

# Trita Parsi: Iran War Ends Today? Threats of Deporting Trita Parsi

Trita Parsi discusses the efforts to have him deported for criticising the Iran War, and also comments on Pakistan's Prime Minister arguing a peace agreement will be signed within the next 24 hours. is the co-founder and Executive Vice President of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. Parsi 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](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](http://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 again by Trita Parsi. Sorry, you're the executive vice president, yes? Yeah. I'll start over and cut. Okay. Welcome back. We are joined today by Trita Parsi, the executive vice president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. He's also an award-winning author, named by Washingtonian magazine for six years as one of the top influential voices on foreign policy in Washington, D.C.

## #Trita Parsi

I haven't updated my bio yet, but it's been six years in a row.

## #Glenn

Six years in a row. Well done. So again, I would advise everyone to look at the Substack, and the link is in the description. So I really wanted to ask you today about the developments in the Iran war, because today, that is on Saturday, the 13th of June, the Pakistani prime minister has argued that a peace deal will be signed within the next 24 hours. I'm not sure if it's... well, I'm hoping he's basing it on something, but I'm guessing something is bound to happen this weekend. But first, I must ask, is the Trump administration currently attempting to expel you personally for having criticized the U.S. approach or engagement in this war?

## #Trita Parsi

Glenn, great to be with you again, and thank you for the opportunity to talk about this. I wouldn't go as far as saying it's the Trump administration. There are certain elements within it who I believe—

though I don't have full evidence—have tried to do this. I mean, you have some of these pro-Israeli social media influencers who for weeks have been pushing for this. They even created an AI video of me getting deported, which was the first time I've seen AI recreate my image. So I actually was kind of amused by that. But nevertheless, there's been this effort from the outside, from some of those elements.

And I think there are certain elements inside the government that also have been sympathetic to this and may have tried to push it. But that hit piece that was published against me two or three nights ago in the Free Press, Bari Weiss's Free Press, seemed to claim that there was an investigation. But the State Department came out within hours and denied that there was an investigation, which is very unusual. And my own theory as to what happened, and it's partly based on conversations we've had, is that there were some elements inside who thought that by getting some external pressure, additional external pressure, this would help move along the bureaucratic effort to actually get an investigation that would lead to a deportation.

But the State Department has come out and said that that is not taking place. I don't know if that may change in the future. I don't think these people will give up for a second. But I think what we can say, though, is that this is a long-term trend. You know, for 25 years, I've been fighting the neocons and warmongers in Washington. They've always tried to cancel me, silence me, discredit me, slander me, accuse me of being an Iranian agent, and all of these different kinds of lies. This is the first moment I see, though, however, they are very publicly trying to escalate it towards a deportation operation.

I'm not, I don't think this round worked out that well for them, because there was this massive amount of public support, which was completely organic. At the Quincy Institute, we were still trying to figure out exactly where will this story go, what's going on, we're making phone calls. But it came out of itself that I was quite heartened by it, I have to admit, of course. And I think this frankly backfired, because there were also elements inside the administration that pushed back against this. So it's a little bit more complicated than to say that the Trump administration tried it. There are certain elements there that clearly are trying to do it, but others were not in favor.

## **#Glenn**

It is interesting, though, how the discourse around the wars and conflicts has changed. I mean, I often... I miss the more objective approach by, you know, formerly the likes of Henry Kissinger. Whenever he would write something, he would take himself out of the analysis and just explain, out of the situation, just explain what is happening. But these days... you know, one uses only these labels. One says, you know, one is pro—well, especially with the Iran war now. The assumption is that if you're pro-Israeli, then you will praise the war. If you're a critic of the attack on Iran, well, then you're pro-Iranian. But, you know, it doesn't really make much sense.

I mean, it doesn't really matter if you think, you know, who you're pro or not, or what you think about Iran. You know, if you like Iran or hate Iran, you need an honest analysis of the war. Because, you know, this war was a disaster for U.S. military strategic interests. So this idea that if you support the U.S., then you're for the war, it doesn't really make much sense if you do an analysis of how this war would likely work out. And the conclusion is that, yeah, it will be disastrous. But do you get the impression that the discourse, the quality, has dropped significantly? Yeah.

## **#Trita Parsi**

Well, I would go one step further. It has qualitatively deteriorated remarkably, but it has done so outside of the U.S. as well. I think that's one of the big differences. I was here in 2003, and it was very clear. I mean, the Bush administration at the time, Karl Rove, was essentially saying that if you're against the war, you're unpatriotic. So it was very much at this level, perhaps not as low as it has become now. But you didn't have that on the European side. You still could have a rational conversation on the European side about the causes of the war, about the context, about trying to understand Saddam Hussein's motivations and calculations. Understanding is not to sympathize. Explaining is not to defend.

