

Iran-US Talks Begin: Marandi & Chas Freeman on the New Middle East

As Iran and the United States begin a new round of negotiations in Switzerland, major questions remain about the future of West Asia, Israel's regional position, and America's long-term strategy. Support Independent media to remain bold: <https://patreon.com/IndiaGlobalLeft> Link for donation: <https://paypal.me/sankymudiar> In this special discussion, Professor Mohammad Marandi and former US diplomat Ambassador Chas Freeman examine:

- What is really at stake in the Iran-US talks?
- Has the Iran war changed the regional balance of power?
- Why public opinion toward Israel is shifting inside the United States after Gaza and the Al-Aqsa Flood.
- The debate within Iran's leadership over negotiations with Washington.
- The rise of a new generation of Iranian leaders shaped by decades of sanctions, pressure and conflict.
- The role of the military-industrial complex in sustaining American intervention abroad.
- Whether West Asian countries can build new forms of cooperation independent of Western dominance.
- The future of US military bases and trillion-dollar military spending. This conversation explores the geopolitical consequences of the Iran war, the future of the US-Israel relationship, regional diplomacy, and the emerging multipolar world order.

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#Iran #USIranTalks #MohammadMarandi #ChasFreeman #MiddleEast #Israel #Gaza #Geopolitics #WestAsia #MultipolarWorld #IranUSRelations #ForeignPolicy

#Mudiar

Hello and welcome to another episode of India and Global Left. If you are new to the show, please hit that subscribe button. Also consider becoming a YouTube member, a patron, or donating a small amount using the link in the description box. Without further ado, let me welcome our guests tonight, Professor Mohammad Marandi and Ambassador Chas Freeman. Professor Marandi is from Iran, and he teaches at the University of Tehran. Ambassador Chas Freeman is from America, and he is a retired diplomat, author, and political commentator. Welcome to both of you, Professor Marandi and Ambassador Freeman.

#Chas

Glad to be here.

#Mudiar

Ambassador Freeman, if we could start with you, given we had Professor Marandi very, very recently. Talks have begun in Bürgenstock in Switzerland, and it is a high-level diplomatic talk. What are the things at stake in your view?

#Chas

Well, the main issue that drove these talks, or actually I would say it's a meeting, because I don't think it is yet talks. It's not clear that there will be talks if the attacks in Lebanon continue at the level that they have been. And it's not clear what President Trump will do, if anything, to enforce the so-called ceasefire or the truce with the Israelis, who, after all, began this war, who are invading Lebanon and characteristically claiming the right of self-defense as they proceed to murder people in Lebanon and advance into it. Obviously, Israel is determined to continue the war, which I think is a futile endeavor because there is nothing going to come out of this war any better than what has already come out of it.

But I think what drove this meeting in Switzerland was the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. And I mean, now it is again closed. And the realization by the Trump administration and the entire world that if it remained closed, the global economy would be ruined, driven into recession, perhaps depression. And in the United States, the political fallout of summer driving impeded by rising gasoline prices would be fatal to the Republicans in the midterm elections. And so Donald Trump basically panicked on the international front, but more importantly, on the domestic front. And here I would just say that this is a very interesting challenge for him. He is, of course—he suffers from narcissism, a narcissistic personality disorder.

He's up against Netanyahu, who also has the same disorder. And indeed, Israel as a society evidences narcissistic personality disorder—that is, the absence of empathy, the unrealism, the desire for adulation, the unwillingness to accept criticism, the inability to engage in introspection. So it's very interesting. You see the Israeli reaction to this memorandum of misunderstanding, as I call it. You see the Israeli reaction is charges of betrayal against everyone—against Messrs. Litkov and Kushner, whom they believed were representing them in the talks, as well as the United States, against Donald Trump, whom they thought was a prisoner of theirs psychologically and politically.

We see Miriam Adelson, who gave \$250 million to Trump to get him elected, charging that he's no longer bought and is not doing what he should do and therefore is guilty of treachery. And no evidence whatsoever of introspection. Why are we in this condition? What condition are we in? Is there an alternative to the continual use of force rather than diplomacy with the Palestinians and our neighbors? Israel, in 78 years of its existence, has made no offer of peaceful coexistence to anyone. Its entire policy is military. And we see that in Lebanon. And this broad peace—not peace, I guess, de-escalation of conflict in West Asia—cannot succeed unless Israel discovers the merits of diplomacy and realizes that the only path to security for itself is a relapse into human decency and respect for those it is currently oppressing.

#Mudiar

Professor Marandi, your opening statement, and also, where do things stand at this moment in your assessment?

#Seyed

I agree completely with everything that Chas has said. I would say that in Iran there is a divide of sorts over the MOU, and some believe that because the United States has always failed to implement its agreements with Iran—whether it was the nuclear deal, or negotiations they had over Afghanistan once upon a time, or in Iraq at another time, and elsewhere—the belief among many is that this MOU is simply going to be used by the Americans to cheat Iran and to get concessions from the country. And on the other side, the Americans are going to refrain from carrying out their obligations and from giving concessions to Iran. On the other hand, there are those who believe that Iran's position now, after the war and after the siege warfare, is strong enough that through negotiations and through this MOU, it can force the United States to abide by these commitments.

