

Trita Parsi: New Deals Will Change the Middle East Forever

Trita Parsi is the co-founder and Executive Vice President of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. Follow the Substack of Trita Parsi: <https://tritaparsi.substack.com/> Buy Diesen merchandise: <https://diesen-shop.fourthwall.com/en-nok> Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glennndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glennndiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glennndiesen> Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back. Trita Parsi joins us today, the Executive Vice President of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. And I would, again, highly advise anyone to follow his Substack. And I've left a link in the description. And part of our talk today is actually about some of your articles, which I always find very interesting. So let me start by thanking you for coming on the program.

#Trita Parsi

Thank you so much for having me again, Glenn. I really appreciate it.

#Glenn

Well, there seems to be a reorganization of the entire Middle East, a lot of deals being made. And again, only today we saw a Saudi-Turkey-Pakistani defense pact being signed. But first, I want to ask about this deal between, or possible deal now between Oman and Iran for some common control over the Strait of Hormuz. What is it? Because it seems like this actually is making progress and something will come of this. So how can you understand this deal?

#Trita Parsi

So the details that are out publicly, I think, are quite corresponding with what I'm hearing privately as well. The issue, of course, is that for four or five days in a row, we've been hearing that it's very close. I heard it from the U.S. side yesterday as well, a degree of optimism, but it still hasn't been finalized. And I'm not really sure exactly what is holding it up. But bottom line is that they've been going back and forth between a couple of different models. One model is that all of the traffic inbound comes through the Iranian side, the northern side of the Strait, with Iran's permission and

notification to Iran. And then everything that leaves would leave through a southern channel that goes through Omani waters.

For some time, that seemed to have been the central proposal, but there was a different proposal as well, and they seem to be going back and forth, at least variations of this. And that is that actually there will be one channel, and that channel goes through both Iran and Oman's waters. So it will come in on the Iranian side, it will go through Omani waters, come back onto Iranian waters, and the exit is going through that same essential channel or corridor that has been created. This is the Iranian preference. The Omanis, who, for all practical purposes, are not actually negotiating just for themselves, they're negotiating for the U.S. and the GCC as well.

And that's part of the reason why their position in these negotiations is frankly different from what they were when they were representing themselves. But their preference is one in which there are two corridors minimum, and there would be different inbound and outbound traffic. Now, I think at the end of the day, the reason why the U.S. is not formally at the table, nor any of the GCC countries, is because of the Iranians insisting that the negotiations about the fate of the strait will be done by those who have territorial waters in the strait. That is a way of reinforcing the Iranian interpretation of the Strait, which is there are no international waters in the Strait. It's territorial waters of Oman, and there's territorial waters of Iran, and there's nothing in the middle.

And in some ways, at least indirectly, this is at least partially accepted by having the negotiations take place with only Iran and Oman, not even the other GCC included. The Iranians reject countries such as Kuwait or others who are claiming that because of a lot of traffic and usage of the strait, they have a say in this, by essentially countering by saying that China has even more traffic through the strait than, for instance, Bahrain does. It does not give them a seat at the table. That, nevertheless, is more or less accepted. But the fact that the U.S. and the other countries are part of the negotiations, there's not going to be a deal unless the U.S. also agrees.

Now, what the exact final outcome is, we still don't know. But it does appear to be that whatever variation comes through here, there is going to be a clarification of what Article 5 of the memorandum essentially spelled out. It left some ambiguity. Those ambiguities are essentially filled out with details in this agreement. And it seems to go back to what the Iranians wanted, which is to make sure that there's no ships coming in or out without notification to the Iranians, at least not in this interim period. When it comes to fees, etc., it's not clear yet whether that will be part of the interim or only something that will be towards the end. There is an aspect here that is important to understand.

Even though the Omanis are negotiating on behalf of the others, and even though their own position probably is a bit closer to that of the Iranians, it's because of the fact that this kind of deal actually really strengthens Oman's position within the GCC as well. Because Oman does not have oil and gas like the other GCC states, it's much poorer than the other ones. But because of its strategic location at the strait, it will gain leverage, particularly vis-à-vis the Emirates, which oftentimes have created

problems for Oman. So I think it's important to recognize that Omanis probably are quite happy going in some sort of direction that is closer to the Iranian position because it actually gives them a lot of benefit as well. But they have to balance that by making sure that they have continued good relations with the U.S., which is ultimately very important for Oman as well.

