

## Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes

### **QI Panel:**

Book Talk: Robert Malley on Israel, Palestine, US Complicity, and War with Iran

March 3rd, 2026

12:00 - 1:00 PM ET

### **Trita Parsi**

Good afternoon, and welcome to the Quincy Institute's book talk with Robert Malley, on Robert Malley and Hussein Agha's book, *Tomorrow Is Yesterday, Life, Death and the Pursuit of Peace in Israel and Palestine*. My name is srina Parsi. I'm the Executive Vice President of the Quincy Institute, a think tank in Washington that promotes ideas that move US foreign policy away from endless war and toward rigorous diplomacy. We favor a national security strategy that is centered on diplomacy and military restraint. When we first envisioned this webinar and this book talks weeks ago, we were going to focus on Rob's must read book which draws on decades of intimate experience with official and unofficial negotiations to explain why the Israeli Palestinian peace process repeatedly faltered, why the historic assumptions of Oslo never match the lived realities on the ground, and how successive US administrations help perpetuate a status quo under the guise of ending it.

But since we planned this, of course, Trump has started a war of choice, and since Rob is one of the few people in the United States that knows as much as anyone does about Iran and the United States. We will, of course, take advantage of the fact that we have him and his expertise here to also talk about the current war, where it is going, where it might be leading, and how we got here in the first place, even though it might not sell, help him sell as many as his books. But nevertheless, we really appreciate that Rob is this flexible with us. With me. Here we also have my colleague Khaled. He was one of the foremost experts on Israeli Palestinian conflict, who will join me in moderating this conversation with Rob, both on Iran as well as on his book as usual. Or for those of you are joining us via zoom, use the Q and A function at the bottom of your screen to ask your questions. Those who are watching through Twitter or other platforms, you can use the comment section to also ask your question, and both Khaled and I will do everything we can to make sure that we get to those questions throughout this conversation.

Let me then without any further ado, introduce Rob. Rob Malley is a lecturer and senior fellow at the Yale School, Jackson School. He served as special envoy from January 2021 to April 2023 on Iran. Prior to that, he was the president and CEO of the International Crisis Group. And under President Obama, he held numerous different positions at the NSC, including, of course, being one of the lead negotiators on the 2015 JCPOA. And prior to that, he served in the Clinton administration, in which he also was intimately involved as an advisor to President Clinton on the Israeli Palestinian conflict and its negotiations. So welcome, Rob. Let me start off by asking you a question about a potential parallel that we're now seeing between what you describe in your book, which is a scenario in which largely the Israelis have been in the lead when it comes

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

to defining us strategy and policy and approach towards the Israeli Palestinian conflict, and what we heard yesterday, both from Marco Rubio and from Speaker Johnson, in which they essentially said that their definition as to why Trump decided to enter this war, or start this war, is because it was self defense on the basis that they knew that Israel was going to start this war, and as a result, they thought the Iranians are going to retaliate against the United States as well, and so they took what they describe as preemptive military action against Iran in self defense.

I have not come across a single person who has been convinced by this, particularly mindful of the fact that this appears to then completely outsource decision making to the Israelis, rather than to the President himself. But I wonder your reaction to that, mindful of the fact that you worked so long on Israeli Palestinian conflict, and much of what your book is describing is one in which the United States oftentimes took the back seat to the Israeli decision makers.

### **Robert Malley 4:36**

First want to thank you, Trita and Khaled for having me. I'm going to say I know the Quincy Institute's objective is to end endless war, so all I'll say is, please try harder, because it seems like we're embarking in yet another one. So it's a good question. I want to say, in some ways, I think the reality is both better and worse than what you alluded to. Know that I think it's better. I don't believe, that the US, in this case, on the Israeli Palestinian conflict, is sort of the subject of a nefarious internal lobby or Israelis efforts that make the US simply be dragged into enterprises over which it has no power. The US was not dragged into this war or come into it. They. The US made a conscious decision. And it made a conscious decision, because it decided, at a minimum, not to say no when Israel said it was going to attack Iran. And the same has happened time and again in the Israeli Palestinian conflict. Let's not take away America's agency.