This is a deep divide right now. There are very emotional exchanges being made in the public sphere, in the media, on national television, and on the streets. But in general, I think it's fair to say that both sides of this divide believe that Iran did win the war—convincingly. They won siege warfare and are in a position to force the United States to implement its obligations in the deal. But some believe that this deal itself and the framework in which Iran is pursuing these concessions are not suitable. In general, I think that the United States, where we are now—and I think this has been the Iranian strategy for the last couple of months—is to use the Strait of Hormuz as a weapon, thanks to the U.S. siege on the Strait, to force the United States to ultimately prioritize its own national interests over that of the Israeli regime.

In other words, in our part of the world, in the past, Americans have always prioritized the Israeli regime to its detriment, in the belief of people in this region—the Iraq War, Afghanistan, Libya, the dirty war in Syria, the support for the genocidal war in Yemen, supporting Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, and so on. All of these, and of course Palestine and Lebanon, have been to the detriment of U.S. interests, but the United States has prioritized the Israeli regime over its own interests. What the Iranians have been attempting to do during siege warfare is to push the United States to make a decision to prioritize its own interests in order to preserve the U.S. economy over Israeli interests. And the Iranians are waiting to see if that works.

#Chas

It may happen. I think, looking at this broadly, Mudiar Jyotishman, I would say that Iran did not win the war, but all it had to do was not lose. And the United States has inadvertently made Iran the dominant power in West Asia, and it is destined—the United States is destined—to withdraw from the region. For many years, people in the United States have argued that we should withdraw from

the region, but for the reasons that Mohamed Marandi just outlined, we have not done so. But there is now a real chance. One can see the debate in Iran vaguely from 8,000 miles away. A similar parallel debate is going on here, with American nationalists arguing that the Israel-first policies of the past need to be replaced by America-first. J.D. Vance, the vice president, is a member of this faction.

He is now present in Switzerland with Donald Trump's crony and son-in-law, at the table with the speaker of the Iranian Majlis, Ghalibaf, and with the foreign minister, Araghchi. And we'll see what comes out of this. But my guess is that unless and until Donald Trump bites the bullet on the confrontation with Israel, nothing is going to happen. So whether there's an agreement or not may matter less than the consequences of this war. No American president ever after Donald Trump will follow Israel into an attack on Iran. So Iran has achieved deterrence of the United States, if not Israel. No American president in the future will be as willing to support Israel in its genocidal activity or its aggression against its neighbors as Donald Trump has.

And Israel has once again demonstrated, as I said at the outset, that it has a narcissistic personality disorder. It's unable to care about anyone other than its own interests. And the evidence that Americans are hearing of the Israeli sense of entitlement—you know, "you've let us down, you owe us something"—we owe the Israelis nothing. And so I think this is, from the point of view of what will happen in the future, the isolation of Israel, not just on a global level because of its achievement of pariah status—a good Tamil word, as I pointed out before—but its isolation in American politics. It is now the skunk at the garden party, and nobody really wants to be identified with it. We have people running for office on the premise that they will not take money from AIPAC, one of the premier Israel lobbies in the United States.

So Israel's done huge damage to its existence. And it is correct to see this as an existential moment. Where it is incorrect is to imagine that the existential challenge comes from Iran. The existential challenge comes from its own behavior. So I see articles in the American press and I groan when they say the problem is Lebanon. No, the problem is not Lebanon. The problem is Israel and what Israel is doing in Lebanon and to Palestinians in the West Bank, and has done to people in Gaza. The latest estimates of the number of dead in Gaza are in the many hundreds of thousands. The fact that Hamas and Israel share an interest in downplaying the level of casualties, deaths, is very obvious. The Israelis don't want to validate the charge of genocide.

Hamas does not want to be charged with having brought disaster to the people of Gaza. But the latest figure that I've seen is 680,000. And this is borne out by the demographics of Gaza. To the extent that aid is able to get into Gaza at all, it is very clear that there are no longer 2.3 million people there. There are probably something like 1.7 million, 1.6 million. And this is proof of the extent to which Israeli inhumanity has done not just Gaza in, but Israel itself. So what will happen is Israel will be on its own confronting Iran. And it will not confront Iran alone, because the Gulf Arabs, who are nothing if not pragmatic, will make their peace with Iran.

That will not be easy for them because they have suffered. But the more thoughtful of them realized that this was a war that Israel ignited. They counseled the United States against joining it very forcefully. Most of them tried to stay out of it. The Saudis, with typical cynicism, tried to have it both ways for a while. But basically, they have suffered grave damage to their livelihood, and they're not going to be prepared to risk that again. And the United States has demonstrated, as Professor Marandi said, that it prioritizes the defense of Israel over the defense of its clients in the Gulf. So those clients are going to defect.

