Seyed M. Marandi: U.S. & Iran Escalate – Gulf States at Risk of Collapse

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#Glenn

Welcome back, everyone. We are joined again by Professor Seyed Mohammad Marandi, a professor at Tehran University and also a former advisor to Iran's nuclear negotiating team. Good to see you again. How have you been?

#Seyed M. Marandi

I'm good, Glenn. Thank you very much for inviting me. It's always a great pleasure. Of course, we are waiting for something to happen. We don't know if there's going to be an all-out war or if things are going to move in a different direction, but we're good.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, we're waiting, as we call it. It's not really clear where things are going. But based on the past week, I would say it doesn't look great. I mean, we know that the vice president, J.D. Vance, who blamed the Iran war and Israel for the disastrous defeat in the U.S. midterms, has now been removed from his negotiating role with Iran. This was several days ago. Then we saw, about a week ago, more U.S. military capabilities enter the Middle East, most importantly the USS Roosevelt. And on Tuesday of this week, the 17th, we saw U.S. airstrikes against Iran's Qeshm Island in the Strait of Hormuz.

And on Thursday, the 19th, we saw the U.S. Senate vote against limiting Trump's authority to continue striking Iran. So all of this doesn't look great. And in terms of Iranian pushback, well, I

think yesterday, on Saturday, the 21st, we saw at least three tankers that were hit or damaged. And in Bahrain, we also saw a lot of developments—that is, multiple Iranian missiles and, I think, also drones attacked the U.S. bases there. So again, I'm not sure if I'm missing anything or what exactly is going on, but how do you interpret these events?

#Seyed M. Marandi

It's hard to say. The chance of war remains high. And the expectation is that if there is war, it will be an assault on Iranian civilian infrastructure, based on what Trump has been saying. But we also saw this peculiar incident where the wife of Trump's chief of staff retweeted Trump's tweet about wiping out Iranian civilization and then deleted it an hour later. You can interpret that in different ways, obviously, but perhaps she thought there was going to be an assault the night before last, and then she was told to delete the tweet. Who knows? But the Iranians are working on the assumption that there will be war. That is the working assumption. Iran itself is escalating. It is increasing the number of tankers that it strikes in the Strait of Hormuz. It is hitting them much harder than before.

Iran is also targeting U.S. jets. The night before last, Iran damaged an F-16, and apparently last night they damaged an F-35. Both of them had to land under very difficult circumstances, so apparently they were damaged. Then the Iranians have also been downing large numbers of U.S. drones. These are very expensive drones. They each cost $40 to $60 million. So both sides are striking. And as you pointed out, Iran is hitting U.S. assets, U.S. radar installations and air defense capabilities in Bahrain, in Kuwait and in Oman. So Iran is also pushing back very hard. I think it's clear that the Iranian policy now is to put more pressure on Trump to force him to make a decision: either go to war or back down. And the Iranians do not want this situation to continue as it is, this no-war, no-peace situation.

So Iran will continue to increase pressure. We saw the U.S. stock market go downhill over the last week. And that obviously has something to do with Iran, too, among other things. These are, of course, problems that the United States has created for itself over more than a couple of decades. But the war with Iran has made things worse. And Iran is using this situation to put more pressure on Trump. So we'll have to see. Usually, the United States likes to attack Iran over weekends because of the markets. But so far this weekend, nothing has happened. Time is sort of running out for Trump because in January there will be a new Congress, and it is expected that life will become much more difficult for him. So the Iranians are very much focused on the next few weeks before the new year.

#Glenn

Well, what is it about Iran's strategic calculations that you think the Americans might be missing? I mean, in terms of the timeframe for the war, the actual geographical scope, or Iran's preparedness to, I guess, deny the U.S. escalation dominance by being willing to escalate itself, as you just suggested.