It's just to try to better understand so that you yourself can calculate what your best options are and calibrate your best way forward by having a realistic understanding of what the actual lay of the land is. I've seen that on the European side, particularly after 2022, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine has just completely deteriorated, not just on the issue of Ukraine and Russia, but almost all of the other major conflicts. I see that on Gaza, and I clearly have seen that on the Iran side as well, in which, again, news is not about explaining. It's not about facts. It's about essentially sloganeering for your team. And part of the reason why individuals like myself, you, and many of the people that you have on your show end up becoming a problem is that if you want to have a war of choice, you have to get rid of all nuance. You have to get rid of all context.

You just have to reduce everything to black and white, good versus evil, and have no one ask any questions. And people who do ask questions, who try to explain the context, who try to explain what the other side may perceive their situation to be, become obstacles to these wars of choice. And as a result, you have to go after them. You have to chase them out. You have to cancel them, discredit them, accuse them of being sympathetic to the Ayatollah, to Putin, or to Saddam, simply by trying to explain, okay, this is how we think they're seeing the situation. And again, this was seen before in the U.S. And the U.S. is so often in war, so it's not unusual that that type of war atmosphere brings the discourse down. But now I'm seeing it in Europe in a way that is frankly terrifying, even on conflicts that they're not directly involved in.

## **#Glenn**

I often make the point that moralism can be deeply immoral. Because I'm always asked, do you condemn Hamas for what they did on that day? Yeah, sure. Or do you condemn Russia for invading? And all the arguments, they're always anchored in condemning someone or this moralism. But again, what makes it moral? If one is forced into a language where one side is all good, the other one is all pure evil, that makes it impossible to actually discuss the security concerns of your opponents. It undermines the ability to find compromise and peace. Then the moralism can become deeply immoral because you no longer have the ability to enhance your own security interests.

And this is, yes, you mentioned the Ukraine war. I've noticed this as well, because when I criticized the toppling of Yanukovich in 2014, I was told, ah, that's a pro-Russian argument. And, you know, the failure to implement the Minsk Agreement, ah, well, if you criticize this, it's also pro-Russian. Or if you are against sending weapons or in favor of diplomacy, then all that's pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian. And that's kind of where the discourse shuts down. But no one actually explains how any of this benefited Ukraine or NATO. I mean, imagine if we could go back to 2014 now, not toppling Yanukovich.

The Ukrainians would have all their territory, including Crimea. Older men would still be alive or not have fled the country. The infrastructure would be intact. There could be a formidable bridge between east and west, a buffer. You know, how was this good for us? Now NATO is disintegrating. It doesn't... But we don't take this point of departure. What is good for us? And then you discuss the different approaches. It's always going back to this pro-this or anti-that, and the concept of being pro-Iranian or pro-Russian. It's just a concept which nobody likes, and then they fill it up with any content they want. It's manipulative.

## **#Trita Parsi**

And ultimately, terribly, terribly counterproductive. Just look at how Europe is faring right now. Look at how the United States is faring right now. I had conversations with the administration before the war. I argued ferociously that they are completely misreading Iran. They're thinking that Iran is much weaker than it is. And beyond that, they think that the Iranians fear war more than they fear surrender. And as a result, Trump's approach was to just amass more military towards the region and think that eventually the Iranians would surrender. And as a result, he would never actually have to actualize his bluff of attacking. I was trying to make it clear to them that they don't understand.

They will never surrender. They fear surrender far more than they fear war. They think they can survive war, perhaps even come out looking good from a war, but they can never survive a surrender. And as a result, the entire fundamentals of your approach are erroneous. And I think that was proven right, that the Iranians did not flinch. They, in fact, seem to have thought that some

level of war was necessary to correct Trump's perception of Iran's weakness—false perception of Iran's weakness—and then go to the negotiating table from a position in which Trump had understood that they're not as weak as he thought. In fact, they're quite strong.

And as a result, he's going to have to agree to a compromise rather than Iran just essentially accepting America's terms for surrender, which is exactly where we are right now. If there is an MOU, whether it is more beneficial to Iran or the U.S., there's going to be a long debate about it. But we're no longer talking in any way, shape, or form about the terms of surrender that Trump had in mind on February 28th. All of them are out the window. And it is because of this miscalculation. It is because of this misperception. And because, at the end of the day, the debate has never really been allowed for the last decades to be nuanced on Iran.

Iran is similar to the case of Israel-Palestine. It's been going on for so long, and this has been a deeply felt issue in the United States going back to the hostage crisis. It's always been extremely difficult to have a nuanced conversation about Iran in the United States, much, much more so than it ever has been in Europe. But ultimately, it has been clearly to the detriment of the U.S. itself, because when you have incomplete information or wishful thinking, you will make wrong policy decisions. And those wrong policy decisions will end up costing you far more than the other side.