And I think Iran, therefore, has also achieved the zone of—not a zone of peace, but the neutralization of the Persian Gulf that it has long sought. And in the midst of all this, we have two very important strategic events unfolding. One is, of course, that Iran, China, and Russia have all put forward proposals for a new security architecture in the Persian Gulf. The prospects for that now have been greatly enhanced. Second, there is a coalition between Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, and Pakistan, which is emerging for two reasons. One, to provide, in the case of Saudi Arabia, an extended nuclear deterrence for it from Pakistan and arguably from Iran also, if Iran does go nuclear.

And second, to build a regionally competent industrial base to wean the region off dependence on imported weaponry. This coalition is not necessarily going to be aimed at Iran, although that may be its initial focus, as well as a focus on Israel. And I don't think we should rule out the possibility that Iran, which has shown a deft touch in diplomacy, will be able to make common cause with this coalition. Finally, I'll just say that when and if there are actual negotiations, as opposed to a meeting to discuss negotiations, which is what is happening in Switzerland, then I think Iran has a trump card, pun intended, namely the possibility of going nuclear after 60 days.

And in other words, the U.S. in that context is again the demandeur. And Iran has the ability to manipulate that situation as it sees fit. So I have a long list of results of the Iran war to lay out, but none of them are positive in terms of the objectives that the United States confusingly set for itself at the outset. You shouldn't enter a war without clear objectives that are feasible. You shouldn't conduct a war while moving the goalposts. You shouldn't have failed to develop a war termination strategy. And you should never commit atrocities like murdering schoolgirls because that embitters the post-war situation to your disadvantage. The United States has failed to meet any of these classic tests of wisdom in statecraft.

#Mudiar

Yeah, I'd be curious to hear more from Professor Marandi on Ambassador Freeman's comment on the evolving security frameworks. The two he outlined are the coming together of Russia, China, and Iran, and then also the Quad — not the India-Japan-Australia Quad, but Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. But I actually want to stay for a moment on Ambassador Freeman's comment on the differences between the U.S. and Israel, because among many of the very important significances of Iran's strategic victory over the U.S., one is the differences that we are now seeing emerging between the U.S. and Israel, because there have been many books and articles written

about the unanimous consensus within the United States over Israel being Israel's greatest success for these many years.

And I wanted to bring Operation Al-Aqsa Flood into it because that was really the historic moment that changed public opinion and perception within the United States regarding Israel. And now, of course, Iran's pushback and the strategic victory are changing opinion even further. So, Professor Marandi, if you can put in perspective this kind of long-term evolution of the significance of the change in American opinion towards Israel and its significance for the region.

#Seyed

Well, I think the change was gradually taking place in the United States even before October 7th. And although it was not dramatic or there was no major shift, there was a gradual shift in perception about the Israeli regime, and it wasn't very positive. They still had overwhelming support among the public compared to the Palestinians, but it wasn't like it was a decade or two before. After October 7th, I think initially, because of the massive propaganda campaign and the myth-making about rapes and the beheading of children, the media was able to contain any anger or discontent towards the Israeli regime.

But after a few weeks, when genocidal intent became clear through their statements and the onslaught on Gaza was so overwhelming and clear to the world, then the perceptions began to shift. We saw university protests and then the clampdown on those protests. And I think from there on, things began to go downhill until finally a turning point, which really made things bad for the regime, was when pictures, images of starving children appeared in the media. And that, I think, was a turning point. And as you recall, massive protests began to be staged across the world, uh, in the hundreds of thousands, in countries where mass protests had never existed at that scale on any issue.

So, and that's what encouraged Trump, uh, I believe, to push for the ceasefire. It was actually a very successful ceasefire for Trump because, uh, not because there has been a real ceasefire. I mean, since the ceasefire, um, over a thousand Palestinians have been murdered in Gaza and, uh, more than one child has been killed every day on average since the ceasefire. So it's not really a ceasefire. The Israelis are continuing to snipe kids and to bomb tents and to burn families alive. That's ongoing. But it did succeed in breaking that momentum across the world where mass protests were becoming a big issue. So what Trump succeeded in doing is stopping that momentum.

And of course, it was done with the help of, unfortunately, regional regimes and regional governments—Erdogan, Aliyev, Abdullah, Jordan, Sisi, and leaders of the Arab regimes in the Persian Gulf, Pakistan, and leaders from across the world. They gathered in Egypt to endorse this ceasefire and to whitewash Trump's crimes. And that is actually having a big impact on Iranian negotiations,

which I'll get to in a moment. But in any case, the mood in the United States has changed dramatically, and now we're seeing major public figures turning against Israel and becoming even more critical than before.

I think a few months ago people were talking about Tucker Carlson's evolution. Today he's even more, far more critical than he was a couple of months ago. So the hostility, the anger towards the genocide, towards the genocidal wars of the Israeli regime, is growing, and the criticism of Trump, even on the right, and the criticism of MAGA on the right, is growing too. So I agree with what Ambassador Freeman says about the future. I don't think that there will be a future president, whether Democratic or Republican, because there are no alternatives for the moment. I don't think any future president will again be willing to go to war for the sake of the Israeli regime.