#Glenn

That's a fascinating dynamic, though. It does make sense. I mean, if you were sitting in Iran, you don't want to negotiate with the U.S. That would undermine your entire argument that this is about Iranian waters. But it's interesting what the U.S. position is here, because I remember back in May, you said that the U.S. has a degree of optimism that a deal will go through. But at the end of May, I remember Trump went out on social media and he wrote that, as Oman and Iran were having talks about these issues, he wrote that Oman should behave, otherwise we'll have to blow them up. "Blow them up" was a direct Trump quote. Again, he's a bit loose with his language, so, you know, these things don't shock anymore. But obviously, it reflected the U.S. position that he didn't care much for these talks at all. Does this signify the U.S. position is shifting?

#Trita Parsi

No, Glenn, I think what that interpreted was that back then, the Omanis were putting forward compromise proposals that the U.S. was very upset about. So, for instance, the proposal for joint management of the system, which I think is what we're going to end up with now, was an Omani proposal. And the U.S. side was not happy about that. The proposal for environmental service fees instead of tolls was also an Omani proposal, and the U.S. was not happy about that. What you saw there was the U.S. kind of—because at the time, the U.S. was trying to create a southern corridor in the strait that would be operational and fortified even if war returned.

That would be a way of making sure that the Iranians couldn't close the Strait of Hormuz. And they were putting pressure on Oman because you could not have a southern corridor without Oman's buy-in or approval, in one way, because it's Oman's waters. So the U.S. was really strong-arming the Omanis to essentially abandon their previous position and take on a position that was closer to that of the U.S. This is what I was hinting at earlier on when I said that the Omanis are currently negotiating on behalf of everyone else in that grouping rather than themselves, because they themselves are the ones who have put forward a lot of these compromise proposals that the U.S. earlier had rejected.

And on top of that, what was perhaps not reported, at least to the best of my knowledge, was that also when Rubio went to the region immediately after the MOU, and it was presented as some sort of a trip in which he was going to help explain the MOU or bring the countries on board. No, he was actually there to force the Omanis to take the American position, and he threatened them with sanctions if they didn't. Now, after all of that and another two or three weeks of war, where are we ending up? We're ending up somewhere that is pretty close to where we were before, without any

significant change in the direction of the U.S. In fact, if there is a change, it's a clarification in the direction of the interpretation of the Iranians.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, I can understand why the U.S. doesn't want to give up or allow Iran to have any administrative control or the ability to impose fees, however it is reasoned. But again, if this limits what you can change, you do have to accept these new realities. But you wrote that it wouldn't be so bad. On your Substack, which I referred to earlier, you had a great piece on how the Strait of Hormuz can be seen through the lens of the Suez Canal and the developments that took place there in 1956. Essentially, the U.S. doesn't need to control it as long as it's open. I was wondering if you can explain this argument and its comparison, of course.

#Trita Parsi

Yeah, because thank you for bringing that up, because I think it's really important, because there's been a conflation of what the actual U.S. interest here is. Is it to make sure that this trade is open, that trade is flowing in a non-discriminatory and predictable way? Or is the actual interest control? Because oftentimes, when you see even a restrained definition of what U.S. interests would be in regions like this, including in the Red Sea, one interest that is accepted by almost all schools is that the waterways should be open. But it's very important to understand that them being open and them being under American control, or the American side depriving a hostile party from having management, are two different things. And those interests have now been completely conflated in this crisis.

When you look at it historically, the U.S. interest has been to keep the flow open. If it can be controlled by the U.S. or a friendly power, that's all the more helpful. But even if it's under the administrative control of a hostile power or a non-friendly power, that has nevertheless not been preferred, but it can be something the U.S. lives with as long as there are guarantees that the flow will be free. So the second interest in the hierarchy of interests is to make sure to deprive control by someone else. It's there only in order to serve the primary interest, which is to make sure that the flow is free. If you can have an arrangement in which the Iranians are ensuring, together with the Omanis, their management is not stopping the flow.

They don't have an interest in stopping the flow. They need to get their oil out and their imports in through this trade. But if they can guarantee that it is open in a non-discriminatory way, even if the control or management is not in the hands of the U.S., it is still acceptable. That has been the historical case. And 1956 is a very interesting example because there you actually had two U.S. allies and a country that was becoming a strong ally, which was Israel, France, and the U.K., going to war with Egypt when Egypt asserted sovereignty over the Suez Canal. And the U.S. sided with Egypt, even though Egypt at the time was in the communist camp, was closer to the Soviet Union, not formally aligned, but nevertheless aligned itself with the Soviets.

