

# Pepe Escobar: Iran, China & Pakistan's High-Stakes Negotiation

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## #Nima

One of the most important pieces that you've written in recent months, I would say. And here is the title of your new article: "How China and Pakistan May Deliver the Real Deal." What is that, and what does that mean, Pepe?

## #Pepe

Exactly. Of course, it's not that China and Pakistan are going to deliver a deal. I cannot explain in a simple headline, as short as possible, that they are working hard to finalize a memorandum of understanding. That's a completely different story. That's the first step. And after that, we can have, according to negotiators, a period of 30 to 60 days when they start discussing the nitty-gritty, the really serious questions. So this article was quite something to do, and it's important for several reasons, because I had direct access to privileged information from people who are very close to the table — Chinese, Pakistanis, and Iranians as well. Some of these Iranians, I'm sure you know some of them, but probably you don't know some of the others. They always, at this juncture, are fantastic in terms of volunteering information, in terms of trust.

They know that I will faithfully respect what they are entrusting me with, which is an enormous responsibility. And the same thing with the Chinese, the Chinese that I talk to here in Shanghai. Shanghai may not be the political capital of China — it's the business and cultural capital — but the circulation of information here is something extraordinary. And there is a tradition of critical thinking as well. Some of the sharpest scholars and analysts are teaching in Shanghai universities, so it's the perfect place to be. And I reactivated my connections with Pakistan. I am very fond of Pakistan, and it was great that these past few weeks I reactivated some very important channels with Pakistan because of their mediation efforts. So when you put this all together, it's possible to write a column like this. Obviously, I cannot name names for obvious reasons.

And the people who already read it, linked to diplomacy and intel, they love that the whole thing is, I would say, built as a very solid, realist narrative, but without naming names, emphasizing the crucial role of these three players: Iran, in terms of making quite, I would say, evident and self-evident for

the Pakistanis as mediators, and for China in the background as the guarantors — their positions, which have been very clear from the beginning. And you know about that, Nima, you have been reporting about it from the beginning, and we know the essential Iranian positions have not changed and will not change. The Pakistanis, they are in a very, very tough spot, and many people are immensely impressed by how they are pulling it off.

Because they are the go-between for the extremely volatile Trump administration, where you simply cannot trust anything they say and do; the Gulf petro-monarchies, which are trying to think about the next step — and it's not going to be under an American security umbrella; Iran, of course, because Iran and Pakistan are talking all the time about the process per se; Russia, of course, because we all know the war — the proxy war in Ukraine, the SMO — is reaching a completely different stage, and this is the Russian preoccupation at the moment. But they keep their eye on the ball in Iran because they know that both wars are completely interconnected. And, of course, China.

And it's great to be in China at this particular moment because we had three immensely important meetings, Nima, one week after another. It started with the visit by Trump, which, as we all know, nothing really serious happened. But of course, Xi Jinping was paying very close attention to what may be going on inside the mind of this four-year-old president of the United States. The next week, President Putin came to Beijing, and then we got the real deal, because they issued their joint declaration, which is basically laying the tracks for building the multipolar world. And they had an over two-hour tea ceremony, very private.

Only Xi, Putin, three members each from their delegations, and the translators, where they discussed especially the United States out of control, the war in Ukraine, and of course, Iran. So what happened earlier this week, Nima, was even more extraordinary. An ultra high-level Pakistani delegation was received by Xi Jinping in Beijing on Monday. Everybody was there — their top negotiator, Field Marshal Asim Munir, their foreign minister, their prime minister, everybody. Of course, this was related to the anniversary of the China-Pakistan special relationship, projects in the New Silk Roads, etc.

But of course, Xi Jinping needed to hear directly from the Pakistanis what they are doing in practice in the mediation sphere, with full support from China. So when we put these three visits together, Nima and all of you, that's it. This is the roadmap for the most important players in Eurasia trying to organize the way out from this war. Obviously, these people — the people who are at the table, the people that negotiate — they are very, very smart, and they are realpolitik practitioners. They have no illusions. They knew even before what's been happening these past few days that the Zionist lobby would go all the way to smash, destroy, blow up any possibility of a deal, which is the stage that we are at now.

So does that mean that the possibility of a memorandum of understanding is dead? No. And this is the main point in the column. It's not dead, but it's at a very, very dangerous juncture now — this week and until the middle of next week, at least. If we, let's say, in these next six to seven days,

manage to cross this abyss, there is a serious possibility that we're going to have a memorandum of understanding and, of course, the beginning of negotiations in detail. Is this a solution? Of course it's not, because we know that, once again, according to our great friend, Grand Master Sergei Lavrov, the United States is non-agreement-capable. And all these players, Nima, they know it. And they have to deal with it.

But this doesn't mean that they need to stop or despair. No, they continue doing their job. It's amazing. It's like an ant colony building something inside the ant colony. They keep working 24/7, all that. And, of course, there are some of these breakthroughs we can actually see, which is the possibility of those \$12 billion in Qatari banks being finally released. So we are at the point that this might happen. But this is a detail because the Iranians are saying that, look, they owe us at least \$100 billion. So until we get there, it's a long, long way. And, of course, the provocations — there were provocations against Iran earlier this week, of course.