And I don't believe that in the future the hold that AIPAC has on Congress and the Senate and others today, and parallel organizations like AIPAC, I don't believe that they'll be able to have that sort of power in the future. And once that power declines, I think there will be a point where it collapses. Because when the all-powerful Israeli lobbyists seem to be not so powerful, then I think that's when the facade collapses, and it sort of becomes like the Wizard of Oz, where it appears it's no longer some force that one cannot confront, but rather it is a force that one day people would be surprised was such a powerful force in the United States in the past. In Iran, I think that is becoming apparent. It's becoming clear.

And that is what began to emerge, I think, late in the war. When the United States accepted Iran's 10-point plan, I was surprised that they would accept it so quickly. Even though at the negotiating table Trump said that I'm not going, his representative said that we're not going to carry out our negotiations based on this 10-point plan. But the very fact that it was accepted as a framework for negotiations after 39 days of warfare shows that the United States was indeed changing, that something had happened during those 39 days that changed U.S. calculations immensely and put it on a collision course with the interests of the Zionist lobby and the Israeli regime. And I think this agreement is also an indication of that, even though there are criticisms in Iran of the agreement.

And those criticisms are valid in some ways, although I think in general that there is unity in Iran, that right now we have to stick with this and make sure it is implemented. But when there was a deadlock over this MOU and Netanyahu foolishly bombed Beirut in order to wreck any hope for a deal or an agreement, and then the Iranians subsequently said they're going to attack the regime, immediately Trump and his people went to the Iranians and gave them the concessions that they wanted to get this deal, including concessions over the occupation of Lebanon and the war in Lebanon. And I think that, too, was a second sign in Iran that things are changing in the United States. Now, it doesn't mean that the Zionist lobby does not have the upper hand still and that the Zionist lobby is not a very, very dangerous force to reckon with.

It is believed that something has happened in the United States. The Israeli lobby, the Zionist lobby, does not have the ability to exert control like it did before. And I think it goes back to what I was

saying earlier, that the fragility of the U.S. economy, the critical situation that the U.S. government confronts today at home and abroad, and with regard to its economy and its global status, has made it, at least to some degree, prioritize its own interests over that of the Israeli regime. Now, will it take further steps in this direction? It's hard to say. But I think that right now, the talks that are currently, as we speak, taking place—their results will give us a clearer picture of that.

#Chas

I agree with that. If I may, Jody, if I may. A few comments. First, I think Donald Trump, as Professor Marandi has suggested, realizes that he has to get out of this mess. And that is why he has been willing to offer the pro forma acceptance of a ceasefire, which, of course, when the actual discussions began in Islamabad, the United States backed away from. Rather typically, it did not hold to the undertakings it appeared to have given. But I think really the issue in U.S.-Israeli relations is twofold. First, Israel has put on a demonstration of a level of sadism and hubris that is absolutely unimaginable. I mean, no one can imagine any parallel to what Israel has done.

Spokespersons like Itamar Ben-Gvir, when they open their mouths, they sound worse than the Nazis. And this does not go over well. But the issue here is that we're all in the United States now. We have a dictatorship, essentially. There is no policy process. The permanent bureaucracy has been emasculated, and everything depends on Donald Trump and a few people close to him, and he is very manipulative. He's also extraordinarily gauche. I mean, he just made an antagonist of Giorgia Meloni, who's a very tough woman, to be sure, but to claim that she was a sort of fan who demanded a photo with him, and he gave it to her out of pity for her love for him and so on, has been met by her with an appropriate response.

And I think this comes to a point. We have critics in Iran of the procedure we're trying to adopt. You know, it's too inchoate to be called anything really—an agreement or anything like that. But both sides are trying to, you know, end this. And Israel is the obstacle to that. But the critics on both sides don't have any answer to what they might do differently. I mean, they're basically arguing for more of the same. And more of the same is going to produce more of the same. So how do we get out of this? We have to come up with some kind of mutual disengagement. And that is, I think, how to describe this.

The issue that Iran posed at the outset, and I remember Professor Marandi hammering away at this in many interviews, was that any war that would be regional in nature could not be considered bilateral. And that was correct. And Iran has achieved that. Now Lebanon is recognized—that is to say, the Israeli actions in Lebanon are recognized—as the key obstacle to a broader return to a level of tranquility that is acceptable in the region, and the key to unlocking the Strait of Hormuz to the benefit of the global economy. And it's very clear that Israel expects loyalty.

#Seyed

I think maybe you should go back to corruption. This election is about corruption. That was about two, three minutes ago.

#Chas

Yeah, that's exactly what I want to talk about. So the issue, I believe, is, first of all, Israelis' expectations of American loyalty to Israel without any reciprocity—no loyalty by Israel to the interests of the United States, no concern whatsoever for those interests or for the interests politically of Donald Trump. And this, of course, reflects the narcissistic personality disorder of Benjamin Netanyahu, but it is also a result of the outrageous charges against Trump of betraying Zionism by reaching an accommodation with Iran.