Because the Egyptians guaranteed that free flow, the sovereignty would not jeopardize that. And it was a huge blow to the French and to the Brits who, prior to that, had been managing the Suez Canal, though, of course, it was not their territory. So I think if we can deconflate these interests, I think we can see that there's a pathway out of this, a pathway that still is not going to be celebrated in Washington in any way, shape, or form. But it's always important to remember: what is the primary interest? What is the secondary interest? And remind ourselves that the secondary interest is there to serve the primary interest. It is not on the same level as the primary interest.

#Glenn

No, I agree. No, no, those are different interests. Again, open waterways is the main interest. But controlling the straits also has a strategic advantage, though. I mean, throughout history, countries wanted to control maritime corridors for, I guess, two reasons. One, security, to keep their own ships able to have freedom of navigation, but also to limit the security of others. And, you know, if you read the work of Zbigniew Brzezinski, for example, he makes the point that, you know, it's very important to communicate to the Chinese: if they ever try to challenge us, we can shut down the Strait of Malacca. If the Russians ever try to challenge us, we can shut down, for example, the Baltic Sea. And so, wouldn't this undermine the hegemonic position that the U.S. strives for if it would simply come to a deal where the straits are open but outside U.S. control?

#Trita Parsi

In some ways, yes, but I think it's also very important to understand: what did this war do, and what did it just reveal? The war did not give Iran control over the strait. The war revealed that Iran all along had the ability to close the strait. So accepting that reality is not to grant Iran something it didn't have before. It had it; it just had not revealed it. So, you know, to view it as some sort of a concession or saying, "Oh, this is granting the Iranians the control"—whether the U.S. grants it or not, the Iranians have the ability to close the strait. And they did beforehand. We just know it much better now because it was exercised. Now, to be frank with you, I don't think the Iranians were as confident of that ability that they had either. But now it's clear to all. And then that raises the second question: how important is the Strait of Hormuz at the end of the day for the U.S.?

And how important is the Middle East? We have seen a clear intellectual development in the last 20 years in which increasingly countries are saying that the Middle East is not that crucial. It is not that vital. It does not justify all of these wars. It does not justify 19 military bases in the region. So if we're actually genuine and honest about what is a vital region and what is not, we should not have huge problems. Now, of course, if this had happened in a different way, an orderly withdrawal from the United States, not under threat, not as a result of conflict, it would have been much more digestible for Washington. Now it's becoming more difficult because it's happening essentially as a result of losing a war, which creates its own dynamics. But at the core of it, is this something that the U.S. really should go to war for?

Well, if it is, why isn't it, right? At the end of the day, all we're seeing is bombing campaigns. We're not seeing a mobilization of 500,000 troops to go in and take over all of southern Iran. And if the administration really believes that the interest warrants that type of a response, then they will put that forward and they will start that mobilization, if they believe they have the capacity. I think what we're seeing is a clear recognition of the fact that a combination of them not having the capacity and certainly an incapacity of selling such a war to the American public, because no one buys it. No one believes that this is necessary. Take a look at just the importance of the flow through this strait over the course of the last 20, 25 years. There was a moment in which about 40% of world oil was flowing through the Strait of Hormuz.

Today, it's about 21, 22%. Why is that? It's because Brazil is now pumping 5 million barrels of oil a day, quite a bit above what the Iranians are pumping. You have the shale oil explosion in the United States. You are seeing increased oil production in several other regions than before. And that is going to continue. So even without bypass lanes—lines, etc.—in which oil would go through the Red Sea, etc., you're still going to see a continued diminishing of this trade. That's not to say that it's unimportant, but you add that process together with the fact that there likely will be investments in pipelines that would bypass this strait that won't be ready for another 10 years fully or so. But nevertheless, you're going to see the significance of this strait go down.

And as a result, it just makes it more and more difficult for the United States to justify a major military action. Also, when you think about the alternative cost, what does that do to the U.S.'s ability to then address conflicts elsewhere that are far more vital and clear, such as in the South China Sea? We're already seeing now that the U.S. is running out, depleting its air defense systems, Patriots. And on top of that, it is also depleting its munitions and projectiles, such as Tomahawks. Is the Persian Gulf that important to warrant that type of a war with 500,000 troops and even more munitions and bombings and interceptors being used, when there are other regions, from Taiwan and elsewhere, that also are important, arguably far more important? I just don't think anyone in Washington can make that argument any longer.