#Seyed M. Marandi

I think the biggest problem that the United States has is, first of all, coming to terms with reality. The world that we live in has changed. The United States is not the hyperpower, as someone once called it, that it was during the period of the invasion of Iraq in 2003. We see that in the trilateral summit in China, where the United States is not only forced to accept China as an equal, but it has to accept Russia as an equal. But still, the mentality hasn't changed. So the Americans seem to believe that if they push and they continue, somehow Iran will break, and that Iran's demands are not serious. Ultimately, Iran will at some point seek an agreement with the United States that's favorable to Trump. I think that's a very bad misreading of the reality in Iran.

And it's based on decades of anti-Iranian narratives in the United States, not just in cinema or in memoirs and novels and television, but also in think tanks and academia—well-funded institutions that encourage a certain type of understanding of Iran. That has led to a misreading of Iran that is very dangerous. And that has resulted in this war. They assumed that Iran would easily be defeated during the 12-day war. That didn't happen. Then they thought if they brought in all they had, Iran would collapse. That didn't happen. In fact, Iran hit them back very hard. And now they think if they starve the Iranian people and bring them to their knees and threaten to destroy Iran's infrastructure and wreck the country, the Iranians will appease the United States. And they have made a catastrophic mistake, because if that happens, the Iranians have said very clearly that they're going to do this to U.S. assets and U.S. proxies across the region.

And that will bring down the global economy and the U.S. economy, which is already, as I said earlier, as we all know, doing very poorly. So that misreading of Iran should have been rectified during the funeral of Ayatollah Khamenei, which was unprecedented in human history. But they just failed to learn. That reservoir of knowledge about Iran—this Orientalist reservoir of knowledge, coupled with the, let's say, Zionist-dominated narrative of Iran in the West, in the United States in particular—just prevents them from reconciling themselves with the reality that Iran is powerful and that its population considers the state to be highly legitimate. These are things that the Americans should have learned by now, but I don't think they will.

I mean, I do not watch CNN, but by chance I saw Fareed Zakaria talking about this trilateral summit on CNN. And he was saying that this was a terrible summit because President Putin was elevated to the status of the head of a superpower. He also said that Trump was friends with the person who is killing innocent people in Ukraine and who is assisting our enemy, meaning Iran. And the irony—anyone who watches would think, well, your enemy, Mr. Zakaria, Iran, has lost huge numbers of children as a result of this unprovoked war. But he doesn't see it that way. That is the narrative of the United States. That is the dominant narrative of the elites. He's an enemy of Trump.

And the media outlet that he's affiliated with is antagonistic towards Trump. But that imperial mentality, that supremacist mentality, that tribalism that dominates U.S. politics—which, of course, is

controlled by the oligarchy and the powerful—prevents them from even seeing their own hypocrisy, the irony in their statements, the paradoxes that they're constantly putting out there in the open. And that is because of this reservoir of knowledge that has accumulated over centuries, but also in our contemporary period after the revolution, that prevents them from even recognizing reality. So as long as this exists, I think that the threat of war is clear, unless Iran deals the United States such a decisive blow that it is forced to change. And I think that is quite possible.

#Glenn

People like Fareed Zakaria, I think, are still stuck in the unipolar or hegemonic mindset because this way of conducting diplomacy did make some sense over the past 30 years. That is, when you're a hegemonic power, or even a collective hegemony—the U.S. and its allies—when you come together, you can impose your will on the rest of the world. This was the whole formula for the hegemonic peace. So, in other words, you don't need to take your adversaries into account. In such a world, diplomacy didn't entail the United States sitting down with opponents and trying to figure out how to manage the competition. Again, under the hegemonic peace, the logic was, you know, why sit down with people you don't like? You know, our enemies will always be evil.

And this is kind of how you justify this new diplomacy. You know, they're all dictators, so it's a moral thing that we don't do diplomacy as we did in the past. And we created this narrative that you only sit in the room with people you agree with, essentially, because our allies are liberal democracies and all our enemies are dictators. But at the foundation of this was a different distribution of power. If the Americans only sit in a room with the Europeans, it doesn't allow them to solve any conflicts, because the whole idea was that the political West, or the collective West, could come together and collectively impose its will. When that's not a possibility anymore, it doesn't make any sense.

