



What Iranians Think About the US-Iran Deal

June 25, 2026

Featuring Mehdi Parpanchi

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

DUBOWITZ: Today I'm speaking with someone who grew up inside the shadow of the Islamic Republic, and who has spent much of his career helping the world understand what happens behind the regime's walls. Mehdi Parpanchi left Iran in 2000 and went on to become one of the most influential Persian language journalists covering the country. From 2003 to 2018, he served as a journalist and lead presenter for BBC Persian, reporting on Iranian domestic politics and the regime's human rights abuses. In 2018, he became Iran service director for Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty's Radio Farda. Since 2020, he has served as executive editor for the United States and director of news at Iran International TV, the most successful Iranian opposition channel, that has faced actual attacks and repeated death threats from the regime in Iran. I wanted to speak with Mehdi because at this pivotal moment, there is a growing global narrative that the Islamic Republic is somehow emerging victorious.

Despite extraordinary military, economic, and political setbacks, the regime is trying to use diplomacy, propaganda, and information warfare to convince the world that it has outlasted its adversaries, that America, Israel, the Gulf States, and perhaps most tragically, the Iranian people themselves are the ones who are losing. But how does this moment look from inside Iran? How do ordinary Iranians view the regime, the US-Iran negotiations now underway, and the future of their country? Is Tehran successfully projecting strength, or is there a widening gap between the regime's narrative and the reality on the ground experienced by millions of Iranians? Few people are better positioned to answer those questions than Mehdi Parpanchi. Welcome to *The Iran Breakdown*. So, let's break it down. Mehdi, thank you so much for being on the show.

PARPANCHI: Thank you so much for having me again, Mark. I really appreciate it. Thank you.

DUBOWITZ: Well, it's wonderful to have you back. And I think, Mehdi, there's no better person to speak to than you to really understand what is taking place inside Iran, and from the perspective of Iranians about, I think, developments that are deeply troubling for many of us in terms of US-Iran negotiations. But I want to step back a little bit before delving into that to talk about Iran International, because you certainly have built one of the most successful Persian language stations in the world, and certainly the most successful Iran opposition station, providing, I think, really relevant and critical news and perspective on what's actually happening inside the country. But because of that, you've also faced death threats from the regime. Tell us a little bit about those threats, and then we can talk about the broader picture.

PARPANCHI: Thank you so much, Mark. I really appreciate your introduction and also the information about Iran International and myself. I really appreciate it. Unfortunately, yes, the threats have been continuing. They recently had an attack on our headquarters in London, which I'm sure you are aware it was in the news. Nothing serious in the sense of the scope of the attack, but however, it is showing that those who do not like what we are doing, they are still continuing threatening and harassing us. And unfortunately, there have been other reports by British police. I mean, it's not public. I wouldn't go into much detail, but this much I can say that as we are speaking, we have a number of colleagues, unfortunately, that are still being basically protected twenty-four seven around the clock. And that's because of the credible threats that the police and counter-terrorism police and authorities have been detecting, whatever they are.

They never share the details, but we understand from the level of protection that our colleagues receive that it must be something serious. And we have also had these issues not just in London, but in many other cities around the globe. We have correspondents in many cities in Europe and other countries, and some of them have also been subject to this kind of threats, and from the authorities of the countries that they are living in, they have received many warnings. In some cases, again, receiving twenty-four seven protection. So unfortunately, the threats are still continuing. You said that opposition TV – we really don't try to be opposition. We are trying to be a news channel. However, living in a free world and trying to publish and broadcast news freely is not something that Islamic Republic likes, because they have unfortunately killed journalism inside the country and they are trying to spread it out to the outside world.



What Iranians Think About the US-Iran Deal

June 25, 2026

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So, this is the situation, but we have always continued doing what we are doing, and we will continue doing it. We've never been felt basically harassed or deterred by what they are doing.

DUBOWITZ: So, Mehdi, I think that's exactly why the regime in Iran fears Iran International, because you are telling the truth and putting out facts, and also you are countering their narrative. And the narrative, of course, has been quite important and profound for the regime over the course of the past year and a half – that the regime has survived repeated attacks by the United States and Israel, that the regime has put down brutally these protests in January, killing over 40,000 Iranians, and that the regime is winning. And I think that is the narrative certainly in the West, and you're very aware of that, being based in Washington. But what is the narrative inside Iran? What do Iranian people think about that? From their perspective, is the Islamic Republic winning?