## **#Glenn**

Yeah, that's written in Machiavelli's work. That is, well, men see the world as they wish it was, and then they die, or then they're destroyed. No, but they're seeing the world as they wish it was. And I think this is a key problem in Europe, though. Everything in this part of the world is very normative. Every argument is normative. So if you're saying that the Russians are winning, oh, well, then you're supporting the Russians. Because if you're saying they're winning, then you might reduce public support for financing a war. So everything is—nothing is a reflection of reality. It's just normative.

## **#Trita Parsi**

Can I add one thing to that? If you actually had a war that was seen deeply as justified by the population, you would not need to do any of these things. It is precisely when it is either a war of choice, or in the case of Ukraine, an option not to actually have a real negotiation, because that's how we've seen it from the outset. There's just been this rejection of negotiation, an effort to think that the war can set back the Russians 10, 15, 20 years, and that will give Europe another generation of peace. As one European official told me, actually arguing very ferociously that this is an opportunity to set back the Russians, and as a result, diplomacy is not needed. When you have situations like this, that's when you really need to clamp down on the debate.

Because if there was a strong level of support—for instance, if the United States had been invaded by another country—I don't think there would be any need for a clampdown on the debate, because it would have been a genuine desire to expel the invaders and support what would be a defensive

war. These types of things only come in when you're going in the direction of some variation of a war of choice. And this is also why there's such low self-confidence in the governments in being able to have just a reasonable conversation about this. If they had the deep support of the population, which they would have if it was a fully defensive war, then there would be no need for them to have this lack of confidence.

## **#Glenn**

Okay. Well, before the attack on Iran in February, I was making the point that Iran is quite powerful, but this was considered to be a pro-Iran argument. I said that they have significant support among their own population—that is, the government. This was also considered to be a statement of support. And I also made the point that this is an existential threat for Iran, which was dismissed because they said, oh, we just want to help protesters. But, you know, if you could accept what I consider to be realities, you could predict how the Iranians will behave. That is, if it's an existential threat, they will absorb a lot of pain and they will be able to fight.

And again, they are quite powerful. And, you know, once you kill a leader, it's not as if the people will rush to the streets and topple the government. All of this was very flawed. Yeah. And also, if they had recognized this was an existential threat to Iran, it would have been predictable that they would have gone up that escalation ladder. Unlike in June, they would have done it in February—that is, to shut down the Strait of Hormuz, strike all the U.S. bases in the region. All of this could have been predicted if, you know, reality wouldn't be considered treason. Yeah, exactly.

## **#Trita Parsi**

I was in several different meetings with folks within government or outside of government prior to this, in which there were discussions about what the Iranians would do and options that existed and things, pathways that could have been pursued. And I do have to say, I do think that there were elements in the intelligence community that were trying to get the right intelligence to the president. And he was dismissive of it and was choosing to listen to the Israelis. But I can tell you that, at least from what I saw, there were plenty of people in the U.S. government that were completely dismissive of the idea that the Iranians would close the Strait of Hormuz or that they would be attacking the other GCC countries.

And I had to really emphasize, all of these options, yes, it is true. They have not exercised them before. And in the past, they were very polite in their attacks and their responses because they wanted to de-escalate. But this time around, they will see it as escalatory. So you have to take into account the striking possibility that they will do this. And it was dismissed, or it was viewed with significant skepticism. So I think we should not belittle how much the drinking of Kool-Aid and groupthink—how quickly that can set in when you're not allowing not just one or two voices, but a critical mass of critical voices to always be present in conversations. Yeah.

## **#Glenn**

No, I couldn't agree more. And on this, I remember on this podcast in the weeks and months before the attack, I often had a common guest, Professor Marandi, who, you know, is from Tehran, who's got a good finger on the pulse in terms of what the government is thinking. And he was just stating as, you know, common sense: well, of course, in the past, we didn't want to escalate because that might draw the Americans in. But if the Americans are going to join, they're going to attack, and then the purpose will be regime change.

And there is no government in the rear to take over. That means we're going to be a new Syria, a new Libya. It's going to be the destruction of a key central power, which the U.S. would have seen as an obstruction. So, of course, on the first day, we're going to have to shut down the Strait of Hormuz, you know, go after all the bases. Essentially, outlining the whole logic makes a lot of sense. But still, I heard Trump give a speech—no one could have predicted this, you know, like, why would they take the bases? It's just, you know, it's quite remarkable.

## **#Trita Parsi**

And it's similar to the Iraq war, you know. Who knew that there were Sunnis and Shias in Iraq? Who knew that there would be an insurgency? I mean, it's absolutely stunning to see the level of miscalculation that can happen in extremely sophisticated governments and bureaucracies. Now, not necessarily currently in the United States, but at least under the Bush administration, a lot of the policy processes were still very, very functional. But it's just amazing how quickly they can be reduced to something far less sophisticated if you do not allow for a plethora of evidence and opinions to be included in the process.