In a multipolar world, you have to sit down with your opponents. I mean, this should be common sense, but I guess they still hold on to the whole moral argument, or the moralism, behind not talking to the opponent, even though that distribution of power is gone. That's the dangerous thing with ideas: they stay even after reality has changed. However, I did want to ask about the geographical scope of the war, which you say you're now waiting to start. What is the role of Iraq here? Because one of the big things that happened over the past two days, I think, was that the Iraqi government began to intervene in what's referred to as militia-controlled territory.

That is, Kata'ib Hezbollah are dominant in the Jurf al-Sakhar region. Again, I'm probably butchering all these names, but there's at least substantial evidence that the U.S. is involved here, that they are pressuring Baghdad to take stronger measures against groups aligned with Iran. Again, I'm not sure what cards the Americans are planning to play in this coming war, but how do you see the possibility of a spillover into Iraq, or the risk of it, at least?

#Seyed M. Marandi

Well, the recent Iraqi elections saw the victory of those parties that are very friendly to Iran. And a strong majority of Iraqi MPs who elected the current government are close to Iran. They're very friendly with Iran. And the United States knows where the sentiments of the Iraqi people lie. We saw that manifest itself at the funeral of Ayatollah Khamenei, when his body was taken to Iraq, to the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala, and millions of people took to the streets, like in Iran. The only difference was that the temperatures were near 50 degrees Celsius, yet you still had those crowds.

And it should have sent a message to Washington, but again, that sense of supremacy, that exceptionalism, as you alluded to, prevents them from really seeing the reality. The only thing that the United States has going for it is the fact that Iraq's oil wealth, its money, its earnings from oil sales, have to go through the United States. Because of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, the United States has refrained from allowing Iraq to become a normal country. It's the same mentality that we see in Venezuela. But the United States uses this as a tool.

They refrain from giving Iraq its own money until it carries out U.S. demands. And so the Americans literally prevent the Iraqi government from paying salaries. Ordinary Iraqis who are government employees suddenly don't receive their salaries this month, let's say. Why? Because the Americans are not happy, and they won't give the Iraqi government its money. That's how ugly U.S. behavior is towards the Iraqi people. They are literally willing to make the entire country starve in order to get what they want. So the Americans have been pushing the Iraqi prime minister to take certain positions. He resists, the government resists, the political class resists.

So there's this tug of war always going on between the Iraqi people, the Iraqi resistance, and, of course, the United States, which is pushing for certain demands. What is happening now is more or less under control. The resistance forces say that Iraq is still not liberated for the reasons that I've just explained, but also because the United States uses Iraq and Iraqi airspace to bomb Iran, and because Turkey continues to occupy northern Iraq. These are among the reasons why they continue to bear arms. A compromise has been made where the armed forces have moved around and these resistance forces have shifted their positions on the ground. And I don't think there's any danger of confrontation.

The Iranian general who leads the Quds Force, the person who replaced General Soleimani, General Qa'ani, went to Iraq for a number of days, and he managed to create a deal between these different forces so that the situation could go back to normal. If there is war, it's clear that the resistance in Iraq will work with Iran. And there really isn't much that the United States can do about that. The region is changing. And we saw that in Yemen as well. The Saudis have restarted their genocidal war in Yemen. They're bombing factories and homes and schools like they did during their seven-year genocidal war in Yemen. But this time around, Yemen is far too strong, and it is hitting back at Saudi Arabia very hard.

And the future of Saudi Arabia is becoming increasingly unclear. If this continues for much longer, it's not clear if Saudi Arabia will remain stable. So the balance of power in the region is shifting quite

rapidly. And there really isn't much that the United States can do about Iraq. They can harm Iraqis, but then that creates more anger among Iraqis towards the United States. And it also increases the incentive for Iraq to move away from the U.S. dollar and U.S. financial institutions. And as we move forward and the region reaches this critical point, I think we're going to see the United States ejected from this region. And then they will not be able to have any control over Iraq, or perhaps any country in the peninsula either.