And I think that is in some ways a more cobbling part of the answer, which is that the US has put itself in a position where it believes, successive administrations have believed that it is in US national interest to have this kind of posture in the Middle East, this kind of relationship with Israel and with others, which has led both to the failure of the Israeli Palestinian peace negotiations and now to this yet another potentially endless war in the region. I think that, and I would also combine the fact, and this goes to your point, that the US simply doesn't understand the region as well as it should. It repeatedly gets it wrong, and it gets it wrong in a way that allows itself to, therefore be subject to Israel that knows it much better.

I mean, it knows what it's doing for for more, and it knows what its plans and its objectives are. It had a clear plan when it came to the Israeli Palestinian conflict. It has a clearer plan when it comes to what it's doing with Iran and the US, particularly now with President Trump. When you have on the one side, somebody who has a clear plan, a long term plan about weakening Iran, destabilizing Iran, fragmenting Iran, or at least its regime, and on the other hand, you have an America under President Trump, who is more improvisational, has a

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

plan that changes every day, doesn't really know where it's going. There's no doubt, and there shouldn't be any question as to who ultimately will decide where this goes.

### **Trita Parsi 6:58**

Yeah, responsibility clearly, ultimately lies with the President. He could have easily decided to say no to them, and he actually has shown, perhaps more than President Biden, that he actually does know how to say no to the Israelis when he's to do so. In this case, he clearly did not, and the responsibility lies with them. You said that the Israelis, however, they know the region better, and they know their objectives. In your view, what is the Israeli objective in this war that the United States and Israel has started?

### **Robert Malley 7:26**

Yeah, that. I don't think it's a secret. I think Prime Minister Netanyahu lays it out pretty clearly, although he dissembles quite a bit at the same time. But, and from his perspective, it makes sense, if they could get rid of the regime and put in place a regime that would be much, much more friendly to Israel, that would be ideal. I think they know that that's probably unrealistic. And so, at a minimum, we can destabilize, fragment the country. We hear reports of working with ethnic groups that, again, if you're sitting in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem, and this is near, and you see Iran as a threat or as an enemy or as a hostile entity, that all these steps make sense from Israel's point of view.

I believe they make sense from America's point of view, and even in the long term, may not even make sense for Israel security. But right now, this is Israel applying to Iran. What is it? What is it has applied, particularly after October 7, but even beforehand the many countries and entities in its neighborhood, which is, you mow the lawn, you know, you make sure that there's no ability that they can write. You know, lift the finger to go after you. You mow the lawn repeatedly, and you go after threats imminent or long term, imaginary, pretextual or real. And they've done that in the West Bank, in Gaza, and Lebanon and Syria and now in Iran. So that's their goal. And if they can, you know, they can have an Iran that note that is entirely absorbed by its own problems, that is weakened to the point that it is no longer able to function and govern itself. That would be from, from Prime Minister Netanyahu, is point of view, victory.

### **Trita Parsi 9:02**

You said, though Rob that the Israelis would be happy with either regime change or essentially state collapse, that could lead to secessionist movements, et cetera. Do you think that Trump administration shared that objective? Because now we have just about an hour or two ago, reports that Trump is saying that he is now open to arming groups inside of Iran who want to take up arms against the central government, which seems to stand very, very far away from everything that he was saying prior to this. I mean, I myself under the impression that he really felt that he could wrap this up by Sunday evening by having the regime implode after taking out the supreme leader, but now suddenly he's saying things that you know we certainly did not

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

hear two weeks ago or even five days ago. Do you think the Israelis had a better understanding that this actually is the most likely scenario we would end up in, and that the administration was completely naive as to what they were getting into? Or do you think the administration was actually in line with what the Israelis thought would be likely?

### **Robert Malley 10:03**

Listen, I think, I think the best answer to that is that you have the Alliance, or the combination of one side, the Israeli side, that has a plan of long standing. This is not new. This is something that they were hoping to do at any point that they were able to do it. And obviously the opportunity presented itself now, plan of long standing of destabilizing, weakening, fragmenting Iran combined with an American president who has an impulsive, ever shifting, never, never constant idea of every day, it's a different objective. And so that's I think that combination means that there's very a lot of uncertainty on one side, the American side. At some points, I agree with you. I felt maybe the President had this idea of trying to wrap this up, be able to declare success. He would know success when he sees it, and define his objective, sort of after the fact. And said, that's why I went into this war. And it's done.