PARPANCHI: I don't think so. I mean, much of the reporting from outside the country, including US media and from the European media, politicians, commentators – they are all aware that everybody is talking about Iran's victory. Part of it is because of the political environment, let's say in the US, the partisanship, and people are accusing each other. Most people who have opposed President Trump's administration, they don't like anything that the administration does, including this war. So, most of what is happening outside the country is probably understandable. However, the propaganda of Islamic Republic is using all those voices inside Iran, equating it, broadcasting it in the state media, using that as evidence that, listen, it's not us saying that Iran won the war – even in the US, US media, the New York Times also saying it, the Washington Post said that, so on and so forth. However, if you ask Iranian people, again, it depends who you ask, but the majority of people – what you will hear is that, okay, let's say the US lost the war, but Iran did not win it, because of the situation that people are living in.

They have seen what has happened to the Islamic Republic. They have experienced it firsthand that Israel and the US have been bombing at will anywhere they want, whenever they want, and they have pretty much managed to kill more than 50, 60 top echelon of Iran's military, including the Supreme Leader. So, if this is victory, as the saying goes, if we win one more time, then there will be really nothing remaining from the Islamic Republic. So, I don't think the majority of the population are really buying the narrative that the Islamic Republic has won the war. However, I mean, if you ask the core base support of the Islamic Republic, they are really increasingly believing this narrative. I wouldn't say that during the war – definitely not during the first two weeks of the war – they were really thinking that Iran is winning. They were very, very worried that the regime may even topple, the regime may be the end of it. But by the time the messaging of the US administration had changed, and also when President Trump started, from almost about maybe the 12th or 13th of March, I think he started saying that we are talking to Iranians, we are talking to Iranian officials, so on and so forth.

So this narrative, although people at the time were not really believing it – but now when you look at it, now what they see, the reality is that the US, despite the very beginning of the war – if you remember what President Trump said on the 28th of February, that a message to the Iranian people: stay at home, outside is not safe. When the situation is right, we will tell you to come out, we are here to help, so on and so forth. But then that messaging completely changed and the US administration started talking to the Iranian authorities, mostly meaning IRGC, as if they are not FTO anymore. But that's the reality that we are facing. So, answering your question, I'm just trying to say that we need to have the full picture. Yes, there are some elements who believe Iran has won the war, and then some elements would say that even if the US lost it, it's definitely not a win for Iran.



What Iranians Think About the US-Iran Deal

June 25, 2026

Featuring Mehdi Parpanchi

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DUBOWITZ: I think that in some respects there was a real expectation gap. I think the expectation gap exists in the United States. It exists in Israel, in the Gulf, and inside Iran. And I think the main expectation gap is not supported by the evidence – that is, that President Trump was committed to bringing down the regime in Iran from day one. I think President Trump has not been committed to that. I think he wasn't committed to that when he launched Operation Epic Fury. I think in telling Iranians to stay home, I think President Trump understood that their bombs would be dropping and he cared about the safety of Iranians, but they never presented that US policy was about regime change, and that he was going to provide American power to bring down this regime. And that if anything, he had very specific military objectives to severely degrade Iran's nuclear program, missile program, defense industrial base, and certainly to take out the top echelon of Iranian leadership – not because of regime change, but to severely weaken and cripple the regime's capabilities.

I think too many people maybe interpreted that as the president was committed to bringing down the regime in Iran. And when it didn't happen, clearly there were a lot of people who were very disappointed, and I'm sure the vast majority of Iranians were. What do you make of that thesis? And is this really a question of an expectation gap and perhaps the president not communicating his objectives clearly enough from the outset of the war?

PARPANCHI: I agree with that. I think neither Israel nor the US ever clearly said that one of the objectives, or the main objective of this war, is to put an end to this regime. However, the perception outside was that some people were expecting it, specifically because the war started with killing the Supreme Leader, and when you go for killing the Supreme Leader, that kind of implies what the intention is behind the war. However, yes, you are right, it was never basically specified that the war is to put an end to the regime. But the question here is that why did the US start talking to IRGC? And also, when you think about who they are talking to, which is Ghalibaf – Mohamad Baqer Ghalibaf – he is the most corrupt element of the Islamic Republic, and his corruption – there have been a lot of cases of embezzlement and financial corruption that he had. So, empowering him is also problematic, because at the end of the day, the US has always been seen, at least for the past 50, 60 years, almost maybe a century – the US is the leader of the free world, at least after the Second World War.