#Glenn

Well, you mentioned before that Iran wouldn't permit the current format of war against it. That is, the U.S. has shifted from high-intensity war to slowly bleeding Iran in this gradual, long war. Again, we saw that being done against the Iraqis in the ’90s. We saw that this was also the tactic being used against the Syrians. I would argue that's also what's currently being used against the Russians. That is, this long war, a long game just to gradually bleed them and then hope that at some point something cracks. But the key problem with this is not just that the United States doesn't really have enough resources in the region to keep this going forever. It's also an economic issue for the global economy. But perhaps more critically, there are the Gulf states. How long can they hold out?

#Seyed M. Marandi

Because this is not a good time for them. You're absolutely correct. And a lot of this actually is because of Iran. After 9/11, whatever the real reasons for 9/11 were, when the United States invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, the Iranians immediately went to work to undermine the United States. And initially, because the first generation of the Taliban was slaughtering people and carrying out genocide, the Iranians wouldn't work with them. And they were hoping a new government in Afghanistan would behave in a much more reasonable manner. And the Iranians were hoping that the United States had learned the lessons of 9/11: not to support terrorist groups, not to support extremists.

But then I think the Iranians began to come to the conclusion that perhaps 9/11 wasn't just about 19 Wahhabi terrorists, and there was much more to it than they initially believed. And then the second generation of the Taliban had evolved somewhat. I mean, the differences between Iran and the Taliban are huge, but this generation no longer carries out genocidal acts. It does not slaughter minorities or anything like that. So the Iranians began to work with the Taliban to undermine the United States. And then in Iraq, Iran did the same. It supported groups that carried out resistance, and it also supported groups entering the political process. Iran was doing the same thing in both countries.

And ultimately, that forced the United States to leave both countries after many years of occupation. The cost was in the many trillions. I recall many years ago someone said six or seven trillion dollars. By the time they left these two countries, it was probably much higher than that. So Iran contributed a lot to the general weakness of the United States. There are other reasons as well: neoliberalism

and so on, and other empire projects that are costly. But I think that the Iranian role was massive, and that contributes to what we're seeing today. In other words, the United States just does not have the resources that it did back then because they've bankrupted themselves, partially due to these occupations.

And now Iran is much stronger, relatively speaking, and the United States is much weaker. And until now, U.S. proxies in the region, like Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait, had thought that things were just as they always were. They believed that if they allowed the United States to use their territory against Iran or against Yemen or against Syria or against Iraq, they could maintain control over their populations, that these ruling families could behave with impunity, and that this would continue forever.

But they did not see the warning signs because, as dictators and their yes-men usually do, they failed to see them. They assisted the United States in its war against Yemen. They assisted the United States in its war against Iraq and then Syria. And this time around, they thought that when the United States attacked Iran, they would be on the winning side, Iran would be destroyed within days, and they could continue with business as usual. But it didn't happen this time around. And now they're in deep trouble. And the longer this war continues and the longer the siege continues, the more dangerous it is for these regimes. Because these are family regimes. There's no civil society. They don't have any popular legitimacy. And the money is running out.

The lifestyles are changing. Businesses have left the UAE. The countries across the region are not making the sort of money that they were. In fact, they have to use resources; they have to get loans. And alongside the fact that the Strait of Hormuz is closed to a large degree for them, Mohammed bin Salman foolishly, at the behest of Trump, restarted his genocidal war in Yemen. That only made things worse. And if Saudi Arabia ultimately begins to wobble, none of these tiny countries will last. People have to keep in mind that the Emirates has roughly a million citizens—a little over a million. Qatar has a population of, like, 350,000. Most people who live in these countries are foreigners.