Of course, Israel never reaches an accommodation with anyone, and these ceasefires have been what I call ceasefires with Israeli characteristics. That is to say, Israel does not stop firing, but the other side is expected to do so. And I think the issue in the midterm elections is going to center on corruption—the corruption of American politics by special interests, notably the Zionist lobby in the United States; the corruption of the presidency by major donations from plutocratic Zionist donors who basically feel they've bought the president's allegiance, as Miriam Adelson showed—an Israeli citizen, by the way—who showed that she could move the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and do various other things in his first term: the recognition of Israeli sovereignty in the Golan Heights, and so forth. The issue is corruption—the corruption of American politics, the corruption of the presidency, the corruption of the bureaucracy, the inability and incompetence of the American government generally under this regime, because so many things are going on. And not just the war in Iran, but other things. And I think, therefore, all this feeds into American nationalism of the sort that Professor Marandi referred to when he talked about the evolution of Tucker Carlson's views, Marjorie Taylor Greene, Candace Owens, others. All this comes together in a major challenge to the United States system, which Americans no longer really believe in.

We've seen suspensions of the Bill of Rights, Palestinian protests of Palestinian injustice. We've seen ICE, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency, run rampant through immigrant communities and kill Americans in the process. We've seen a whole range of things. All of these things will come together. And in a sense, what we will see in the midterm elections is a repeat of the very anger that elected Donald Trump. That is the sense by Americans that the political elite is beholden to others and does not listen to them, that the political elite has been corrupted and that we have to throw the rascals out. So I think the Iran war has many, many consequences that are beyond the region in which it took place.

#Mudiar

Yeah, but before I come to the regional dimension—that's the sort of last thing I have in mind, unless you guys bring up something else—but I wanted to quickly ask Professor Marandi a little bit about the differences in Iran that you began with, given we saw a little bit of that in one of the

statements from the office of the Iranian Supreme Leader that said that there were personal, principal, and other disagreements on the talks. And we've seen part of it being played out on social media, but Vali Nasr, whose book **The Grand Strategy** Professor Marandi and I have discussed off camera...

He has recently said on Democracy Now that the assassination of 130-plus Iranian leaders has meant that the new leadership that has occupied those positions has a very different view of their relationship or approach to the United States. They were born after the revolution, and they have seen betrayal after betrayal from the United States when it comes to Iran, and now they don't want to negotiate. Is that the correct way of looking at these differences, or do you think these differences have always been there in Iran when it comes to its relationship or its approach to the United States?

#Seyed

I don't know how many of Iran's senior officials have been murdered, but I think almost all of the members of the Supreme National Security Council were already senior figures. They're not, for the most part, from a younger generation, and many of them were in the council before the war began—and elsewhere as well. For example, in the cabinet, I think only one minister was killed. Or in the armed forces, we did see high-ranking officers and generals murdered and martyred, but not all of them by any means. So I don't think that there's been any radical change in the leadership. The leader, of course, is younger.

But he, as someone who was in his father's office, Ayatollah Sayyid Mujtaba Khamenei, was very closely affiliated with his father, and his worldview was very deeply impacted by his father. I think there's been a general increase in skepticism towards the West, but that, I think, goes far beyond the corridors of power. That's something that I can even feel among my more liberal colleagues on campus and my more liberal students who I've had in class, who I interact with. The skepticism towards the United States has increased, and support for the Islamic Republic, I think, has always been high, but I think it's become more entrenched among the population.

But the debate is not over whether we should have negotiations or not. Some do say that we should not have negotiations, and they are a substantial part of society. But I think among political elites, the question is not whether, or at least for the most part, not whether to have negotiations, but what sort of deal should we have? Because ultimately, many believe that the United States will not carry out their obligations, which is true. I mean, the Americans... This is, I think, day three or so of the deal, and Iranian assets haven't been transferred.

The sanctions have not been lifted for Iranian energy exports. And, of course, the Israeli regime has been continuing to carry out genocide until a few hours ago, when the Iranians shut the Strait of Hormuz again. And then afterwards, after they shut down the Strait, the Israelis halted the killing, and we'll have to see if there's any change in the status of the Strait of Hormuz in the hours to come

and what happens next. But the point is that there is skepticism about whether the United States will carry out their side of the bargain.

And also the leader had, I think, some differing views about the first phase of the MOU and the second phase, and how he wanted greater separation between the two. But since the overwhelming majority of the Supreme National Security Council voted in favor of this current text or this way forward, he said that he will agree to it. So there isn't a lot of debate going on anymore, which... which, by the way, and I wasn't thinking about this, but Larry Johnson pointed this out, that this shows how dynamic the Iranian political system is. I mean, for me, it was just ordinary, you know, something quite ordinary. But he's right.

When you look at it from a Western lens, it runs very much against the narrative of Iran that is predominant in the West — that we have the leader listening to the different viewpoints, the majority thinks differently from him on a certain issue, and he agrees on this very key issue to go with their, not consensus, but their majority vote. But in any case, I think that this division inside Iran is going to make the Iranian team at the negotiating table take a tougher stance because they know that they're going to be scrutinized more at home now than before, because the voices that are critical of the current state of affairs are quite loud.