And when you look at the doctrines, you had Woodrow Wilson, for instance, who was saying that peace is achievable in the world through spreading US values, the most important one of them being democracy. What we see today is consolidating and empowering the most corrupt element of an authoritarian regime in Iran. I don't think this is defensible. I mean, putting aside whether Iran won the war or the US won the war, the result of it, as we see today, I don't think it will last. I think I can argue that this is not going to continue, but what we are witnessing today is consolidating and empowering Mohammad Baqer Ghalibaf. And that, I don't think, is defensible by any standard.

DUBOWITZ: Well, let's talk about Iran's leadership, because clearly, as you mentioned, the strikes were very successful in killing Ali Khamenei and killing the 50, 60 top generals and IRGC leaders and members of the security and intelligence apparatus. Who are we left with, Mehdi? You mentioned Ghalibaf, who's a speaker of the Iranian parliament, former IRGC commander. You mentioned that he's a very corrupt man, but there is an argument – and I think people in the Trump administration might make this argument – that that's fine. We have no problem if he's corrupt, as long as he's willing to do a deal with us to stop Iran's nuclear program. We took out Maduro in Venezuela. We end up with Delcy Rodriguez, who is as corrupt as anyone, but it's actually in her corruption and in her avarice that we are able to find somebody who's at least a pragmatist and will do business with us.

Why is Mohammad Ghalibaf not the bad person? Why is the administration wrong in believing that he is?



What Iranians Think About the US-Iran Deal

June 25, 2026

Featuring Mehdi Parpanchi

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

PARPANCHI: I think the problem is that what the administration is trying to achieve, I don't think they will get it, to be honest with you. I don't want to be too harsh on the administration because President Trump has been the only president who has basically done probably what must have been done many times in the past two, three decades. So he, as the creditor – at least when you think about Ali Larijani, who got killed in this war, and then a number of 50, 60 top-echelon IRGC commanders, every single one of whom was responsible for the massacre which happened only two months before the war, every single one of them were responsible for that bloodshed in the streets of Iran and hundreds of other cities. So, imagine if Iranians wanted to hold them responsible and accountable – they would've never been able to do so. So that credit must be given to the administration.

So, nobody should forget about that side of it. But as I said, if they are really trying to achieve putting an end to the nuclear file, for instance, I don't think it's going to happen, because at the end of the day, yes, I agree with you that the US didn't want to change the regime. Maybe if they could, fine, but it was not the main objective. But they were trying to change the behavior of the regime – that much I think we will agree on. And I don't think they are going to achieve that. Again, I don't want to be too harsh, but when you look at the MOU, which is signed – and signed, I'm sure that you also have been, if not criticizing, at least not very happy with the MOU. I mean, remember again those very famous lines of Churchill, which he said to Chamberlain: "You had the options between dishonor and war, you chose dishonor, and you will have the war."

This is not going to put an end to the problem that the US and Israel have been having with Iran, and it's not just the US and Israel, it's the entire region. And for me, the most important part is the Iranian people. I mean, this struggle has been going on for half a century now. But I'm afraid I don't think there is an end to it with Ghalibaf. It's not going to end. The behavior change, if the US wanted that, is not going to happen, specifically with Mojtaba Khamenei as the Supreme Leader now.

DUBOWITZ: Okay. So again, I don't believe this case but let me make the administration's case and have you respond to it. Let's say the administration says, "Fine, we didn't set out for regime change, but effectively we have eliminated the men who are going to stand in our way of a nuclear deal. We have signed an MOU. There are people who are very critical of the MOU, but we are putting before the Iranian regime an opportunity of a \$300 billion reconstruction fund and tens of billions of dollars of money that would flow in in the interim. And here is money that the Iranian government can use to rebuild its economy, rebuild its infrastructure, and give the Iranian people a better life, a better prosperity. And all the Iranians have to do – the regime has to do – is give up their nuclear infrastructure in order to unlock all of that money.