They're foreign workers. Before the war, 10 to 15 percent of the population were passport holders. So these are not real countries. These are tiny entities that are very wealthy because of oil and gas, but that can easily be swept away due to the circumstances that we're now living in. And if that happens, then I think that will bring about a very swift collapse in the global economy. I mean, let's look at the markets in the United States and across the world over the last week. Main Street has been suffering for a very long time, thus the catastrophic midterm elections for Trump. Now, High Street is in serious trouble. I'm not an expert, but from what I'm hearing and seeing, things are not looking good. And therefore, none of this bodes well for these family dictatorships.

#Glenn

Well, you mentioned that if Saudi Arabia begins to wobble, this could be a bit of a disaster. And as we've seen, Ansar Allah, or the Houthis, or whatever we want to call them in Yemen, are able to inflict a lot of pain on Saudi Arabia now, which is the main reason why they're wobbling. And they're also being cut off from both the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea. But let's say something were to go terribly wrong in Saudi Arabia and the government were to begin to fall. What kind of alternative forces could replace it? I guess the same question could be applied to Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, or Bahrain, for that matter.

If these governments fall—as you say, they're very dependent on energy exports, financial services, and real estate. But all of this is, of course, also tied to the very strange demographics, where the majority are foreigners working there. So what kind of governments would take their place if something goes wrong? I mean, these are not just pie-in-the-sky hypotheticals. This is something we could see even over the next few months. I'm not saying it will happen, but at least it's a big possibility that should now be considered.

#Seyed M. Marandi

I agree completely. If the United States launches the sort of war that Senator Murphy has been implying, then I think that these regimes will be swept away very swiftly. I mean, we are at war, but I'm talking about a massive attack on Iranian infrastructure. Even if the United States doesn't do that, the road that we're taking right now will ultimately lead to these regimes being undermined. They will begin to wobble, and this will lead to their collapse. This is not sustainable forever.

I think it's quite possible to foresee circumstances where Kuwait will be absorbed by Iraq, or where there will be a revolution in Bahrain. People are already being battered and beaten and imprisoned in Bahrain. Saudi Arabia could break up, and so could the Emirates. These are tribal countries. They remain tribal. The Saudis and the UAE have never allowed civil society to grow. So if the center collapses—let's just imagine there's no ruling family in Riyadh—then you have tribes that will want to assert greater control. And that could lead to the map changing in the Arabian Peninsula altogether. Qatar is too small to be divided.

Will there be another regime? Will it be absorbed by someone else? It's unclear. But the point is, these are not really important countries. They're tiny dots on the map. But the energy that comes from the Persian Gulf region—the sulfur, the helium, the fertilizers, the gasoline, the jet fuel, the diesel, the LNG, the crude oil—all of this will come to an end if there is chaos across the other side of the Persian Gulf. And that will lead to catastrophic consequences for the world. Many have left Qatar, by the way. The only people who remain in these countries are the foreign workers, who really have nowhere else to go.

They need the money. If they go, they have nothing to go back to. So it's not as if the countries are functioning normally now. They are paying out of their own pockets. They're using their reserves.

But when the U.S. economy goes downhill, their reserves are all in the West. They're in the stock market. They're in the bond market. They have purchased U.S. assets. So the worse things become in the West, the worse it is for their reserves. I personally don't think they're ever going to see their bonds again. The United States will never allow them to sell their bonds. And if their regimes fall, I think the Americans will just confiscate all that wealth that was there.

It was clear that this was going to happen the day they began doing this, but these family dictatorships pay bribes in huge quantities just so that they remain in power. That's why the Americans keep them in power, because they buy trillions, literally trillions of dollars' worth of weapons over the decades that they can't use, as we've seen during the last couple of years. They put all their assets into the West, and the United States in particular. But ultimately, when push comes to shove, the United States fails to protect them. The United States uses them to attack Iran. But then, when Iran strikes back, the United States is completely indifferent to the fate of these regimes.