## **#Glenn**

Yeah. Well, it's also then, whenever one goes into war, it's always also the discussion about the morality of it. That's usually how they shame people away. That is, somehow it's always the people who are cheering for war who have the moral argument. You know, there's always, oh, what about the girls in Iran? We want to liberate them. Or, you know, what about the girls going to school in Afghanistan? And it's always these moral arguments. And first of all, I think they're very deceptive. But even if all of this would be genuine, one also has to look at strategy. How do you think you're going to achieve what you set out to achieve?

Because if you look at our track record over the past 30 years now, it hasn't been great. I mean, 20 years in Afghanistan to replace the Taliban with the Taliban is... All this money and lives wasted in Iraq only to essentially make it closer to an Iranian ally. The attack on Libya, which essentially brought back slavery, and the attack on Syria, which has now made us allied with ISIS through

Jolani. I mean, this is not a great track record. It's just... Yeah, I wish there would be more substantial arguments or discussions in terms of strategy. What exactly do we want to achieve, and how can this be achieved? And we don't seem to do that.

## **#Trita Parsi**

And by the way, your comment about the immoral aspect of moralism is really well taken. As far as reason, I've always been more attracted to realism because it takes that dimension out of it. It assumes that all actors, at the end of the day, are pursuing some definition of their own self-interest, and by trying to understand how they define their self-interest, you have a better way of predicting what their next steps will be. And if you can do that, you will have a better way of dealing with them, defeating them if you need to.

But you need to understand how they see the world in order to be able to do so. And moralism only makes that all the more difficult because you are confusing yourself from how they actually see the world, because you think that there's some sort of single moral truth that guides these things, rather than the actions of decision-makers based on flaws perhaps, but nevertheless their calculation of what their self-interest is. And if you can understand that, you can predict them. Moralism gives you almost no predictive value at all.

## **#Glenn**

It's also in great power politics where states usually sell, you know, you want to sell war as peace. You want to, you know, this is not a new phenomenon. This is core political propaganda. You know, when it came to the Afghanistan war, we learned from WikiLeaks. They leaked these documents from the CIA which showed that, well, the Europeans were losing a little bit of support for the occupation of Afghanistan. So they essentially concluded that the Europeans cared a lot about women's rights. So let's frame the war as, you know, we're occupying Afghanistan for, you know, these 20 years to help little girls go to school. I mean, it is, it's quite absurd that, you know, we think this is why great powers go to war. This is why, I mean, this is not about America.

It's any country. It is a bit, it's a little bit childish. I mean, this is absurd that the US suddenly became Amnesty International with nuclear weapons. But after this point, though, you had articles coming out, I think it was in The Guardian. You had NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and Angelina Jolie co-authoring an article together — you know, a little bit of NATO, a bit of Hollywood — about why NATO is now the leading provider of women's rights. Yeah. It's extraordinary. And people, they eat it up. And then if you oppose the wars, then, well, I guess you don't care about little girls. I mean, this is where the moralism comes in. And we fool ourselves because we can't discuss the motivation for war. We can't discuss the strategic aspects of it. It's...

## **#Trita Parsi**

If I could go on a small tangent here, it is related to the attacks that I've been enduring from the neocons. And I think I did mention that part of this piece on the Substack post this morning. When we started the National Iranian American Council, this is like 25 years ago. At first, it was not even supposed to be involved in politics. We were just trying to get the Iranian American community to become a little bit more sophisticated in understanding and participating in American democracy. And this was done because the first community that was targeted after 9/11 was the Iranian American community.

The Enhanced Border Security Act was passed immediately after 9/11, and it restricted visas to Iranians. It did nothing about Saudis and Egyptians and others who actually were part of the 9/11 attacks. And it was a very clear manifestation that if you don't have any political representation, you end up getting the shorter end of the stick all the time, even if this had nothing to do with Iranians or the Iranian government even. But over time, because the conversation in Washington was increasingly going in the direction that they would, you know, should we attack Iran, should we not attack Iran, we had pressure from our own membership to start taking positions on these matters, and we eventually did.

And we realized that we were a very small organization, a relatively small community, but we thought there's one thing we may be able to achieve, and that is to make sure that, unlike in the Iraq war, in which the neocons paraded their favorite Iraqi Americans on TV, left and right, begging for the United States to bomb their ancestral home, at a minimum we can make sure that if there is a war, at least the American public will know it was not because of the Iranian American community, that our voice would be clear on this issue. We may not be able to prevent the war, but we will be able to prevent exactly the argument that you said — that this is some sort of moral favor to the people inside of Iran. And by having Iranian Americans oppose the war, we would take that argument away from the neocons. And that's part of the reason why the neocons came after us and many different things that we did that were countering their... And I have to say, for 20 or so years, we were very successful.