So, we're not throwing the Iranian people under the bus and negotiating with this regime. We're giving the regime an opportunity to change its behavior and to get access to hundreds of billions of dollars in money to rebuild Iran." Why are they wrong, Mehdi?

PARPANCHI: If it happens, perfect. Nobody is against that. If there is a prospect that people will be benefiting from that \$300 billion and the frozen assets are released and so on and so forth, and if really the Islamic Republic is going to use that money for rebuilding the economy of the country, that's perfect – even if there's not going to be democracy, let's say. I mean, nobody's against it, but at the end of the day, the welfare of people probably is more important than that. I mean, as the first step. And I'm sure then the rest will come.



What Iranians Think About the US-Iran Deal

June 25, 2026

Featuring Mehdi Parpanchi

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

I remain skeptical. I don't think it's going to happen, Mark. That's the problem. I don't think that the behavior of the regime is going to change. You can see it in many elements of the Islamic Republic who are opposing even this MOU. They are attacking Ghalibaf and Pezeshkian, who have been seen as the most important people in terms of being responsible for signing this MOU. And right now, Mojtaba Khamenei is somewhere in his bunker, nobody has seen him yet. And obviously the number of people who are in touch with him are very, very limited – maybe a handful of people. I don't know who, but you can have your own guess. You wouldn't really go more than three, four, five people maximum, because if it's more than that, then they will be able to find out where he is. But when he comes out, if this goes through – I mean, let's say there will be negotiations and they are assured that nobody's going to target Mojtaba Khamenei –

the moment he comes out, then he will start meeting the other people. Then the real politics will start inside the Islamic Republic. And why has he only issued one statement about this MOU? And in that statement, he has very, very clearly said that he is against the deal. He has said, and this is his word: "In principle, I am against it, but I'm accepting it because the president gave me assurance that the US is going to fulfill what it is signing – the obligations that they are taking under the MOU." This is exactly what happened when Ali Khamenei allowed the JCPOA to go through. He said exactly the same thing. He said, "I'm against this, but I'm accepting it because the president at the time, President Rouhani, is insisting, so okay, we will give it a chance." But what happened later? He did not allow it to be implemented, because what was the expectation behind the JCPOA?

Again, it was change of behavior. But Iran used all the benefits, all the money which they had because of the JCPOA – they invested it on missile program, on their own program, on proxies – and the problem became even bigger basically because of the JCPOA, because they used that money to grow their capabilities and capacities. This is what is going to happen. And there is zero doubt about it that if the Islamic Republic, if Mojtaba Khamenei – who lost his father, who lost his daughter, who lost his wife, and who lost his brother-in-law in the bombing – if he drew only one lesson, it is that he has to double down, he has to even increase the capabilities that they have. Because at the end of the day, from their point of view, what stopped the war was spreading it throughout the region. His father, Ali Khamenei, promised before the war that he said, "If this time the US and Israel attack, we will regionalize the war.

We will spread it throughout the region." And that happened. So, imagine if really the deal goes through... I don't think that \$300 billion is going to materialize. I believe it's only on paper. But if it happens, the majority of that money is not going to go to the Iranian people. That much I can assure you.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah. Well, we certainly saw that after the JCPOA, when there was, I think a 90 percent increase in the IRGC budget in the year after the JCPOA was reached. So there certainly is a lot of evidence from the past that that money is not going to go to the Iranian people. But Mehdi, let me ask you this. The men who rule Iran – we've mentioned Ghalibaf, you've mentioned Mojtaba Khamenei – who else is there who's left, who is influential and is playing a major role in either the negotiations, or more importantly on the military and internal security side? I mean, obviously Pezeshkian, and you've mentioned, who is the president, and Araghchi, who is the foreign minister who's involved in the negotiations – I think those are people that most of our listeners have heard about. But who have they not heard about that is playing a key role within the system, names that they should become more familiar with?