#Glenn

No, it's quite remarkable. And I don't think people always appreciate the percentages we're talking about here. I think for Saudi Arabia, just short of 50% of the population are foreigners—that is, foreign passport holders who just work there. I think it's 44, 45%. In Qatar and the UAE, it's almost 90%. It's like 87, 88%. I mean, this is remarkable. This is almost like a holiday resort operating as a country. You know, I don't want to denigrate people's countries, but the point is, it's not what you usually associate with countries. As you say, it's almost like corporations masquerading as countries. I mean, the people there, the nations are real. You know, there's a lot of history to all this, Arab groups and people, so I don't want to suggest otherwise.

#Seyed M. Marandi

The issue is not that the people who live in these countries, or in what today is called Qatar or Saudi Arabia, are any different from people anywhere else in the world. But the UAE has a population of one million, made up of different tribes, and almost 90% of the people who live there have no rights. They have no status in that country that allows them to be part of the decision-making process, even though no one else does either, because it's a ruling family that's in charge.

But this is not something that is sustainable under such circumstances. In other words, the only reason why that ruling family can maintain control over one million people and nine million people who are working there is because of its intelligence agency, which is linked to Mossad and the CIA, and because these families have overwhelming Western support to maintain power. And how do they keep that support? They put their money in U.S. accounts, in U.S. banks. They put their money in the U.S. stock market, the bond market. They buy U.S. assets. They buy U.S. weapons, waste trillions of dollars so that the family can stay in power. And as a result of all that money that flows to the United States, the United States ensures that they stay in power.

That is how things have been for the last few decades. But now the United States does not have that overwhelming power. And these countries have been exposed as weak and vulnerable because when the Iranians retaliate, they can do nothing about it. Now, when Yemen strikes Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia cannot block its drones and missiles. So these regimes have been exposed as weak and vulnerable. So if this continues, it's just not sustainable. And Saudi Arabia is a country that's named after a family. That does not create a strong sense of national identity. So the issue is not the individuals living on these lands. They are as worthy and valuable as anyone else.

But the fact is that the individuals who live on these lands are not allowed to have a role. They're not allowed to create a civil society and the sort of bonds that would exist, let's say, in Iran. In Iran, when the leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, was murdered—martyred along with commanders on day one—and when the United States terrorized the country by bombing schools and intentionally wiping out the children of naval officers to demoralize the country, along with other acts, Iran had no leader for the first two weeks. And many of Iran's senior commanders were killed. But the country continued to function.

And the reason was that the people came and effectively ran the country. People were on the streets every night, on their own initiative at the beginning, keeping things calm. There were no runs on markets. There were no runs on banks. You didn't see people going into supermarkets and buying up food. It was normal. Why? Because within society itself, there was a sense of shared identity. People were in solidarity with one another, and they maintained Iran as a strong and powerful society under the most devastating circumstances, without a leader. This solidarity that we saw among Iranians kept the country together.

And this is something that doesn't exist on the other side of the Persian Gulf because these are family dictatorships where ordinary people have no role, and the majority of people in many of these countries are not even citizens or don't even carry passports for those countries. So it's not sustainable unless there's a lot of money. It is only because of the massive oil and gas wealth that these family regimes have been able to sustain themselves. But if they can't sell the oil, if they can't sell the gas, if they cannot profit from that, and when the United States does not have the power that it had before, then the status quo is not sustainable.

#Glenn

Let me ask you about the possible diplomatic path here, because, again, we are stuck at a crossroads. Do we have to go back to war? We're already at war, but do we move to all-out war, which seems more likely? The diplomatic pathway is still there, even though it seems to be very much undermined. I was wondering what you see, because earlier on you mentioned that Iran has an interest in weakening Trump. And as we know, in the midterms, everyone recognizes that this

was a referendum on Trump and that the war against Iran was really the main issue, along with how he had let himself be used, likely by Israel. But it also has to be said, though, that the Democrats and Republicans, you know, they're very much aligned on Iran.