They've been quite loud for the last couple of days. I think Dr. Ghalibov will probably be more demanding today at the negotiating table. The position they take will be tougher. And I think the fact that they shut down the Strait of Hormuz yesterday may have had something to do with this, although I'm doubtful. I think that with what the Israeli regime was doing in Lebanon, it was inevitable that the Iranians would shut the Strait of Hormuz. But I think that if the United States behaves wisely, and it does prioritize its interests over the Israeli regime in today's negotiations, and it forces the Israelis to shift, change their policy, the Strait of Hormuz will probably be reopened soon.

#Chas

I think the irony here is that a war which began in part directed at regime change in Iran is going to produce regime change in Israel, and very likely in the United States. So this is a boomerang, a rather unexpected effect. I think Mr. Adib, indeed, is under a lot of pressure to be tough, and so is J. D. Vance. Let's not forget that Marco Rubio deftly enabled J.D. Vance to take the fall from the warmongers on this effort to produce an end to the war. And so some of the criticism that used to happen in Iran, I assume, is still there but muted. I mean, for example, people in Iran for a while were saying, well, why doesn't Hezbollah come to our aid?

You know, we did all sorts of things for them, and why are they hunkered down doing nothing? I mean, actually, Hezbollah is a very prudent organization. It doesn't do things without carefully considering the consequences. But it basically behaved much the same way that America's allies did with regard to some of the issues, you know, wringing its hands while sitting on them, issuing

rhetorical... Hezbollah and Saraya. No, Hezbollah. I mean, and Saraya actually stepped up, even though they're not as beholden to Iran by any means as Hezbollah is. But I think, you know, Hezbollah now is part of this picture, ineluctably, and I wonder whether the criticism of Hezbollah's unwillingness to act is still a factor in Iranian thought.

Two other considerations. Any rational examination of this whole process will prove once and for all the futility of assassination as an effective tool of statecraft. We should have understood this. I remember when I was at Harvard Law School, one of my classmates was a Cuban who had been ransomed out of Cuba in return for a tractor after having been captured in the Bay of Pigs invasion. He was an older man. He was probably 28 or 29, and I was 20. Ngo Dinh Diem, the president of South Vietnam, was assassinated. I was, very naively, very happy. I thought, well, now this will mean a better regime in South Vietnam. Maybe this stupid war we're in will make some sense.

And he said to me, why do you assume that? The successor may be worse. And by the way, who is the successor? Do you know? And I have always, ever since, thought to myself that assassination is a shot in the dark. It doesn't work, and especially it doesn't work with a system as institutionalized as the Islamic Republic is. So, final thought. Again, Israel and the United States. Israel doesn't give a fig about the Strait of Hormuz. The United States and Iran share an interest, actually, in opening it. Israel doesn't share that interest. Iran and the United States share an interest in the health of the global economy. Israel doesn't give a fig about the global economy.

So actually, when we get past all of the damage that we've done to each other, there is a basis for finding some common ground if we have people in office who are capable of that. I think perhaps Iran does have such people, judging by what I hear from Iranian officials. I'm not convinced the United States does, certainly under the Trump administration. But in the longer term, there is, I believe, hope for some kind of accommodation. And here I'll just end by saying, Chas Freeman raised the issue of regional politics that nobody in the Gulf, not Saudi Arabia, not ultimately the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, or Iran, has any interest in replacing American hegemony with supervision by China, Russia, or some other country.

What all of you seek in the region is strategic autonomy. And that goes back to my question about whether the four-party coalition of Pakistan, Turkey, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia could not be part of a regional cooperative security framework, which established a kind of balance of power and cooperative security system in the region. I think that is possible, but it would require a level of, Professor Marandi used the word, wisdom on the part of the United States. There is none at present, but maybe we can rediscover it somehow.

#Seyed

I think that you're absolutely correct, and I think the ambassador is spot on. The underlying interests of the Iranian people and the American people are to have the Strait of Hormuz open. I mean, I think most people in the world would have the same shared interest. And a stable Persian Gulf is in

the interests of all of the countries in the Persian Gulf region. In fact, in many ways, Saudi Arabia today—and I've said this many times before—Saudi Arabia today for Iran is preferable in some respects to the Saudi Arabia of the past, because Mohammed bin Salman, whatever his faults, has distanced himself from Wahhabism and the ideology of Takfiri Salafism.

And that is something that is welcome in Iran. We have less extremism in Afghanistan, in Pakistan, in Iran's border area with Pakistan and Afghanistan as a result. So I think what the Iranians would prefer, ideally, is for the eight countries in the Persian Gulf region to sit together and formulate a collective security arrangement. And Iran does not want to militarize the Persian Gulf. Iran never had much of a Navy or an Air Force; it hasn't been spending very much money on the military, except for drones and missiles and underground bases that are protected. But Iran's military expenditure is less than any of the other countries in the Persian Gulf region.