What Iranians Think About the US-Iran Deal

June 25, 2026

Featuring Mehdi Parpanchi

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

PARPANCHI: A lot is written about it. I wouldn't go into details, but you can pretty much say that members of the Supreme National Security Council – those are the most important people right now. They are not equal, neither in terms of the hierarchy that they have officially on paper, and also in the real terms the real power is not the same. Yes, you have President Pezeshkian. He is president because of that. Of course, he has some power, but at the end of the day, in two years' time he's gone, and he has no political future, if you like. But Ghalibaf – yes, he would have it. I am doubtful, to be honest with you. I think I'm going to basically risk it and predict that he's going to be a victim of this MOU, because I don't believe this is going to succeed, and I think that his political future is also going to basically be wrecked by this MOU – probably the same for his counterpart in the US.

You would know better. I'm not very familiar with US politics, but I think both of them will be victims of this MOU, because I don't think it's going to succeed. But right now, it's very, very difficult to really say who is calling the shots. You definitely have Ghalibaf there, but then you have Vahidi, then you have Zolghadr, you have Mohsen Ejei, who is the head of Iran's judiciary, you have a handful of other people – because politics has stopped in Iran because Mojtaba Khamenei is in hiding. So, politics in real terms is not happening. So, it's very difficult to really gauge who has the upper hand. We have seen it since the end of the war, we have seen that Ghalibaf's power has been going up and down. There were times that he was under attack. We even thought that maybe he wouldn't survive, and then you see that he's reemerging.

The same goes for Pezeshkian. So, a lot is really happening behind the scenes. We are not aware. I don't really think that anybody can really claim they know who is really in charge, because Mojtaba Khamenei is also meeting some of them. And if you read carefully the most recent statement that he issued, then you will see that there is a lot of tension behind the scene.

DUBOWITZ: All right. Mehdi, I want to move from the regime to the people, and I want you to address, I think, another argument that we hear often in Washington, which is that there's no doubt the majority of Iranians despise the regime. There's no doubt that they are incredibly courageous, and they've been on the streets multiple times since the late 1990s, and that the most recent protests, which were large and geographically spread out, where you saw incredible courage from Iranians – and as we said, over 40,000 of them slaughtered by this regime. But what there really is evidence of is the fact that there is no real organized opposition, there is no organized opposition capable of taking on this brutal regime and its security services, and that while we hope for a different government in Iran, and while we hope for a free and prosperous Iran, President Trump is going to have to be not Wilsonian but Jacksonian.

He has to deal with the world as it is, not as the world as he wants it to be, and that he has to do a deal with the men who have the guns and not hope that the men and women who don't have the guns are somehow going to be able to overthrow this regime. Why should we be optimistic about the Iranian people, and why should the United States government put its power and support behind those people so the next time they're on the streets, to bring down this regime?

PARPANCHI: Very difficult to answer this question, because I really don't know how the US government wants to support those people if they come out again, what they can do in practice, really. We haven't seen anything specific in the past and I'm not really sure what can be done in the future, but is it going to happen? I would say definitely – it's not going to go anywhere, because people have not forgotten about what happened in January. Thousands of people got killed. I still don't know how many people exactly... This is not going to go anywhere. And when you look at the economic situation – again, when you look at the official figures of the central bank and also the Statistics Center, which are also official government bodies – last month the inflation was 8.87 percent, nearly 9 percent in one month. That's going to be three-figure inflation by the end of the year.



What Iranians Think About the US-Iran Deal

June 25, 2026

Featuring Mehdi Parpanchi

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

The prices are really going high, and then you look at the food price, you are looking at 150, 200 percent inflation. The unemployment is massive, especially because of the war, and also because the internet was down, millions of people lost their jobs, they had no revenue. So, this is not going to really leave the country in a way that they can govern. And perhaps that was one of the reasons that they really thought about starting negotiations and getting to some sort of a deal, because it was impossible really to govern the country.

I don't doubt the question of whether there will be an uprising or not. I think definitely we will have one. The question is when. How can the US help? I don't have an answer for that, because I don't see even an appetite for it, because at the end of the day, if you sign a memorandum and one of the articles is that the countries are not going to interfere in their domestic issues, then that is said – we have signed it. But in terms of the opposition, you asked about opposition. I don't think Iran's opposition is weak. If you look inside the country, there will be no opposition because inside the country, a country like Iran cannot have an organized opposition. Looking for an organized opposition, and a strong one, inside the country is simply looking for something which is impossible. You have groups and people outside the country, some of them enjoy massive support inside the country, inside Iran.