It was very clear that the Iranian American community, the majority of it favored diplomacy, an overwhelming majority favored the JCPOA, strongly opposed the Iranian government and its repression, but nevertheless wanted to pursue a peaceful path between the U.S. and Iran, lifting sanctions, etc. But it's not until just in the last year that the neocons managed to pull off something that I have to say, frankly, I was surprised by, which was that, in a variety of ways, over the course of time, they had worked very hard and had cultivated alliances with these monarchist Iranians to really get them to become extremely pro-Israel and then ultimately pro-war. And in some ways, at least in the early phases of this, they became the face of that war, with some of them dancing and singing in the streets, celebrating the start of the war.

That was a key thing that we had, frankly, managed to prevent for 20 years. And plenty of studies need to be made to better understand exactly how that was flipped. I have some theories, I've written some pieces about it, but there's still much more that needs to be done to fully understand,

because it is a remarkable shift in psychology — not of a majority, they were never a majority, but nevertheless a very significant minority that went to that side. A lot of it has to do, of course, with the fact that the repression in Iran became worse and worse, but a lot of it also has to do with the fact that these elements were trying to eliminate all other voices and all other pathways. Reform was wrong. Lifting sanctions was wrong. Dialogue was wrong. And essentially saying all of those things have failed.

The only thing that is left is war and foreign military intervention, which meant they had to do exactly the type of cancel culture that we just talked about earlier. They had to discredit everyone who favored diplomacy, everyone who favored lifting of sanctions, opposed war, in order to be able to create an atmosphere and a landscape in which they were seen as the only remaining option. That's how they sell the war. Everything else has failed, so war is the only option. Now, of course, the war has gone disastrously. I don't see them singing and dancing in the streets in the same way any longer, but it was ultimately, I have to say, a failure for the Iranian American community as a whole, that a minority of them could have been recruited and pushed in this direction, ending up becoming, in my view, a very repulsive base of this war by singing and dancing in the streets as their own countrymen and women were being bombed.

## **#Glenn**

Well, to some extent you see this in the Ukraine war as well. I mean, you see every poll, such as from Gallup and others, that the overwhelming majority of Ukrainians want immediate negotiations. They don't want four more years of boycotting diplomacy. Yet you will never see a single one of this majority of Ukrainians on TV. Never. You will only have the ones who will, you know, chant that weapons are the path to peace and, you know, that diplomacy is appeasement. So you will never find them on TV because there's a goal where they're selling a war, and to sell the war, they have to push this message that, well, we stand with the Ukrainians irrespective of any statistics.

It's just remarkable that, uh, yeah, this is a key, uh, key, key, key component, I think, of the propaganda. But, uh, yeah, I did want to shift towards what's happening now in Iran. That is, well, as I started off saying, the Pakistani Prime Minister now, Sharif, was making the point that a deal will be signed within the next 24 hours. How are you reading the situation? First, when I heard Trump say, you know, this peace deal is coming, I thought, yeah, well, I heard this about, you know, a hundred times before, but... this is different, though. I mean, or is it the memorandum of understanding only leading to a peace deal? Or can you unpack what is going on?

## **#Trita Parsi**

Yeah, so I think it's not the hundredth time. I think it's the thirty-ninth time.

## **#Glenn**

Oh, we're getting there. Exactly.

## **#Trita Parsi**

I do think it is different. Conversations I've had with folks on both sides made it very clear there is something on the table. It is back in the Iranian court, and the delays, as have been the delays in the last couple of weeks, are a challenge on their side to get the full buy-in of their system. And this is very important to understand. Again, it really makes Iran very different from many of the other countries in the region. Power is dispersed throughout the Iranian system, and you have now a new supreme leader who is not yet fully grown into his role, so his authority has not been fully established.

He's also suffering from several different problems, physical, given the attack that he was enduring. So he may not have had the full ability to even try to assert his authority. His father ended up taking several years to be able to grow into that position. But also, this is one of the most important decisions Iran has made in the last couple of decades. Having to do that in your first couple of weeks is clearly not going to be easy, which I think is part of the reason why it appears. And I want to be careful because you hear a lot of different things, and even if I believe I have pretty decent sources in Iran, one has to be very careful knowing that we still don't know exactly what's happening.

But what I'm hearing, though, is that part of the issue is that he wants to make sure that there is as close to a full consensus within their system as possible. That is extremely difficult to achieve because you do have certain very hardline elements that will never agree to any type of deal with the United States. I think right now there is an effort to try to at a minimum minimize those. Whether that can be done within 24 hours remains to be seen, but the signals I've gotten make it very clear that at least the majority have already essentially agreed to this. And their answer is forthcoming.

The fact that the Iranian foreign minister, Javad Zarif, and the Pakistani premier all issued more or less similar tweets within a very short time span in which they were criticizing media speculation about what's in the deal, I think, is also noteworthy because they recognize that there is an effort in some media to try to put forward exaggerated contents of this deal in order to make the final deal look very bad, to make it look as if expectations were not met. And from all three sides, they started to push back against this. And then you had the very unusual, I think unprecedented, event of having Donald Trump retweet the Iranian foreign minister. So I do think that we are closer than ever before. I think that's even the language that the Iranian foreign minister used. But we have also been closer than ever before and still not seen anything happen.