And other times it looks like he's prepared to have this go on for weeks and weeks and weeks until the either the regime collapses, or Christ uncle. But again, one side knows where it's going, and the other side of the other party in this alliance seems to be improvising every day, and it's part of a long standing and we'll talk about it when we come to Israel Palestine. So this improvisational not really knowing where you're going, having a broad structural interest, but then the fact that an ad hoc policy on the ground that is not a constant, but it is a long, also a long standing American feature, but in this time, it is really exacerbated by a president whose moods and whose instincts and whose intentions seem to change depending on the time of day that you ask him.

### **Trita Parsi 11:54**

Are you surprised by how the Iranians have responded, particularly the rather fast pace in which they have started targeting all of the GCC us faces in GCC states, etc. Is this the response you expected the Iranians to show?

### **Robert Malley 12:11**

I mean, my view before the war was that everything would depend on how they perceived the objective of the war, which I think they knew was coming, that if it was more or less limited strike that was intended to take out more nuclear missile facilities. They would respond in one way. But if they felt that this was existential, and that this was really an attempt again, either to topple the regime, to destabilize the country, then they they felt probably a that they had much less to lose and be that they had to raise the cost on the American side through one way or another in order to try to end the war more on their terms with the regime surviving than on America or Israel's terms. And so at that point, and it is, it is a very risky move to go after GCC countries,

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

some countries with which Iran had invested a lot to try to normalize, or at least to improve their relations over the last several years. But though that's sort of the soft belly of America's presence in the region, or Americans alliances in the region.

And so once they saw, and, you know, obviously it was evident within the first hours, given the targeting of the Supreme Leader and others, that the goal, from Iran's perspective, couldn't be anything other than to destroy, decimate the regime, which point it really, as I said, it has. It's hardly a sign of desperation. They don't have that many targets from their mind that they could in their mind, that they could really reach. This is one where they could, they could show that they have retaliatory power. And I assume that they hope that some of these GC, GCC countries will turn to President Trump and say, we're with you against Iran when Iran is attacking us, but we can't be with you if you drag this out, because our economies are at stake. Our stability is at stake. It's a risky venture by Iran, because we're hearing more and more GCC countries saying they may join this war, but it gives you the sense the Iranian leaders today feel like they don't have that much to lose. And again, their strategy is externalize the cost. They can't be the only ones who are going to bear the burden and the cost of this war.

### **Trita Parsi 14:07**

On that point that they might join the war. Two questions. One is, what we've seen from the Qataris is that they say that they're defending their airspace and their territory, so they've shot down planes, et cetera. But Majid, sorry, the spokesperson just came out quickly and said they have not joined the war. That's not what they're doing. They're not joining it offensively. They are just defending their own territory. When you say that they joined the war, do you mean that there is a probability that some of them may actually actively join the attacks on Iran rather than just shooting down whatever the Iranians are sending against their territory, and if so, how would that look? What would be the added assets of the Saudis in this war? For instance, if they were to choose to go down that path?

### **Robert Malley 14:50**

Yeah. So it's a fine line. Obviously, if you retaliate and if you try and go after missile sites, I'm not sure how much these countries can add, but you know, they have their own domestic politics. They have their own interest. It's hard for them to not do anything when they're being attacked by Iran. So but you know, this is, again, it's a product of what I think Mark Lynch wrote an excellent book and called America's middle east. It's a product of decades of entanglement of the US with regimes and governments in the region where it's hard for either one to disentangle from the other so you know that Iran is going after countries that that host military American military bases. These countries feel that at some point they have to react, and they react, and they then get embroiled in America's war. So whether it's defensive or not, at some point, and I don't, hasn't happened yet. At some point, I wouldn't rule out that the Emirates, the Saudis, or others, decided they're going to have to retaliate by taking some action against Iranian territory.

### **Trita Parsi 15:47**

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

Khaled, do you want to jump in?

### **Khaled Elgindy 15:49**

Yeah, if I could rob you referred to the soft underbelly of the Gulf states. I'm wondering. You know, since the American security umbrella was essentially another pillar of us Middle East policy, alongside Israel's security. Are we seeing these two now the security umbrella for the Gulf states and and the sort of commitment to Israel? Are these now in conflict with one another? And what does that mean? Do you do you expect the Gulf states to kind of reconsider their their own involvement or their own participation in that security umbrella to you know, they are hosting these US bases. But is that necessarily the case going forward?