Right now, the Iranians are carrying out bilateral discussions with each of these countries, and some of them have been more successful and some less successful. I think we've all noticed that in the latest military exchanges between Iran and the United States, Saudi Arabia was not targeted. The Emirates was not targeted. Qatar was not targeted. It was focused on Bahrain and Kuwait. And the final one was Jordan. So I think there's a reason for that. And some have been saying how close the Emiratis have become to the Israeli regime, or how close they've moved to the Israeli regime. The Emiratis have been telling the Iranians, at least verbally, that that is not the case. And the Israelis have been trying to make it seem to be the case to create a bigger wedge between Iran and the Emirates.

And after the war, the Emirates did make some moves to deescalate. So there are some things happening. Of course, if there is war and the Americans use the bases in this region or their airspace, again, the situation could change very rapidly. But as things stand, and if things continue to move in this direction, I think that these countries will, if they have the will, be able to assert more autonomy. And I think that would, by itself, enhance the relationship. I don't believe that Pakistan, or Egypt, or even Turkey, have the means to do much, because Pakistan and Egypt are very impoverished. And the countries in the Persian Gulf region, their economies have been hit much harder than many people think.

I don't think we're ever going to go back to the past when it comes to the accumulation of wealth. And Turkey is facing challenges, and who knows what the next government is going to look like and how it's going to be. But I think for Iran, the priority is for these eight countries to be able to come to some sort of agreement where they can benefit from the enormous wealth that exists in the Persian Gulf region. With regards to Hezbollah, I think that actually the Iranians feel that Hezbollah has paid a disproportionate price, that when in this war, when the Israelis and Americans attacked, Hezbollah entered the war, and the Iranians didn't ask them to do so.

And they, of course, it's a small country, and they've suffered a lot. And they suffered in support of the Gazans for over two and a half years, because they were the ones who, when the genocide

began, drew away half of the Israeli regime's forces by starting the border clashes, and they knew that ultimately the regime would get its revenge. So they've suffered to save Gaza, they've suffered to help Iran, and they're not a huge community. And the rest of Lebanon hasn't really paid a price. It's been the supporters of the resistance who have been paying this price. And they've been attacked from inside Lebanon and from Syria, which is now U.S. proxy territory.

So there is a lot of sympathy for Hezbollah in Iran, and that's why the Iranians are so insistent that the Israelis must leave. And that's why we have the situation today, where they've shut down the Strait of Hormuz because of the violations of the MOU. Of course, it's not only because of Lebanon; it's also because the United States has so far refrained from releasing Iran's assets, and also because they have not waived the sanctions which they promised to do from the very beginning. But again, I think that today is going to be a very important day, and what comes out of this meeting, or what does not come out of this meeting, will give us a clear idea of where things are going to be moving towards.

#Chas

I'd like to pick up on one point you made and amplify it. I think we're entering a post-ideological age, and I don't think Iran is as ideological as it was in the early days of the revolution. Saudi Arabia, as you indicated, has moved away from a focus on the theology that it had previously. Salafi Islam is not a major factor anymore in Saudi Arabia, at least in official circles. And so I have been very struck on a broader scale by the... The Chinese just issued a blueprint for global order, in which there's not a word of Marxism-Leninism in it. It's entirely Chinese traditional thought. It is not ideological. It is pragmatic.

And I think this is a trend which is helpful. To go to the point about the importance of these talks, or the importance of the consequences of these talks for U.S.-Israeli relations. The real issue is Israel's Greater Israel Plan or Project—its project to dominate West Asia and incorporate much of it into its own sovereign territory. As long as this plan persists, there is no escaping a regional focus for Iranian or other policies in the region. And you cannot dismiss the possibility that the rulers in Syria, whatever their background, will respond to statements by Israeli politicians that they're going to have to go to war with Syria again.

You know, I mean, Israel is the problem in the region, as Busaid, the foreign minister of Oman, clearly stated. So this is being driven home to everyone. And it's why Israel is probably an implicit topic of conversation in Switzerland, and maybe not just in the Lebanese context, but more broadly. So I think this is an important realization, which undercuts the longstanding American subservience to Israeli interests, since we surely have no interest in continued instability in the region.

#Mudiar

Professor Marandi has to go in five minutes, so I want to wrap it up. I'm very tempted to ask one final question to Ambassador Freeman because I thought that's relevant to all this discussion we're having. So if you could sum up very quickly, and then one minute to Professor Marandi, and we'll leave it there. It was also curious, as you were speaking earlier, about the intention of the U.S. military-industrial complex itself and its interest in the region. Because if what you guys are saying is that there has to be a West Asian treaty organization based on common security and so on, and there is a desire on everyone's part, but it's not just Israel. It's the military-industrial complex that has these bases, which, regardless of how costly they are, they would like them to be back there, with the high resources being poured into this AI, which is a sophisticated word for how the economy and resources are being reorganized now.