In most wars, there's very little that differentiates them. Again, Trump will have to take the fall for the Iran war. But how different are the Democrats? I'm thinking of the first Trump administration, when Trump withdrew from the JCPOA. You had people like Joe Biden criticizing it fiercely, saying that this was not a good idea. However, when he became president, he didn't do anything different. He didn't try to reinstate it, nothing. And you see, this is a common trend across all countries. Against China, during the first Trump administration, Biden criticized the tariffs and the sanctions. However, when Biden came in, he kept them in place and even increased them. And you can say, you know, the same with Russia.

That is, Trump criticized it: "Why do we impose all these sanctions? Why do we fight this war against the Russians?" Well, Trump comes in, and he continues it. I mean, I know that whoever's in power has to be blamed for the war, and the opposition can play the peacemakers, but history suggests it doesn't really matter who sits on the throne. I was wondering, how do you see this? And just to expand further on the question, in contrast, you do see this Qatari delegation, which I think met with Iranian officials in Tehran two days ago, on Friday. I mean, how do you assess these different pathways towards some kind of peaceful settlement, if not to end the whole war, then at least parts of it?

#Seyed M. Marandi

Well, if I forget, Kata, remind me to get to this, because there are two parts to the question. At the end of the first part, I may forget about the second part. You know, I don't want to name the think tank, but during COVID, after Biden was elected, I was invited online to a closed-door session of a very well-known think tank in the United States. You know that. And there was a lot of optimism. This is a think tank that is associated with the Democratic Party. They were, of course, very happy to see Trump go, and they thought he was gone forever. But anyway, one of the things that they were all saying—and when I say they were all saying it, I mean everyone.

There were like 15 speakers, maybe 30 people in the discussion. And I was one of two people from Iran. And they were all saying that, yes, when Biden comes to power, he's going to immediately use his presidential authority to remove Trump's presidential decrees and revive the JCPOA. That was the consensus. And then when it was my turn, I said, "Look, I obviously don't know nearly as much about the United States as you do, but looking at the United States from the outside, my experience leads me to conclude that Biden will not do such a thing, that he will maintain all the sanctions that were imposed by Trump, and that, as a result, the JCPOA will not be revived."

And then we had another gathering. This time it was just me; the other Iranian, for whatever reason, couldn't participate. I don't recall exactly when, but this was in the first few weeks after

Biden went to the White House. And I reminded them that what they had said in the previous session—all of these people being experts on U.S. governance and the U.S. government and being affiliated with the Democratic Party—turned out to be wrong. And what I said, as an Iranian who knows very little about the United States and who's not even an expert on politics, turned out to be right. And I think that's because the political class in the United States doesn't understand what people like yourself, like me, and like many others who watch the United States from the outside understand. They do not see what we see.

And that is that the person on the throne does not have that much authority. There really isn't such a great difference between Trump and Obama. And even though some Americans would be offended by that, they'd say Trump is crude and Obama is sophisticated. No, it is integrated. Obama was the person who began the process of destroying Syria through his regional proxies and allies: Erdogan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Israeli regime, Jordan, and the Europeans. But he was the person in charge. He was the person who led the operation. Or take the destruction of Libya. Libya was the wealthiest country in Africa.

It was doing very well, regardless of what they like to think about the Libyan leader. He's no worse than any of these European leaders that I see. But they destroyed Libya. And then there was the genocidal war that Mohammed bin Salman began against Yemen. Obama gave the green light for that war. It was during the nuclear negotiations. He gave the green light partially because he wanted Saudi Arabia not to disrupt the JCPOA negotiations. That was Obama, and the list goes on. So there is no real difference in substance. Yes, there are differences over abortion in the United States or arguments over health care, although neither party supports universal health care.

But yes, you're absolutely correct. But there is a difference, and that is that the United States is in a much weaker position today than it was before, and that there is a great awakening in the United States. I don't want to overestimate or exaggerate it, but there is an awakening in the United States. Those who voted for the Democratic Party—I think it's fair to say at least a huge segment of them, if not the overwhelming majority, according to polls—oppose the Israeli regime, they oppose genocide, they oppose the war. And therefore, those people who form the foundation of the Democratic Party, those who voted for it, didn't vote for the party; they voted against Trump. But they had no other option.