### **Robert Malley 16:37**

I mean, it's a great question. It points the paradox of this reliance on what you call the US security umbrella, which is that part of why they are exposed is because they have hosted these bases, but they probably now because they're exposed, are more in need of American protection. You know, this is a structure again. These are structural dynamics that go on, that have that were born decades ago, and which have made both the US and the GCC countries sort of partners in an event in which they don't have the same interests, they don't have the same objectives, but they do seem to be more tied to one another than should be the case. So I don't know how this ends up. B

Because, you know, I don't think coming out of this, GCC countries are going to feel like now they could afford to distance themselves from the US, but at the same time, they must have learned two lessons, one, that this entanglement does expose them, and two, that it doesn't really protect them. I mean, it's not like America is is, and we've seen some reporting on this, that some of the GCC leaders are not particularly happy that most of the interceptors and the defense assets are being used to protect America and Israel, not so much to protect GCC countries. So that does create, again, it's just, it's, it's a fraught relationship, but it's one that has endured, and I suspect it will survive, because of how closely intertwined this structure has, has led their relationship to be.

### **Trita Parsi 18:02**

You mentioned Rob that you know you were taking little bits by surprise. I suspect the US government is taking quite by surprise. I have had conversations just in the leading days before, and folks from the military side who, you know, really discounted the likelihood that this type of response would come from Iran, because it would be suicidal. It would be undermining their relations, in my view, not really grasping the fact that the Iranians would view this as existential, and as a result, all bets are off. But if all bets are off, and if the Iranians succeed in expanding this further, we already seen that they also shot drones or missiles at UK basis in Cyprus. Can we continue to believe that there's no way this would drag in Russia and China, or do we have

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

to start thinking more carefully as to whether, and this is the question is coming from Charlotte Phillips in the audience, as to whether there is some point in which the Russians and the Chinese would, at a minimum, perhaps change some of their rules in the sense that they might start giving something more. What are they giving now?

And how do you see that escalation ladder looking so first, I want to reiterate, I don't think it's surprising. I don't think anyone should have been surprised once it was clear that this war was an existential war for the Iranian leadership, so I suspect that they had pre programmed, sort of they want autopilot, that if the leadership was going to be decimated, decapitated, taken out, this is how they would respond. And I think what is quite extraordinary is to see now the US scrambling to get people out of the region, trying to evacuate embassies and others, which really shows that they had not planned, they had not calculated. They didn't expect Iran to respond this way, which is, again, I find that extraordinary, given that they knew both the timing of the war and the scope of the war.

### **Robert Malley 19:52**

Now you raise a very good question, or the person who raised it about China and Russia, it is you know so far, both in the 12 day war. Or and even if you just look at Venezuela, two cases, where you would expect it Chinese and Iranian and Russian interests to be implicated in a way that they might want to respond, they haven't yet again, I don't know what may be happening that that I'm seeing, and I suspect that that's for two reasons. One, there's not that much they can do that, where they can truly match us firepower. That's number one, I think that's would be a risky endeavor and risky investment. They well, they might just be investing and then lose their investment. And secondly, and this is sort of goes to a broader question, they may not think it's all that bad to see the US yet again, embroiled in a long term war that is not going to really serve American interest, and that in the longer term, may we're down to China's benefit. That's certainly how they read what happened in the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

So I don't know, because this is a, you know, Iran is a different kettle of fish. It's a, it's a country that China has relied on for oil and that Russia has entered into agreements with, and has has China. So it doesn't truly reflect well on the validity and the reliability of having an alliance with them, or having a partnership with them, is when, if, when your regime is is threatened, they can't really do much to help. So I've watched that closely, but at this point, I think they are. They're a bit anxious about getting overly involved when you know they could expose themselves and they could expose their interests, but I think it's a very fair question to see whether at some point they believe their national interests, or at least their strategic interests, are threatened to the point that they have to do more to help, at a minimum, to help the Iranian regime survive.

### **Trita Parsi 21:36**

I'm going to ask you a very unfair question, Rob, but based on the experience you have, you have an understanding of us plans, either the Iran that have existed for a long time, you have an

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

understanding of us, capacity, arsenals, etc, as well as the likely response to the regional states and others. We are now at a point in which, I think the administration did not believe this is the scenario that would be in now, and they're now looking more towards something that looks they're even opening the pathway for US troops on the ground. There may already be some Israeli special forces involved. I'd love to hear your comments on that, based on the idea that, based on the fact that Trump just recently said that he's now looking towards groups inside a country. How does this end? In your estimation, the most likely scenario?