So it could still go wrong. And even if it goes right, I think we have to be very, very clear. This is a memorandum. It is a pit stop towards a final deal. A final deal is actually harder to get than the pit stop. And the pit stop has proven to be extremely difficult to get, taking much longer than it should

have. So we're still not in any way, shape, or form at a position where we can say that the war will really end or that there will really be peace. And then you, of course, have these players who have a remarkable capability of sabotaging this whole thing. They don't even have to do anything against Iran or against the U.S. They just need to restart the war in Lebanon, and that can be sufficient to actually cause the collapse of the entire deal or the diplomatic process.

## **#Glenn**

Well, yes, critics would say a compromise is incredibly difficult given how far apart the two different sides are, but also, of course, due to the existence of saboteurs on all sides. I mean, in the U.S. they have the Lindsey Grahams, and in Israel, well, I wouldn't know enough, but I assume that the majority would like to see this deal be canceled, and they have the tools to do so. But as you said, Iran also has their hawks who now see, you know, probably riding high from the successes and would like to go for a full win. But yeah, so I can see why there would be a reason to constrain one's enthusiasm or optimism. But nonetheless, what do we know about what's inside this deal?

Because I heard, again, these warnings about misinformation around what was in the deal. And even they argued that journalists should not speculate too much about that. But I heard some stories that the first step would be to release some of the seized funds, the Iranian funds which have been seized. I thought this could make a lot of sense because the Iranians do not trust the Americans, but if the U.S. has to release some of the funds, they already bought into this process. That is, it would make less sense to walk away. I thought, you know, a good way to get the ball rolling. Yet again, do we know anything about what's in this deal?

## **#Trita Parsi**

We know that that has been the Iranian position, that they want to make sure they have that buy-in from the United States. From their view, they're giving up, they're opening up the Strait of Hormuz, which is a major leverage, probably the main leverage they currently have. It is more of a leverage than the stockpile of 60% enriched uranium. And the U.S. only gives up the blockade, which in many ways has also been counterproductive to the U.S. So the Iranians believe that that exchange is imbalanced in favor of the United States and that, as a result, there should also be some release of their frozen funds at the outset of this memorandum in order to balance things out, but also really show the U.S.'s commitment to this.

They're asking for \$12 billion up front and then \$12 billion at the end of the MOU. Six out of the \$12 billion, incidentally, was already supposed to have been released by the Biden administration, which made a deal with the Iranians in September, or actually in August 2022. That was part of the prisoner exchange. It was in September 2022, part of the prisoner exchange. But that prisoner exchange, or that release of the funds, never actually ended up happening because the Mahsa Amini protests started in Iran, and the Biden administration decided to renege on that deal, having already secured the release of several Americans from Iranian prisons.

So the Iranians believe that those first \$6 billion have already been promised, so they're not going to renegotiate over that. Now, there have been efforts by others to say, look, let me also explain why the U.S. has been very critical of this. The U.S. side doesn't want to do that because they don't want to be compared to the Obama administration. They don't want to sound as if they've given up something at the very beginning of the process. And given the fact that the Republicans heavily criticized Obama for having released some of the funds—but those were actually not these funds, that was a lawsuit that was settled between the United States and Iran—but because they don't want to see any comparison to it, they've rejected this.

So others have come forward with ideas that essentially would mean that those funds will not be released, but some other country will give equivalent funds to Iran at the outset of the process. And then later on, they can settle, they do the accounting afterwards. But at a minimum, that allows the Iranians to say, we got the funds, and it allows the United States to say, we never released any funds. This was not those funds. But at first, the Iranians were very negative to this precisely because of what you said. They wanted to see the commitment from the United States, and if it is not the U.S. releasing the funds, it is not sufficient of a commitment.

It appears to me, however, just listening to what some of the Iranians have been saying for the last 48 hours, that the Iranians have essentially accepted that there will not be a formal release of the money, but it will be some sort of other accounting issue that will ensure that they get the money, but it won't be the U.S. itself that is actually unfreezing it. Because at the end of the day, money is money, and it's better to do it this way. It seems like this is the position they've moved to, and that's part of the reason why this issue is about to get resolved, because that was one of the main sticking points.

There are other issues on the Strait of Hormuz, and I'm not entirely clear how they're exactly going to resolve that. But there you have the same issue, in which the language may be made sufficiently vague so that both sides can interpret it in their own ways and sell it to their own publics in their own ways, because the vagueness allows for several different interpretations. That is not unusual in deals like this, but it is highly problematic if there's too much of this vagueness in this MOU. It will turn into a Swiss cheese of an MOU, just as much as the ceasefire ended up becoming very much a Swiss cheese.