So those who've come to power in the Democratic Party, those who've been elected to the Senate, to the House, or as governors—I'm personally not optimistic about any of them. Maybe one or two congressmen or women. Even in the Senate, I mean, three senators-elect—one from Texas, one from Michigan, and one from Maine—at least these three have called what's going on in Gaza genocide. But I don't trust any of these three elected senators for a host of different reasons. Their endorsements, just like the mayor of New York's endorsement of Hakeem Jeffries, who supports the Israeli regime just as much as Biden does. So I'm not optimistic about the Democratic Party, and only a naive person would be. However, the people who voted for the Democratic Party have expectations.

And the situation in the United States is worsening. And if the Democratic Party doesn't at least meet those voters halfway in terms of their expectations, then I think Americans will conclude that the political system in the United States is a dead end. And that is dangerous for the future stability of the country. Either a third force emerges peacefully, or a third force or other forces emerge in a different manner. So there is a lot of pressure out there for the United States to change course. And if Trump attacks Iran in the way that Senator Murphy implies, the US economy will tank. It will go downhill very fast. And that will be immediately after the American people have voted no to Trump and no to war. That will make them even angrier.

In other words, if Trump had attacked Iran before the midterm elections, it would probably have been smarter. If his intention has been to attack Iran—and we don't know what goes on in his head, thank God, because we're all sane—he should have done it before the midterms. Because after the midterms, the American people have spoken, and they will become very angry if he and the Zionists and Netanyahu destroy their world and their finances and wreck the economy and their lives after the midterm elections. And the Democratic Party knows that that is the expectation of the people.

So after this long explanation, which I don't know if it's very coherent, the point that I'm making is that this is not, again, the hyperpower of old. This is not the unipolar moment anymore. This is not the old United States. This is not the United States that could control West Asia, that could control different parts of the world and manage them, for good or for ill. For ill, in my opinion, but for good or for ill. The United States is weakened at home, and it's weakened abroad. It cannot control events in our part of the world like it used to, and for the same reason, the political regime in the United States shouldn't think that it can control events at home like it used to either.

So I think changes are taking place which will make it much more difficult for the United States to try to impose its will upon Iran or the axis of resistance in the future. It makes it increasingly impossible. But with regard to Qatar, ever since Vance was removed and, in my opinion, repeatedly humiliated by Trump—and we have to keep in mind that even though Trump is unpopular, you know this better than I, Glenn, his base still dominates the Republican Party. So even though he's unpopular among Americans, he controls the party. And Vance cannot defeat Trump in the party. The base does not belong to Vance. It belongs to Trump. So Vance has been humiliated, and he's been sidelined.

Ever since he was sidelined, U.S. communications and messages have stopped. Now we'll have to see what comes of the Qatari efforts, because Qatar now knows that its own future is at stake. It's become much more keen on solving the problem rather than just allowing the United States to use its bases to bomb Iran. We'll have to see what the United States is proposing. But at the end of the day, unless the United States abides by Iran's demands and revives the MOU, which Trump signed, we're not going to have a deal. And although I do not know what has gone on in the negotiations, at the moment I don't see any reason for optimism.

#Glenn

I was hoping we could finish this on a positive note, but I rarely do.

#Seyed M. Marandi

We never do. We never do, but still, there's no war.

#Glenn

No war, yeah. So that's a good thing. But again, usually one assesses threats by looking at intentions and capabilities. And if we look at the stated intentions, there's not much talk of peace. And if we look at the capabilities, they are now mounting, and they're being used as well, increasingly so. As you said, it looks like both the Iranians and the Americans are now escalating. So I'm not sure what would bring down this escalation spiral. Anyway, Professor Marandi, thank you so much. Have a great Sunday over there, and let's hope for peace.

#Seyed M. Marandi

You too, Glenn. Have a great day, and hopefully we'll have better news next time we talk.