Whether the US wants to recognize that or not, that's another question. I don't think they are going to do so. We have seen it, and then the administration starts talking to the elements from the Islamic Republic, and then that basically puts an end to it.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah, it's interesting. First of all, I don't think it's relevant at all that there is a provision inside the MOU that both countries commit not to interfere in each other's countries. The Iranians are running massive influence operations inside the United States every day, assassination campaigns and plots. So, they're going to be in egregious violation of that provision, which I think opens the door for the United States to do what we want to do inside Iran. I think, second, you're right – it's hard to know whether there's an organized opposition inside Iran. And even if there was and we knew the people's names, they're more likely to be killed if they were that active. But there's certainly a massive grassroots opposition that comes to the streets repeatedly and has since the 1990s, and 2009, and 2017, 18, 19, Woman Life Freedom in 2022, 23, and then back on the streets in 25, 26, with this really extraordinary mass uprising that we were just talking about.

So, it seems that there certainly is a large grassroots movement inside the country that is courageous and willing to come to the streets. It seems to me – and I will name names – it seems to me people like Reza Pahlavi have a large support base inside the country, have a very large social media following inside the country, and are able to message and communicate and inspire many, many Iranians. And that leads to the question of why we don't have a plan, or why we should have a plan, because I think President Trump is going to realize that when negotiations fail and we get to, let's say, November after the midterms, he's going to be faced with what is he going to do next. Now he can return to major military operations, which hopefully will include winning the Battle of Hormuz. He can impose severe economic pressure.

He can try to return back to diplomacy, even though it's likely to fail. But he needs a fourth option. And if "Epic Fury" is major military operations and economic theory is economic pressure, what about "People's Theory"? What about Operation People's Theory? Angry Iranians are sick of living under the Islamic Republic. I think President Trump should instruct his intelligence community to build a plan so that he has that option. Whether or not he actually operationalizes that, he needs a plan, he needs another option. And even the fact that the Iranian regime knows he has a plan and could operationalize it would give him more leverage if he decides he wants to continue negotiating with this regime to some kind of end state on the nuclear program that he's satisfied with. So, it's been a longstanding theme here at FDD and on this podcast that we need to build these plans.



What Iranians Think About the US-Iran Deal

June 25, 2026

Featuring Mehdi Parpanchi

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And I hope that people listening who are in positions of influence inside the US administration, inside the US military, are building these plans so the president has a full array of options.

PARPANCHI: Mark, I think – I might be wrong, I want to know your view on this as well – I don't think in two months this is going to collapse, because I think on both sides, especially on the US side, the vice president is really capitalizing on this. There is a political investment. I don't think he's going to accept failure, no matter what happens. And I believe Iranians will be very, very careful. They are not going to be faithful to the MOU 100 percent, but at the same time, they will be cautious. What they are looking for is really containing the US government for the next two and a half years until this administration's term has ended. So, they will be careful. And on the other side, because J.D. Vance is really investing on this, and his political future is also kind of dependent on this in his campaign if he runs for president –

I believe – let me put this to you basically, give you an example. If you ask anyone who was involved in the JCPOA, from John Kerry, Rob Malley, President Obama himself and so on and so forth, even up till now, none of them would agree that JCPOA was a bad deal. They will support it because they invested in it and also, they had some sort of an emotional attachment to it. This is going to be the same. Some people will stick to it no matter what. So, I don't really think that in the next two months we are going to see that the negotiations are going to collapse. I think it's going to continue. And especially when you look at the language that the administration is using – let me give you an example. The first article, when you read the MOU, it says, "Iran and its allies" and "the US and its allies."

Who are Iran's allies? Hezbollah is the most important one, and then Iran's other proxies. Who is the US's ally in that MOU? That's Israel. I mean, look at the language. It's equating a member of the United Nations with a number of groups, which are by the way, FTO.

DUBOWITZ: FTO being foreign terrorist organizations designated by the United States, right?

PARPANCHI: Exactly. So, the US government is negotiating with IRGC, which is a foreign terrorist organization based on its own definition, and then signing an MOU, which that MOU puts Israel – a member of the United Nations – equal to Iran's allies, which is Hezbollah. This is important, I think. I mean, it has a political meaning. It reduces Israel to a US proxy. Let's face it, that's what is signed there. And Iran has been arguing for many years, IRGC has been arguing that Israel is a proxy of the US in the region. That's what is in that MOU. So, these are details that one should pay attention to. And also, when you listen to the language that the vice president is using when he talks about Israel, these all have meaning. And I don't think we can ignore this and believe that in two months this is going to fail, because they are kind of giving things away.