## **#Glenn**

Yeah. But I think that ambiguity is good because otherwise there can't be any deal. They really need to keep Trump away from the media because every time he talks, he says that we're not going to give a dollar to the Iranians, that they're going to give up everything with peace through strength. So he kind of committed himself rhetorically to this strongman position. So if he has to make any compromises, especially one, as you said, comparable to anything Obama has done, then he's going to make it close to impossible.

I just had a question about the opening of the Strait of Hormuz. And I heard from the Iranian side that, well, we never closed the Strait of Hormuz. We're just managing the traffic, so they took some tolls. And they actually said that also the Strait of Hormuz is not international waters, it's Iranian and Omani. So, in other words, this is our water, and we'll keep it open, but not in the same framework as it was before. So when the Iranians say that they will accept opening up the Strait of Hormuz, what would that actually entail? Please make some distinctions here.

## **#Trita Parsi**

Yeah, this is about the ambiguity of the word "open," which, you know, the Iranians can say that it's open because they haven't closed it—they're just charging fees or tolls. I think they moved away from the language of tolls because it's very difficult to justify a toll in international law. Of course, there's a dispute as to whether this is international water or whether it is Iran and Oman's waters. The Omanis have never signed on to the treaty that manages these types of issues. Nor have the U.S., incidentally—UNCLOS. Exactly, UNCLOS. So it's very interesting to see the U.S. refer to that, mindful of the fact that the U.S. itself has not ratified it. The U.S. does so as well when it comes to the South China Sea. The Chinese have signed on to it; the Americans have not. But nevertheless, Trump can say that it's open.

## **#Glenn**

The Iranians can say that it's open.

## **#Trita Parsi**

That in and of itself does not clarify if there's an administrative theater that is being charged. It doesn't say anything about who is controlling it. So sometimes that ambiguity, as you said, is absolutely needed in order to make sure that both sides can say that, well, it's open. And Trump can go out and say, no, I've opened the Strait of Hormuz, and not go into the details of who's controlling it and whether there are fees, etc. I don't find it likely at all that the Iranians will give up the Strait of Hormuz altogether. I think they have been very clear that they will try to make sure that whatever comes afterwards is different from what the pre-existing status of the Strait was.

But that does not necessarily mean that there's only one type of alternative scenario in the Strait. There can still be several different ones. There could be one in which the Strait and the administrative fee, the environmental fee, would be managed and charged by all of the GCC countries or a larger number of them rather than just Iran and Oman. There are different ways of doing this. I don't know if that is what has been resolved in the MOU or if that is going to be left for the agreement afterwards, and that at this moment they just settle on the fact that it's open in terms of making sure that traffic can flow.

## **#Glenn**

I know the Iranians seemingly wanted a more collective approach to this, which is why I think they were working on something with Oman to do together. But Trump essentially countered this by threatening to blow up Oman. Again, this is not the most diplomatic language, but blow up Oman if they would do this. So yeah, it is interesting to see how this will develop. But there were some different things I wanted to ask you about, which is the change in the region now. Because I noticed something that you had commented on as well, which is the extraordinary development that Iran attacked Israel — that is, without Israel first striking Iran. Now, this is essentially in response to Israel bombing Lebanon, right? So what does this mean for regional security? It's essentially Lebanon now under an extended deterrence of Iran. I mean, how does this change the entire region? Yeah.

## **#Trita Parsi**

So this is what I think the Iranians are trying to establish — an extended deterrence. This is what the Israelis call the new equation. And it is not clear whether it has been successful or not. It's very clear that it's been attempted, which is, again, a very unusual situation in which Iran would attack Israel. In a severe way, I'm not trying to belittle the Houthis' attacks against Israel, but those attacks are not really comparable. I mean, they're shooting one or two missiles. The Iranians can shoot two to three hundred missiles at Israel, combined with drones and other things, and really inflict significant damage on the Israelis. This is the first time in a very long time that you have a regional power that is willing to back up its warnings to Israel against a third country with hard power. We've not seen that for a very long time.

And that's part of the reason why the Israelis have been able to continue to expand settlements, annex territory, just have this unlimited, completely unrestrained maneuverability in the region. This would be a constraint on their maneuverability. This is something that the Israelis find completely unacceptable. And as a result, we've seen that they're going to do everything they can to prevent this new equation from being established. It's important to understand that one exchange of fire does not establish that equation. It is a potential step in that direction. It's not clear whether it's been established or not. What has happened is that the Israelis struck Beirut despite U.S. warnings and Iranian warnings. The Iranians struck Israel relatively hard. The Israelis struck Iran. The Iranians struck Israel again. The Israelis did not respond, probably because of pressure from the United States.