### **Robert Malley 22:28**

So first of all, it's easier to rule out some scenarios which some in the administration may be thinking of. By the way, I would say, I believe that there's some in the administration who were very aware of what where this might lead to, but they knew where the President wanted to go, and he's not a president, and you want to contradict if you want to keep your job. And so I think that that dynamic, I suspect, has been one that has plagued the way the administration has approached this from from day one. I don't think the regime is going to capitulate. I don't think you're going to see them sort of raise the white flag and say, Now we give in to whatever demands there. I don't believe that. I don't believe there's going to be like a delsi Rodriguez kind of outcome in which somebody emerges and says, We're going to now be friendly to the United States, and they could take a percentage of our oil if they want.

And I don't think that you're going to see the regime sort of be replaced by a more pro Western democratic regime of some kind. So it's easier to say. What I don't think is going to happen. What I suspect will happen is that you're going to see it's inevitable that, you know the regime is going to lose some control over the country, and it's subjected to incessant bombardment, some of its assets are going to be depleted over time. So I think you're going to see it's going to be more chaotic. It's going to be more fragmented. I think the regime will survive at least this episode, and it will try, because that's its goal. I mean, its goal at this point is to show at the end of this war that it is still standing, and that the countries that try to go after it have had to swallow their own words, and they're not dealing with it with a fundamentally different leadership. It's different because the supreme you have been killed and others have been killed.

So I think in the short term, what we're going to see is a more fragmented, more chaotic, but still standing regime. That's I'd say, I've heard you also say this. I'm sure for many Iranians in the country, they're looking at this and saying, finally, finally, somebody is punishing our oppressors. And you know what I get? I don't live there. I've not been subjected to the kind of massacres and repression that the Islamic Republic has inflicted on its people. So I'm sure there's a sizable constituency. I can't give a number of percentage. Is it a majority? I don't know. It may well be a majority looks at this and says, at a minimum, this is that they're getting the some accountability. But, but let's be clear, who are the who are the losers in the scenario that I just described, who's going to lose? The top echelon of the regime has already lost because they're dead, or they're about to be killed, and the others who I fear will be the losers are the Iranian people, because they're not going to be liberated. They're being subjected to the bombs that you, that you described, is going to be sort of, you know, obviously. Country is going to be in far worse shape,

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

and at the end of the day, I suspect the leaders who are going to be ruling them are not going to have a much more benevolent attitude towards them than the ones who've just been assassinated.

### **Trita Parsi 25:10**

I'm going to hand it over to Khaled but I just saw one question in the audience. I thought it would be good to ask you before we shifted more to Israel. Palestine conversation is from a senior South African official in the audience who was asking, Is this a US Israeli war, or is there a way for the US to separate itself from this essentially, Can you envision an exit ramp, an off ramp that Trump is willing to take mindful of the fact that this is already costing him tremendously, and it likely will continue to cost him if this never gets to that type of a clean, glorious victory that He is usually desiring?

### **Robert Malley 25:48**

It's a good question. Again, I would say, I mean, the one ray of hope in this, it's the not many, is that the President is a very unpredictable and shifting person, which means, right now, he's making what I consider to be a disastrous decision, but he could wake up tomorrow and decide that he's going to make take it in another direction, and he will define that as what has always been his plan, because he has this ability. Yes, he puts himself in a corner, but he could paint himself right out of it. And then he will know success when he sees it. And he will convince himself and his those who follow him, this is what he was after all along, and the objective will be defined, you know, in hindsight, you know, a post factor. So he has that ability.

And I think who knows whether he decides because of the situation he's in now, which is not the one, as you said, that I believe he predicted he could either decide, I'm going to double down, I'm going to make these people pay, and so the country is going to be sort of flattened. And that's the price, the price they pay for resisting. Or he decides, you know what, I'm going to get out of this and say, I killed the Supreme Leader. Killed Qassem Soleimani, first destroyed for though now I killed, now, I killed the Supreme Leader. What other president in history has ever had that kind of record? And there and so and I avenged the massacre of perhaps 10s of 1000s. Who knows of Iran it which I said I would do, that's mission accomplished. And if Iran ever believes that it can reconstitute its nuclear program or anything else, I could always strike them again. And he could come out if he feels that this is costing him, either politically or for any other region, he has that ability which other presidents, paradoxically wouldn't have, whether he'll take that road or not, I really don't know.