DUBOWITZ: So, Mehdi, I think you make a very persuasive case. I do think the MOU is not really seen by the president as a two-month MOU. I think it's a five-month MOU, because I think he needs to get to midterms with oil markets calm, the price of gasoline down, the rate of inflation down, and position himself so that he can keep at least the Senate. And to me, that's why the MOU was reached. I think the president understood that if he didn't reach an agreement that opened up the Strait and got oil markets stabilized by June, then the economic effects wouldn't take place quickly enough to position the Republican Party to hold Congress by November. But I think if we get past November, the president then understands that he's got two years to deal with the Iran issue. Maybe negotiations go well, maybe J.D. Vance convinces the president that it's worth hanging in for another five months or six months and keep negotiating with the regime in Iran.



What Iranians Think About the US-Iran Deal

June 25, 2026

Featuring Mehdi Parpanchi

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I'm deeply skeptical the regime in Iran is going to give up the nuclear concessions that President Trump would deem to be acceptable. I also think President Trump, unlike President Obama, is not invested in the negotiations and not invested in the MOU. And he actually said to Vice President Vance, "If it works, I'll take all the credit. And if it doesn't, you'll take all the blame." And he said that to the vice president, I think partly in humor, but let's face it – President Trump was speaking truth as he sees it. So, I don't believe he's invested in this process. I think he needed the process for political reasons. And I'm deeply skeptical there's going to be Iranian compliance or a final deal that is going to address the nuclear program in ways that the president will be able to defend as being much better than the 2015 JCPOA.

So, I think we get to November or December, and then I think the president faces a whole set of options about what he's going to do about the regime – military, economic, diplomatic. And again, this is why I continue to promote this on this podcast and everywhere else I can, that he needs a plan to support the people, because I think ultimately it is only the people of Iran that can truly cripple this regime and advance American interests. And that's why it's so necessary that the president instruct his team to have a plan that he can actually consider.

PARPANCHI: Maybe. Maybe I would just add a few words about the gas price that you mentioned – that the war was ended because of the gas price and also the energy market and stock market, so on and so forth. The same logic stands after the midterms, because whenever if they go back to any sort of conflict – which I'm skeptical about, but if they do – the same logic applies. And I don't understand how an administration can be worried about gas price and its impact on the elections but not be worried about a population which will see the administration as basically having lost a war, because that's also going to have an impact on the election. Because if you have lost the war and then you are going for an election, I'm not sure if it's going to have a positive impact. But at the end of the day, even if they go back to another round of conflict after midterms, again, the logic of the market is still there, the logic of gas prices is still there.

But the problem here is you are facing a system – a political system, the Islamic Republic – which is fighting to make Allah happy. And then you have on the other hand, another system which is trying to make markets happy. They don't really marry to each other, because at the end of the day, if you try to make markets happy and then you are fighting with the regime which is trying to make Allah happy, then you will end up appeasing the Ayatollah. And that's what we are really facing here.

About the Strait of Hormuz, for instance – what we witnessed here was that for, I don't know, 14 days or something after the war, the Strait of Hormuz was closed and no insurance company really wanted to insure those tankers anymore. No tanker was ready to pass through. Iran is feeling that they won the war, and I believe the US administration allowed this to happen – basically, the US gave the impression to Iran that you won the war. Look at the MOU again, about the Strait of Hormuz. Today – only a few hours ago – we heard from Secretary Rubio saying that Iran cannot have a toll from the Strait of Hormuz because it is against international law. I don't know if you heard it or not, but when you read the MOU, you read that they say it's going to be open for 60 days, not all. After 60 days, Iran will negotiate with Oman and other Persian Gulf countries for a new arrangement. So, if it's against international law, then what kind of new arrangement are we talking about, and why has the US signed a document which basically gives legitimacy to something which, according to Secretary Rubio, is against international law? This is all, as I said, mixed messaging, and this sends the wrong idea to both Iranians and to the media, to commentators, to everybody.