#Glenn

I think the weapons being depleted can be something that really shifts the American position, because by going all in on this war against Iran, the weapons the U.S. is expending now, they actually do need them. The U.S. also has security interests. It does need this for its actual defense. I mean, this is, I think, a huge mistake. But if the security of the U.S. itself is challenged by this war, I think that could be what is required for the U.S. position to shift. I do want to pivot a bit to this other deal I referenced earlier, that is this defense pact between Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan.

That is, again, it's about, yeah, the attack on one should be considered an attack on all. But what are the competing motivations here? I can understand the Saudis. They obviously are under direct attacks. You see Turkey, they have their own rivalry with Iran, but, you know, I don't see them wanting to go to war with Iran. And then you have Pakistan, which, well, it's hard to see them

attacking Iran unless, you know, you've got some corrupt generals. But what is the purpose here? Or are they just three very different actors with different incentives?

#Trita Parsi

I think they all have different incentives and different concerns of their own. The Pakistanis don't have the money, but they have the military means. The Saudis don't have the military means, but they have the financing, and they have other ideological factors that are important. And I think the Turks are doing this increasingly not just because of the balancing against Iran, but also because Turkey does not trust NATO in case the Israelis were to attack Turkey down the road, which the Israelis increasingly are talking openly about, Turkey being the new big threat in the Middle East from the Israeli perspective. This is a narrative that started at a moment in which the Israelis thought that they had already defeated Iran. Of course, the situation is very, very different now.

But it is something that I think is noteworthy, that as soon as the Israelis think that they have managed to get rid of one geopolitical opponent, immediately they start building this narrative about how this next country is the big, big threat to stability in the region, et cetera. We had Naftali Bennett, for instance, saying that Erdogan is the most dangerous person in the Middle East. The same thing that we saw happening between Israel and Iran back in 1991, when the Israelis decided that the geopolitical circumstances had shifted and that Iran no longer was a potential friend of Israel, but the main rival. Overnight, you just started to see these articles portraying Iran as the big threat, whereas just months earlier they were still lobbying Washington to talk to Iran and make up with Iran because they needed Iran as part of their previous geopolitical situation that existed.

So I think all of them are coming at it from different directions, but the most overarching thing is: you cannot rely on the American security umbrella. So you need to have some alternatives, not just one alternative. This is not a replacement of reliance on the United States. I think this is complementing it, and it will probably not be the only thing. And I think you will see more of this in the region, perhaps not as impactful as this one potentially could be, but you will see more of this because everyone in the region understands that the American security umbrella turned out to be much more hollow than they expected. Moreover, American decision-making is far from rational and predictable.

And as a result, you would be quite foolish to put all of your security eggs in that basket. Europe should perhaps take some inspiration from the Middle East right now when it comes to this. Europe has had plenty of time to rethink things and has failed to do so, but that's perhaps a different conversation. The question then is, is this really an anti-Iran pact? I think there's different motivations here. I think there's an element of it to at least try to balance against Iran because they're seeing that the other entity that they were hoping would be that balancing element against Iran turned out not to be reliable or effective. So now they have to find their alternatives.

The danger here is if we start seeing deeper bloc formations in the Middle East. That, I think, would be a huge problem. If, however, this is something in the interim, but the real investment will be some sort of collective security—we talked about it before—indivisible security for the region, I think that's a much better path to go. I find this development potentially a threat to that, but it's not entirely clear yet. And part of it is also because, really, is this really reliable? Will Pakistan go to war with Iran over Saudi Arabia? Will Turkey go to war with Iran over Saudi Arabia? At the end of the day, these agreements are only as strong as their credibility.

And this one's credibility may be stronger than the American security umbrella at this point, but not necessarily fully credible. But if I was sitting in Iran, I would not dismiss this. I would recognize that unless there is an effort by the Iranians to also try to move in a direction that relieves some of the concerns of the neighbors and disincentivizes them from this type of a bloc formation, they may very well end up in a scenario in which, yes, the region is not relying on the U.S. to balance Iran, but it is still investing heavily only in a formation that does balance Iran rather than seeking some formulation that could actually bring everyone into a security arrangement, including Iran, of course.