But instead, they struck southern Lebanon, not Beirut. And since we've not seen strikes by the Israelis against Beirut, particularly not against the neighborhood in southern Beirut, even this is not sufficient to be able to say that there has been a new equation. And even if a new equation is established, it does not mean that the Israelis will never do it. It means only that if they think of doing it, they now have to take into account that there is a certain cost associated with it — a cost

that did not exist before. And that may cause them to think twice. It may cause them not to do it nine times out of ten. And sometimes they still do it. But again, we don't know yet if that has been established or not.

If there is an MOU, however, I find it completely unlikely that the Iranians will—I mean, I don't see any scenario in which the Iranians actually would sign the MOU unless a region-wide ceasefire is part of that MOU. And that is partly because if the Israelis are allowed to just restart the war, what's the point of the MOU? Because if they can restart the war in Lebanon, that has a spillover capacity to spill over into Iran. We've already seen that happen twice. But also, I think it's starting to become clear the Iranians are not going back to having some form of forward defense, meaning that Lebanon is part of their first line of defense against Israel. It's a deterrent, but it's also a retaliatory capability. It did function as that in 2006 because the Israelis did not manage to defeat Hezbollah.

They never managed to expand the war into Iran, which was the plan at the time. That forward defense has taken a huge hit because of the fall of the Assad regime and the setbacks that Hezbollah has suffered. But now you have statements from Iranian leaders saying very clearly they're not going to go back to having their deterrence be on their own soil. Their deterrence is going to be outside of Iran. And that is, I think, a very clear reference that they're going to rebuild their forward defense. And the first and most important element of that is Lebanon. So I find it extremely unlikely that they will agree to anything that allows the Israelis to continue to occupy Lebanese territory, at least in the medium term, or that they will go back into attacking Lebanon in the short term.

## **#Glenn**

My last question, though, is what do you think the wider objectives of Iran are in this war? And as I say, I know they didn't start it, but that being said, they're not happy with the war ending on the terms of going back to the old status quo. So I guess this is relevant in terms of what we can expect to see from Iranian demands in this memorandum of understanding. That is, what do you think is the wider goal of the Iranians? I mean, one can, of course, dream up a big, great objective—that is, the U.S. packs up all its military bases, goes home, all sanctions are lifted. I mean, you can kind of see the direction, but it's, of course, what you want and what you can achieve. So what do you think are the priorities for Iran in this war?

## **#Trita Parsi**

I think actually a lot of those different things. I think they do see it as quite likely that an outcome of this war, perhaps not in the immediate term, is that the U.S. military presence in the region is going to dramatically shrink. One outcome of this war is that a lot of these different GCC countries are not going to rely on American bases for their security. They're going to rely on American weaponry and all kinds of other agreements, but not just with the U.S., but with plenty of other states. So security from the GCC perspective is going to start to be diversified rather than just being in the American

basket. All of these different things I think the Iranians will see as positive. I think you're also going to see, and I think they are going to be aiming for, a new type of relationship.

Not necessarily between the GCC and Iran, because I'm not really sure that the GCC really is a functional entity in any meaningful sense of the word at this point, but rather new relationships between Iran and key states on the southern part of the Persian Gulf. Some of them are going to have a much more intertwined approach with Iran. Not to say that they're not angry with Iran, not to say that they don't see Iran as a threat and a challenge, but they're going to recognize what the Europeans used to recognize and have given up on, which is that economic interdependence is a critical element of your security, and that in the past, the balance between containment of Iran and integration with Iran was too far in the direction of containment, and it led to this disastrous war that revealed the utter vulnerability of these GCC states.

And they're going to shift away from that. So I think the Iranians are going to see this as a pathway towards their political, economic, and security rehabilitation in the region, within a United States that is no longer going to be in a position to constantly push for Iran's containment, and may not even want to do so because of its own deal with Iran. And this is going to be a massive opening for Iran. It doesn't mean that everything will be fine. It doesn't mean that everything will be friction-free or that there won't be other types of problems that can emerge and certainly will emerge. But it will more or less, I think, from their standpoint, be the end of a 47-year era in which the U.S.'s organizing principle for the Middle East was the containment and isolation of Iran. And this is the nightmare of the Israelis, by the way.

## **#Glenn**

Well, in all insecurity, in the security competition, one always has to manage the security dilemma by balancing deterrence with reassurance. That is to make sure one doesn't provoke while still deterring. I think during the Cold War, because of the concentration of power, this balance was disrupted. We went all the way. There was no need for reassurance. We went all the way into deterrence and containment without reassurance. I think now there's a readjustment required. And so, yeah, I think not just with Iran, but in the wider world, there are going to have to be some changes, adjustments to the new distribution of power. Anyways, thank you very much for your time. Thanks so much. I really appreciate it. Appreciate the insights, and I hope you don't get deported. But if you do, we will be very happy to have you back in Scandinavia. So thank you.

## **#Trita Parsi**

I appreciate it.

## **#Trita Parsi**

Thank you so much.