Iran decided not to respond forcefully. Why? Because of Eid, because of the Hajj. They don't want any spillover affecting pilgrims from the whole Muslim world and the lands of Islam who are currently in Saudi Arabia finishing their Hajj. Next week, this will be over. So we can have an Iranian response much more forceful than so far. So this tension between the diplomatic intel track that is progressing, even against all odds, but anything can happen along the way to collapse the whole edifice. So that's where we are exactly at the moment. And this is what I try to explain in this article.

Yes, it's a tough read, but I try to explain it in the most palatable way, straight to the point and outlining the priorities on all sides. And of course, emphasizing that if we follow a path to peace like the negotiators are trying to achieve, the whole ball game changes completely. It has already changed, Nima, as we already know. We are already in the post-American established order in West Asia. We still don't know how this is going to be constituted, but it's already a new ball game. And that adds to the desperation, the impotence, and the fury and rage of the American side, and especially the international Zionist side.

## **#Nima**

You know, Ben-Gvir today said Israel doesn't let Donald Trump sign a bad deal with Iran. I don't know what else they can do. It's going to be a bad deal for the United States, for Israel—specifically for Israel—because I don't see that much for the United States. It's all about Israel. It's all the American bases in the region that are fighting. Basically, the main reason is Israel. That's why they're so desperate right now. They're attacking Lebanon in the southern part of Lebanon. They defined a yellow line in the southern part, then they're crossing that line. They're saying that that yellow line doesn't matter anymore. Every time, it seems something is happening. As you've just mentioned, something is happening. I don't know how important that is and how critical and how sustainable that sort of negotiation or those talks that are happening are.

## **#Pepe**

Yes, we know a lot of things are happening, Nima. For instance, after this article, I received another batch of information, which I'll probably use for another one, maybe before the end of the week or the beginning of next week. It is moving very fast. But, of course, they have to be prepared for ultra-nasty interference by all those usual suspects in Washington—all the neocons, all the Zionists, the Zionist international, you know, the axis of Zionism everywhere. And, of course, how are you going to respond? For instance, one of the questions that I put to one of the negotiators, and he gave me an indirect answer, in fact.

I was asking, okay, assume we have the path towards a deal, and Israel decides that no, they will continue to bomb Lebanon and illegally annex Lebanese land, and kill Lebanese civilians in droves, which is what they have been doing for months. How is Iran going to respond? Is Iran going to stick exclusively to a deal with the United States, or will they respond to Israeli horrors, which is the only thing they know how to perpetrate? Of course, Iran will respond. And Iran will tell the United States, look, this may fall out of our deal, but we told you from the beginning that if the Zionists go on a rampage, we are going to respond.

That's it. But the thing is, will the Trump administration admit that that's the case? Probably not. So, you know, we go from one dead end to another. In fact, that's why it is so dangerous. But still, we have to keep a positive attitude about all that because there is a strong possibility on the table being discussed. So I think all of us, we have to insist on that. Otherwise, Nima and all of you, we give up. There's going to be war all over again. And this war is going to destroy what has not been destroyed yet, not only in West Asia, but the global economy. Are these people, these lunatics, these terrorist lunatics, lunatic enough to do that?

## **#Nima**

Yes, they are. They don't care.

## **#Pepe**

And that's why it's so dangerous. You are dealing with a bunch of killers. You are dealing with a gigantic killing machine, one of the most, one of the nastiest in modern history, and in history as a whole.

## **#Nima**

Pepe, how do you see the role of Qatar? You mentioned the Iranians. We know that Iran, the head of the Iranian parliament, together with the head of the Central Bank of Iran and the foreign minister of Iran, went to Qatar about that \$12 billion that you just mentioned. That is half of the frozen Iranian assets abroad. And how do you see the role of Qatar? Are they getting more involved? Because before we had Pakistan, and you mentioned that Pakistan is playing a very important role right now, but how do you see the role of Qatar and the GCC?

## #Pepe

Yeah, the top mediators are Pakistan. Qatar, they don't want to get involved. Qatar, they want to protect themselves from any extra effects, nasty effects on their economy. They already suffered a lot. So for them, to unblock these funds which are in Qatari banks is not such a big deal. It's not Qatari money, it's in Qatari banks, and they can do it. And even Trump can sell that inside the US to domestic public opinion — look, we didn't do it, the Qataris did it. So this is something that arranges everybody. And the Iranians know it. And that's why they sent this ultra high-level top delegation to Doha. So this is something that can be done. It's an example of things that can be done. But when we get to the ultra intractable deals — everything from the nuclear dossier to Iran's ballistic program to support for the axis of resistance to the new status of the Strait of Hormuz.

Then we know that then it's hell. Then we could have years of negotiations on any of these issues, right? So... just to give an idea of what is the mentality of these negotiations at the moment. They know that, OK, we can have an incremental success here, another one over there, and that maybe starts building momentum. And then maybe this will show, especially to the West — forget about the bloody Zionists — especially to Trump and the people around him, that this is inevitable, that there's only one way out for him, which is to strike some sort of deal that he can sell to domestic public opinion as victory, Trump-style, like if this was an MMA show. Who cares? As long as Iran gets the respect for their rights and their sovereignty and their independence and the sacrifices they made, they don't care how this is going to be sold inside the U.S.