### **Trita Parsi 27:24**

Thank you Rob, Khaled?

### **Khaled Elgindy 27:27**

## Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes

Yeah, thanks. I mean, in a lot of ways, this next segment is really a continuation of the same kind of discussion, since we're talking about the US role, role in the region and its many shortcomings. So once again, your book is tomorrow, is yesterday, life, death and the pursuit of peace. And in Israel, Palestine. And you know, as you know, there are quite a few, there's no shortage of peace process books out there, or even post mortems on the peace process.

But your book is different in that you know, a lot of analysts will focus on the parties as primarily, you know why the peace process failed is because of one or both of the parties. And, of course, you also, I think, assess the the failings of of Israelis and Palestinians. But what makes your book different is really in focusing on the role of the United States and its failure in the in the peace process. I'm wondering if you could tell us, I mean, this is rare, especially coming from a former US negotiator. Why is it that you think the United States bears the lion's share, lion's share of of the blame for the failure of the ISRAEL PALESTINE peace process? And you describe a kind of three stage, three stages of failure. If you could elaborate on that in the process.

### **Robert Malley 29:04**

Yeah, so first, I will sort of nuance that a bit. I'm not sure that Hussein and I would say that the US bears the lion's share. Obviously, the Israelis and Palestinians are directly responsible, so they bear most of the of the blame. But I do think, you know, here's particularly after the the end of the Cold War, where the US was the superpower unrivaled and so unmatched, unchallenged, and at least under President Clinton, and then to some extent under President Bush and President Obama, that we could debate what extent they decided trying to reach peace between Israelis, or they announced, trying to reach peace between Israelis and Palestinians is one of our priorities, is one of our objectives.

And when you look at what happened between 93 of obviously 2023 but even before that, you could see that in almost by almost any metric, the situation between Israelis and Palestinian is worse, and we're farther away from this illusory two state solution than we were by far in 1993 and so at a minimum, this mismatch between, between power and the stated intent of the US and the results of the grounds makes you wonder, why did it? Why did the US deal with it so poorly? Or did it deal with it the way it wanted to deal with it, and was not really saying the truth, at least at some point, along the line about its desire to see a fair, comprehensive resolution to the Israeli Palestinian conflict. And so what we write in terms, when we speak about the US, we say, yeah, the stage of the US, the life of a US. Failure comes in stages, first comes the failure.

And again, the failure is amply demonstrated when you wrote book, which I make a plug for blind spot, which is another great book about American involvement. I mentioned bark Lynch, I'll plug yours. But so there is the failure, the failure which is based on which is both a reflection of these blind spots, this inability to understand the region, also of national interests which are at odds with a stated intent. And we could get into that at length as to how US is pursuing a policy which is really not in which reaching peace between Israel and Palestine is actually not the priority. So first comes the failure. Then comes the lie. When we, you know, they say, well, in

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

fact, we're close to it, or we're achieving it, or we're trying as hard as we can, you know, we're working day and night for for the actually, I'm sorry, let me restate it. The second stage is the report before the lie comes, the repeat, the repeated failure. So you fail once, and you double down and you try to enact the same policy and it failed again.

So you double down on how you negotiate between Israelis and Palestinians, or how you try to do regime change, and after and when the failure recurs, then comes the lie, when American policy makers have to either dissemble by saying, Well, this was our goal all along, or we're getting close to it. And that's where, as I said earlier, the most obvious or glaring the seat was when the US under the Biden administration was saying we're working day and night for a ceasefire, even as they were arming those who are ensuring that the fire would not end. So that's sort of a recurring cycle of failing, repeating the failure, and then lying about it. And it is, you know, unfortunately, it's bipartisan, and it transcends the generations.

### **Khaled Elgindy 32:23**

Yeah, and I just want to quote a line from from the book, because in addition to being highly incisive, I think the book is just superbly well written, and I highly recommend it. It's just a great read on its own, but, but you have this quote that is really powerful, and that is, you say the lie is born of failure and blooms as the failure recurs. I wanted, I wanted to sort of follow up on that and ask, was the Oslo process and or the two state solution kind of doomed from the beginning, or could it have succeeded with, you know, more effective American mediation?