#Glenn

Yeah, no, that seems reasonable, that, you know, something has to appear in the vacuum, though. If Iran expects the U.S. to pull out, what would replace it? Ideally, it would have some collective security deal that includes Iran. But yeah, hopefully down the path. About the Europeans, since you mentioned them, they actually had their own path towards a pan-European security architecture deal with the Russians, as we know, in 1990 and 1994 and 2000. I think they went with NATO expansion instead because it was a good way of making sure that the U.S. remained in Europe. But again, now that they see less trust in the U.S. security guarantees, the goal in Europe now is apparently to make a new NATO system only with the Europeans.

So not go back to the plan of an inclusive security architecture based on the Helsinki Accords, but instead reinventing NATO, but without the Americans. So we're truly led by madmen here, I think. But another deal, though, which could reshape the Middle East, is this U.S.-Saudi deal. I find this peculiar because this nuclear deal would make a nuclear deal with Iran near impossible, it would seem, if the U.S. would be that blatant about different standards for Saudi Arabia and Iran. Indeed, I heard a journalist ask about this, and the response from the White House was, "Well, Saudi Arabia is an ally, and they get special rules because it's America first." But if this is the basis of regional security architecture, then it's going to be very unstable.

#Trita Parsi

So what do you make of this deal? I see several dangerous things with this deal, particularly in the context of the U.S. simultaneously trying to get a deal with Iran. On the one hand, this is less than what the Saudis wanted, but also it's completely cutting out the Israelis. The Saudis also wanted a

security guarantee from the U.S. I'm not so sure that they've completely given up on that. I think in their new approach of having several layers, they would still want it, even if it's not as reliable as it could have been or as they thought it would have been. It's still something that I think they potentially want. And one of the dangers of doing this nuclear deal first is that it may put the Saudis in a position in which they will be able to strong-arm the U.S. to later on give a defense pact, a security guarantee as well.

And part of the reason I would think that would be bad for the U.S. and for the region is because the U.S. should disentangle itself from these regional conflicts. Giving a NATO Article 5-type security guarantee to Saudi Arabia would be the exact opposite of that. But we have the examples of other countries that, once they have the nuclear enrichment capability and they have a pathway to a nuclear bomb, they have used that as a way of pressuring the U.S. into giving a security guarantee, essentially saying, well, if you don't give us a security guarantee, we have no option but to go for a nuclear weapon. So the U.S. is now giving the Saudis the same technology it, for the last 40, 50, 60 years, has tried to deprive Iran from having, and has gone to war to deprive the Iranians from having, but it's granting it to the Saudis.

That then creates a significant problem potentially for these negotiations with Iran. The Iranians had, in earlier discussions, agreed to a moratorium on enrichment that could be as long as 10 or 12 years. It's difficult for me to see that the Iranians would stick to that if simultaneously the U.S. is granting that same technology to the Iranians—to the Saudis. And on top of that, with far fewer inspections—in fact, no international inspections—compared to what the Iranians are agreeing to. And that creates a different problem in and of itself. How are you going to get JCPOA or JCPOA-plus inspections of the Iranian program as part of a nuclear deal that Trump says that he wants if you're simultaneously exempting the Saudis from any such inspections?

It's insanity, in my view. And it doesn't seem like the administration really calculated how this would be impacting the Iran negotiations. That deal, incidentally, has been ready for some time with the Saudis. It was announced now for other reasons that have to do with reporting requirements and things like that, making sure that it's all done before Trump leaves office. But I think the two of them together actually, they're working against each other. It doesn't mean that the U.S. cannot strike other deals with the Saudis, et cetera. But to do it exactly in this manner, if these are the details that stand at the end of it, once we fully know the details, I think it's going to create a significant problem for any deal with the Iranians.

#Glenn

Well, yeah, because the Iranians want to move away from the U.S. hegemonic system. And if you accept that the U.S. gets to write special rules for whoever are obedient and a different set of rules for those who do not obey, you accommodate it, I guess. But, yeah, that kind of takes me to another issue I wanted to ask. That is, what might the Iranian parliament push, though, as an alternative arrangement for the region?

Because I saw in the Iranian media yesterday that the Iranian parliament might present a bill which would then, well, be considered a bit of a hardline bill that would limit Israeli ships going through the Strait of Hormuz, or any ships going to Israel or benefiting Israel. Also, they would demand reparations again. It was—I would define it as a hardline proposal. And if you see this combined with, for example, the strikes they did on Jordan, which seemed to be aligned with the wider objective of encouraging them to break their ties with the U.S., so do you think the Iranians would be tempted to go for an all-out victory? That is, just, well, humiliate the U.S., kick them out of the region, and essentially assert complete dominance over the Strait of Hormuz?