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DUBOWITZ: So, Mehdi, I think you're exactly right. I mean, as somebody who works in the information space, you understand better than most the power of messaging, and certainly I think there's no doubt where the regime in Iran has won – this is through messaging. They've lost badly militarily. They've sustained massive blows to their nuclear and military and missile and defense industrial capabilities, to their leadership, and to their economy, but they've been quite brilliant in playing the fractures and fissures that exist within the American political elite, and certainly being able to leverage the fact that there are many people who opposed Donald Trump and would oppose anything he did. So, I think certainly they've had a messaging victory. I'm actually a little more optimistic on Hormuz. I think Admiral Cooper – the commander of CENTCOM and the US military – was doing actually a very good job quietly moving tankers through the strait and moving five, six million barrels a day.

And I think with more time and with an order from President Trump, we could win the battle of Hormuz militarily, because that actually is the only answer. There is no way that the regime in Iran can emerge with Hormuz extortion, with the ability to be able to extort the global energy markets and the United States of America and our allies by constantly threatening to close Hormuz. And that's exactly what they're going to do, as you alluded to, whether there's a deal or no deal. So they have to be defeated in Hormuz militarily. I think President Trump – I hope after the midterms – will give Admiral Coop that order and the US military that freedom to do so. And then the real question, I just want to end with this, is – because I always want to bring it back to the Iranian people, who have gone through such dashed expectations from "helpers on its way" to a MOU negotiated with their oppressors, where an American president or American vice president is literally in the room with the IRGC shaking hands and negotiating terms –

do the Iranian people, through everything they've gone through, remain committed to the end of the Islamic Republic? Are you optimistic that in our lifetime we will see the end of this regime? I'd always like to end these on an optimistic note. If you're not optimistic, don't pretend to be optimistic. But after covering Iran for all these years, living in Iran for much of your life, are you optimistic about the power of the Iranian people?

PARPANCHI: Yes, I am, definitely, because I believe a regime like the Islamic Republic cannot continue. It doesn't belong to this time, and it doesn't belong to the Iranian people, because the Iranian people – when you look at them in terms of education, worldview, ideology, anything that you basically gauge a nation with, any criteria – this regime does not belong to that country. Everybody understands it. I mean, yes, the regime has support. Nobody claims that they don't enjoy support, but maximum support is maybe 15, 20 percent. And these are the figures that they are saying – it's not just me. So, all we are saying here is that when you have only 15 percent of people supporting you, and the other 75 percent... nobody is saying that that 15 percent should leave the country or be killed or suppressed, but it's not logical to believe that they can continue. I remain hopeful. But if you tell me, how is it going to happen, nobody knows.

I don't think anybody could predict a similar regime – that they used to exist and they are not around anymore. Nobody could predict when and how they were going to end. But we have witnessed throughout the history that these kinds of regimes don't have a long-term life. My worry – and also many Iranians, when you talk to them – is that there might be a deal which will empower the regime and which will even make it last longer. Because let's say there was no war – you could definitely say that the regime would have faced much more trouble because of the massacre that they committed in January, and also the expectation of a war: if it happens, what will happen, so on and so forth. But now that the war has happened, and in my opinion, the US entered this war half-heartedly, basically – when you look at the sequence of events that happened from the start of the war until the 15th of March – on the 15th of March, many things changed.



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I have written about this at length, so I don't want to go into details, but there were five or six elements that completely changed from the 15th of March onwards, and that changed the psychology of the war and the way the US and Israel were prosecuting the war. And from that time on, the IRGC believed that they are going to stay, and that basically changed everything. I don't see there will be another conflict, to be honest with you. But if it happens, I believe they should really think about it thoroughly and know what they are doing. And when you have a plan and do not implement it properly, then everybody will really say that you lost it.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah, I think that's a good cautionary warning, Mehdi. I think we've accomplished much against the Islamic Republic over a number of years, particularly through the Trump administration, but you're right – you can actually achieve great military victories and squander that at the negotiating table. You can implement plans and not follow through, and I think we've got a lot of twists and turns ahead of us. So I look forward to having you back on the show to talk about that as we continue to follow the issue. And thank you, Mehdi. Thank you for your reporting, for your courage, and for everything you do.

PARPANCHI: Thank you so much, Mark.