompted this? Is there any report of an imminent attack?

#Seyed M. Marandi

Well, Iran has been on high alert for at least three weeks now. And I've been told on multiple occasions during this period that it could be tonight, it could be tomorrow. I've heard that on multiple occasions. But this is a three-day weekend. We're also approaching a critical point in the global economic crisis. The bond markets are wobbly, and of course, Trump—I'm guessing, this is just me saying—that he's not going to go to his son's wedding and that sort of thing, I think. And the sense of urgency by the United States, all of that, I think makes the Iranians—and the fact that

this is a three-day weekend. This is a three-day weekend, and we know that Trump, or at least it seems that Trump, likes to start wars, and the United States in general likes to start wars on weekends so that the markets would not be terribly... and they don't go into shock, and they can sort of, hopefully from their perspective, contain the situation by the time the weekend comes to an end.

Maybe these would be calculations. So I think that right now we're on—it's Saturday—so we still have two more days. So it's still like a normal weekend situation ahead of us. But that doesn't mean there's going to be an assault. I think it's just impossible to say. At least for me, it's impossible to say. But, you know, Iranians are confident. They're not panicked at all. The 12-day war made Iranians a lot more confident about themselves—about their capabilities, about the resistance, and about their ideology.

#Seyed M. Marandi

I don't know, strength. But this war went far beyond the 12-day war. And so you have some Iranians whose expectations are also very high. And that is something that the government and the state and the negotiators have to deal with too. Many people, their expectations are extremely high. So the Iranians are confident about their position. I mean, the economic situation is difficult. It will get more difficult. But the Iranians are confident.

#Glenn

It's such a dangerous and difficult situation because, for the United States, they can't win the war. They can't get a peace which Trump can bring home and claim as a victory. And they can't really maintain the ceasefire either because, well, time isn't on America's side on this one, as the Gulf states apparently keep warning Trump about. But to what extent do you think the other regional actors—be it Israel or Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the Gulf states—what influence do they have in terms of constraining or assisting the negotiation process? Or are they all spectators here?

#Seyed M. Marandi

Well, Qatar sent a delegation to Iran, but I don't think any of them really have much input. Even Pakistan, what it does is pass messages back and forth, which is something that Iran prefers. Iran prefers things to be written because Iran wants to think things through. They don't trust Americans. They want to make sure that there are no loopholes in anything that goes back and forth. And in the past, Americans have promised things very often, and they never carry them out. And also, the Pakistani mediation could have its own difficulties. The Pakistani mediators could interpret something in a particular way, and then the Americans—which has happened—would say that that's not what we meant. So I think basically it's the messages that go back and forth that are important.

#Glenn

Countries in the region, they...

#Seyed M. Marandi

You know, Ben, there's been a lot of deception from the very beginning. Last year, you recall that before the war—and we're approaching the anniversary of the previous war, the 12-day war—we heard right before the war that there were big differences between Trump and Netanyahu about waging war against Iran, and it turned out to be fake. So now, just a few days ago, Trump and Netanyahu apparently, allegedly, had a difference of opinion over Iran again. Should I believe that? I don't think anyone here really takes that seriously. It may be true, it may not be true, but no one is going to take it seriously because we've already seen this narrative right before a previous war being used as disinformation. Or, for example, the five countries in the Persian Gulf that, before the war, were claiming that they were against war.

But gradually it emerged that no, none of them really were against the war. In fact, they were supporting the war because they thought that it would be a quick win by the United States. So they assisted the Americans, and they continue to assist the Americans in every way or form. Now, today they are much more concerned because they see how badly Iran can hurt them and retaliate because of the crimes that they were involved in. So they say they're against the war, but again, we don't know. I don't think anyone really knows.

Some people may believe that they are, others don't, that they're serious about a change of heart. The Emirates, of course, is a different case. The Emirates is showing itself to be a full ally of the Israeli regime, which is a foolish move because it only justifies Iran's position to the entire region and public opinion. During the war, when Iran was retaliating against these regimes, across the Arab world, people were cheering for Iran, except for the Wahhabis and the Salafis who are funded by these regimes and other people on the payroll. People on the streets were cheering. Why?

Because they know that none of these regimes have done them any good, that they haven't done anything good for Arabs in different countries, let alone the Palestinians. Qatar pretends to do some things like giving scholarships to some Palestinians or building a couple of hospitals in Gaza before the war, or Al Jazeera showing the crimes of the Israeli regime, but in reality, Qatar doesn't do anything substantial, just like Erdogan in Turkey, who continues to let Netanyahu transport cheap oil from Baku to Netanyahu. None of them do. So by taking this stance, the Emirates is enhancing Iran's soft power capabilities because everyone hates the Israeli regime.

So we don't know where these countries stand. I don't know, at least. I hear some people say that the Qataris have had a change of heart, but it's not because there's really a change of heart. If there is a change in position, it's because they know that their gas facilities can be destroyed for good. And that will happen if Iran's critical infrastructure is attacked, and so on. Turkey, it's NATO. And Erdogan, he'll never do anything against the United States. He didn't do it in Gaza. He didn't do it in Lebanon. Even though the Israeli regime is more of a threat to Turkey, as we all know, Greater

Israel actually doesn't directly affect Iran, nor Yemen, two members of the Axis of Resistance. It mostly affects Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Egypt.

But those countries don't have the ability to do much about it. Of course, it would affect Iran indirectly, because if it expands, its sphere of influence would expand with it. But in any case, no, these countries don't have a leadership that would stand up to the United States. So the region is not really that important. This is between Iran and the United States and the Israeli regime. But also, inside Israel, there are lots of problems. And those who follow the Hebrew media, they know that there's a crisis inside the regime. And Alastair Crooke and his wife, Ashley, they do a lot, especially his wife. She does a lot of work on the Hebrew media. So I think people, if they want to know more about that, they should follow...

#Glenn

Yeah, no, his Substack/Reflex Forum is quite excellent. Make sure to read it as well, just to also catch up on what's happening in the Hebrew media. But no, whenever we see anything in any messaging coming out of the White House, I get a bit worried because they say they're optimistic, we're getting close to a peace. This is usually a red flag that they might attack. Trump said that the Gulf states had convinced him not to attack, which sounds like he's going to try to give some protection for them as he plans to attack. And, of course, this new talk of a split between Netanyahu and Trump is also something you would want to hear before an attack. So hopefully, yeah, this weekend will be peaceful. And yeah, good luck. And as always, thank you so much for being so generous with your time.

#Seyed M. Marandi

Not at all. It's always a great pleasure, Glenn. And I hope it's peaceful for everyone — the people of Cuba, the people of Lebanon, the people of Gaza, and across the world. Hopefully, we'll see better days. I'm sure no one believes that we're going to see better days anytime soon.

#Seyed M. Marandi

But I think ultimately, after the hardship, things will get better.