Well, to various degrees. Because, again, there must be a lot of anger there, you know, even from the public, and you can't really ignore this either. And, you know, I also make the point: you can imagine if it was the other way around, if Iran had done this to American cities, would the U.S. not have some vengeance in mind? I mean, how do you see this? Again, it could just be political signaling that this is the alternative to proper, you know, good-faith diplomacy. If we don't get that, we'll hand it over to these hardliners who will just go all out in humiliating the U.S. So I'm not sure how to interpret this, to be honest.

#Trita Parsi

So I think there's elements of all of that taking place right now. There is an element in which I think there is a sense of utility to be able to signal what the alternative is. But I think also there's a reality in which the hardliners in the parliament—and it's important to note, up until, what is it, a week or so ago, the Iranian parliament was not in session because of the war. And as a result, that was a factor that was not present in the negotiations. Now, when they are present in the negotiations, we do have examples in which the parliament has passed bills that have been meant to strengthen the Iranian position, but ultimately have actually ensured that there is no deal.

Similarly to when Congress is, you know, imposing new sanctions, and it's nominally to strengthen the American position, but in effect, and also in many cases in intent, was designed to undermine the negotiations. And I think the Iranians should be very careful about this, because yes, there's a particular motivation for humiliation of Trump because of what Trump has done. But the countereffect of that is not necessarily that the U.S. does something. The countereffect could be precisely what we have begun to see the inklings of, which is that other players in the region ultimately draw the conclusion that Iran is going to go too far in their view of how it will try to assert its control and position in the region, and that then necessitates that they form bloc formations to counter Iran's rising position.

And that will then only change who the Iranians are in a rivalry against, rather than allowing the Iranians to exit this very hot rivalry that has been going on for quite some time, that is constantly on the verge of war. And in the long-term perspective of establishing security, I think it's quite clear that that type of a situation, in which there is this natural reaction—not just this deal with the Saudis

and the Pakistanis, but something much, much more than that, a full bloc formation to counter Iran and to balance against Iran—is ultimately not in Iran's interest. So I think the body is going to have to balance whatever desire and need they feel for humiliating Trump or pushing the U.S. out, however they want to phrase it, with what that actually does for Iran's interest. If it generates a counterforce that did not exist before, that was not driven by the security needs of those countries in the region before, but rather driven by American hegemonic incentives or imperatives, then that ultimately would be a very bad position for the Iranians to find themselves in.

#Glenn

Yeah, no, that would be a mistake, I guess, if you replace the U.S. hegemonic alliance system with a new bloc system for the sole purpose of containing Iran. And I guess with the collapse of U.S. soft power over the Iran war, I think it's quite remarkable how the Iranians built their soft power. I mean, the kind of empathy you have now towards Iran, and I guess I have never seen this in my lifetime, at least. So it would be, I guess, a mistake for the Iranians to throw this away by going overboard on the vengeance. I did want to ask, yeah, the last thing, though, how the Middle East could—well, the war now could extend itself. It looked for a while like Zelensky had an objective in terms of merging these wars, the Ukraine war with the Iranian war, although it seems to have dialed back a bit since. Do you still see this possibility? Because it, you know, seems like a recipe for World War Three, to be honest.

#Trita Parsi

It would be a disastrous outcome if the U.S. were to buy into what I wrote. I think it was on my Substack about this as well. I did not see a likelihood that Zelensky's visit would generate a positive response from the U.S. side. I think the Trump administration would have enough of their guard up to be suspicious of this. And it does seem like Zelensky went back relatively empty-handed on this specific aspect. But my worry was always that the Trump administration would end up making small decisions, none of them in and of themselves being seen as an acceptance of this, but nevertheless, in their totality, would move in that direction. And then the merging of the wars would happen over time, rather than by a big decision, but rather by a thousand paper cuts. That, I think, was a higher likelihood.