It's not just the bosses, but it's how economies and resources are reorganized. They are in nexus with the security status. So my point is, they are not going to wind back without an ideology, if you like. There has to be tremendous resentment against them within the imperial core inside the United States to draw down, to wind back the \$1.5 trillion budget that Trump is seeking for next year. And, you know, all the reliance on, you know, we discussed the petrodollar and so on, which is part of the security framework. So I'm curious, Ambassador Freeman, if you can share your thoughts about the domestic sentiment about winding back this gigantic military machine, because without that, they're not going to let the West Asian countries freely develop their full cooperation and relationships.

#Chas

Well, unstated presuppositions and vested interests do generate an ideology, a false consciousness, which describes the world in terms that are self-interested. Actually, this is Marx's definition of ideology, as I recall it—that it does represent the interests of those who espouse it. You're absolutely correct. The military-industrial complex in the United States has an ideology. It is shared by a fair part of the Congress, in large measure because of the corruption of the Congress by not just the Zionist lobby, but this lobby as well. But this is now suffering considerable resistance from the American public. There is an intellectual trend toward what is called restraint in foreign policy—not yet victorious, but very much a factor in isolating neoconservative militarism.

The misadventure with Iran can only help in this regard. We are seeing candidates come to office who break the stereotypes—Mamdani in New York, a similar mayoral candidate in Washington, D.C., and so forth. The problem is, I mean, there is a two-party system, which is Tweedledee and Tweedledum, and they offer no real alternatives. I go back to Professor Marandi's pleasure at the vigor of debate in Iran. I wish we had a comparably vigorous debate in our public media. There are those on the margins, and I'm very much on the margin, who are engaged in questioning this influence of the military-industrial complex, but it remains extremely powerful. In fact, the U.S. Defense Department's budget—War Department, I guess, now—the budget for this organization is treated as a jobs program by the Congress.

There is no serious threat analysis behind the direction of procurement and investment in defense. It's all about creating jobs and supporting the science and technology that is militarily relevant, even as we cut expenditures on those areas of science and technology that are not militarily relevant. So, yes, I agree this is a major problem. I think it is generating antibodies. We'll see whether they prevail. I don't think the current American system is at all stable. There's too much dissatisfaction with it. We are either going to return to a constitutional democratic order or we're going to invent something different. And so, watch this space.

#Mudiar

Professor Marandi, your closing comment.

#Seyed

Well, I think we are in the middle of some transition phase, which is very volatile. And, uh, as we speak, people are being killed in Gaza. People are being, uh, harassed and killed in the West Bank. And who knows what will happen in the hours ahead in Lebanon. So, um, nothing is for certain, but I think that there is a chance for change in the United States. The rise of the belief in restraint, as Ambassador Freeman was discussing, that, I think, would be a game changer for our region. The problem for our region, of course, is the Israeli situation, and it's the death and destruction that it has caused both directly but also through the United States.

If the issue of Palestine is resolved, I think that we will be living in a completely different environment. But I don't think it's going to be that easy. I believe that Zionism is on the decline. I'm very encouraged to see so many young Jews in the United States and in the West turning against Zionism. Max Blumenthal, I saw him on a show a couple of weeks ago where he read a poll showing that roughly 50% of American Jews below the age of 35 believe that Jews and Palestinians should live side by side in Palestine. That's an anti-Zionist position to take, whether it's expressed directly or not, that's anti-Zionist.

And that is an enormous shift and very commendable, because not only are they able to see through the American mainstream media propaganda—and Americans are more propagandized than anyone else on this planet—but also they're able to see through the Zionist propaganda in their own country, which targets them specifically. So there is change happening, and the world is changing, and it's turning against Zionism. And we do see differences emerging at higher levels, at least among the elites. But I think we still have a way to go. And unfortunately, I'm pretty sure that we're going to see a lot more bloodshed before this comes to an end. But I do think that the region is ultimately moving in the direction where this type of governance, meaning ethno-supremacism, will not exist in the long term.

#Chas

May I add one very short final thought? And that is that if Israel repents of its militarism and sadism, and turns over a new leaf in which the immense talent of its people is applied to making peace with its cohabitants in Palestine and with its neighbors, including Iran, there will be changes in Iran and everywhere as a result of this. The removal of the menace that Israel has posed to stability in the region will have enormous catalytic effects. What they will result in is going to be up to the people of each country where those effects are felt. But Iran is not, in my view, in its final evolution politically. And the removal of the military threat, which is very real, the establishment of Iran as, in many ways, the dominant power in the region as a result of this war, can have catalytic effects in Iran, and we'll wait to see what those turn out to be.

#Mudiar

We'll leave it there, Professor Marandi and Ambassador Freeman. Thank you so much for your time, and this was a really very helpful conversation. Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

#Seyed

Thank you very much for having me.

#Speaker 04

Hi, my name is Ayushman. I, along with Jyotishman, have started this platform. For the last two years, we have tried to build content for the left and progressive forces. We have interviewed economists, historians, political commentators, and activists so far. If you have liked our content so far and want us to build an archive for the left, I have two requests for you. Please do consider donating for the cause. The link is in the description below. Also, if you are not able to do so, don't feel sad. You can always like our videos and share our videos with your comrades. Finally, don't forget to hit the subscribe button.