And that's part of the reason why, despite the fact that Zelensky did not seem to be successful in this one visit, it does not reduce my concern that this may end up being a direction that we go in. I don't think Zelensky is going to stop pushing that narrative that is the underlying basis for all of this, which is that at the end of the day, there's the same enemies in both of these theaters, and as a result, it is the same war. This is something he's been saying for some time now. He repeated it even after leaving Washington. So I think that frame is going to remain in place, and as a result, we may be moving towards that, even if it's imperceptible day by day, that the trend nevertheless will be in that direction. And I agree with you fully, it would be an absolute disaster, and it certainly would not serve U.S. interests.

#Glenn

What would be the objective here, though? Because it could backfire as well. It could pull the Europeans into the Ukraine war and spread their resources even thinner. What do you think Zelensky's calculations are, given that he's pushing this so hard?

#Trita Parsi

And it's important to also understand, from what I've heard, there are senior people in the Ukrainian security establishment and the military that are completely opposed to this. And they're opposed to it because of a different assessment of the risk. The risk is, in their view, that Ukraine would end up getting overstretched and engaged in the Iran war without generating American participation in the war with Russia. And as a result, the return on investment would be a negative one. Whereas I think the way Zelensky is looking at it, the risk is worth it because he thinks that whatever overextension Ukraine may experience, it will be compensated by the fact that the U.S. will be much more directly involved against the Russians.

It is an insane bet. There's some people who tell me that he's doing this more because of it as a distraction from domestic problems he's faced with, etc. But I think it's difficult to completely buy that, mindful of the fact that it has been the Ukrainian position from the very beginning of this war to get the U.S. much, much more directly involved in the war. And if you're sitting in Ukraine, there's an understandable reason as to why you would push for that. It's not illogical for them to push for it. I think it would be illogical for the U.S. to accept it, though.

#Glenn

Well, let me, yeah, just one last question. Where does Israel fit into this? There's a lot of deals happening now. Again, the deal between Oman and Iran, the Saudi-Turkey-Pakistani deal, the U.S.-Saudi deal. I mean, there's a lot of things which could reshape the region here. Where does Israel stand? Because I feel they're being awfully quiet at the moment, which I'm not sure is good or bad.

#Trita Parsi

Yeah, well, keep in mind that they're also entering the political season right now. So a lot of focus is turning inward into what will become a very decisive election for Netanyahu, of course. On the Ukraine thing, I think the biggest winners, frankly, would be the Israelis. It would give another lease on life to the Iran war, which the Israelis want. It would give an opportunity for the Europeans to enter the Iran war in a manner that they have not, at least not directly. And perhaps most importantly, it would reframe the entire Iran war. Because right now it's very centered on Israel's role in it, which is well deserved, mindful of the fact that Israel has had a central role in it.

But going forward, it could end up becoming one in which defeating Iran is not there to defend Israel; it's there to defend Ukraine. And that will have a completely different political digestibility in Europe in particular, but also in the United States. Israel's standing has plummeted in the United States. It is a huge drag for the administration that this Iran war is seen by so many in his own base as having been done for Israel. Now, they will be more happy if it's done for Ukraine, but it will split some of the Democrats who otherwise have been opposed to this war.

It will be more difficult for them to take that position because they remain still very committed to support for Ukraine and its war against Russia. So I think the Israelis see a lot of opportunities with this in a manner that I don't think anyone else can see the same level of positives. When it comes to these other things, I think the Israelis will probably be very worried about this new formulation, particularly if it ends up being one that does not focus solely on countering Iran, but actually ends up in some ways even including Iran. There's been efforts by the Pakistanis in particular to get Iran into that formulation with Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

If that ends up happening, I think the Israelis will see this increasingly being a constellation that is there to counter Israel. There's question marks as to whether this deal does eliminate a chance of normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia. Some in Israel, of course, are still very much hoping for such a normalization. Doesn't appear to me that MBS cares that much about it, but it's not clear to me that he actually would be a block to that type of a normalization with Israel. I just don't see that being in the cards right now and for the foreseeable future, or even particularly desired by the Saudis at this moment, in which we still have an ongoing genocide and the anger against Israel, even amongst Saudis and in the region as a whole, is still at a level that is much higher than it's been in the last 10, 15 years.

#Glenn

Well, hopefully something good can come out of all of these deals. Yeah, at least I'm a little bit optimistic now about the deal between Oman and Iran, especially if it has the blessing of its neighbors and the U.S. It could resolve the Hormuz issue. I think the other things would be easier to fix. So anyways, thank you so much for your time. Thank you so much.

#Trita Parsi

Really appreciate it, Glenn.

#Trita Parsi

Thanks. Thank you.