### **Robert Malley 33:09**

And good question again, and with which Hussein and I have, you know, have had many debates, and I'd answer it in two ways. One level, it is possible that with a sturdier American hand, a greater understanding of the perspectives, not just of the Israeli side, but also the Palestinian side, understanding where both were coming from, and being able to steer the parties in ways that, as Trita was mentioning earlier, the US has not done. Certainly has not steered the Israeli side in ways that are consistent with its America's own stated objective. So that's so it's possible. I don't know that. It's very hard to think of counterfactuals, as we say in the book. There are so many instances in which people thought the alignment of Stars was more or less there, and then it fails for one reason or the other. Arafat wasn't prepared. Barack was too stubborn. Olmert was on his way to jail. Clinton was too soft, whatever.

But at some point you have to say, Well, wait a minute, if it's taken with all these iterations, all these efforts and it has failed, it's something more is deeper, and part of the what is deeper is, as we argue, that ultimately reaching Israeli Palestinian peace may not have been a core American was not for American strategic interest, but more more, perhaps even more, fundamentally, and this is another big part of the book, is that this was the attempt to forge a two state solution. Was based on a misunderstanding and misdiagnosis of what the Israeli palestin called it was about. It was not born in 1967 when Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza. It's not going to be resolved simply by drawing a line on the map and saying, Okay, this is the parts

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

of the West Bank you Palestinians could keep. This is a small parts, or the parts of Jerusalem where you can have your capital. And here the security arrangements, and we'll find some tidy answer to the refugee question. It's much deeper than that. It's more historical. It's more emotional. It goes to the core of what the Zionist movement movement is about, and what the Palestinian national movement is about.

And both of them were born far before 1967 and so this effort, which is a very American and foreign, led effort to tell the parties this is how it's going to be resolved, through ethno national division, partition between two entities. And we're just going to, as I say, draw a line on the map as it all the other issues that we mentioned, refugees, 1948 Israel's desire to be recognized as a Jewish state. It's fear of the Born of history of persecution of the Jewish people and the Holocaust, the Palestinian history of dispossession and expulsion and ethnic cleansing, as if all those things you could sweep under the rug and say, We're gonna have a clean, technical solution, and then we may deal with those of those, all those other issues, when, in fact, those issues are the conflict that needs to be resolved.

So whether two state solution was possible or not, you know what? At some point maybe, I think it was always a long shot and it wasn't the answer to the real conflict between Israel and Palestinians. But I think I could say with some certainty, and I know that you agree that at this point it's two states, or anything that you and I would call a two state solution with a genuine, meaningful, sovereign Palestinian state that is no longer or is, if it were ever was it is no longer possible.

### **Khaled Elgindy 36:13**

Great. And I do want to talk about alternatives in a in a minute. But your chief argument seems to me that part of the failure was in recognizing the historical factors. Right? Talk about 1948 not 1967 and also the psychological dimension was missing from from the process, existential fears, historical narratives, those sorts of things. And so you write behind every behind every step and every concession lies, histories, irrevocable judgment, decisions came less easily with such weight on their shoulders, again, beautifully written. Why? Why was that so essential? And why do you think the United States or American negotiators were incapable or simply ineffectual in in grasping the historical weight?

### **Robert Malley 37:15**

Yeah, so first, you know, again, part of it was because they probably didn't care enough about the issue. And as we quote is one of the lawyers for the American team, Jonathan Schwartz, was this brilliant man and who, at the end of the Camp David summit, when we're doing the post mortem, and we were trying to figure out what had gone wrong, he said we didn't take the issues seriously enough. The Americans simply didn't take this seriously enough. So that's one dimension, but the other one is, I'll quote you again, blind spot. It's the inability to comprehend sort of that other people actually are people. And they have, you know, they're not. There's not a computer game. It's not an artificial intelligence. And you could just put on a map and decide

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

what, what's going to meet their interest that people are adding. That's what distinguishes us so far from artificial intelligence, and that people are motivated by emotions, by pride, by anger, by fear, by yearnings, and to make the rapprochement with the early discussion.

And really, I think it was so revealing the moment that Steve Woodcock, the envoy who was negotiating with Iran, said, and he was purporting to reflect what the President thought, that they were just confounded that Iran would not simply capitulate when there was also this Omar that was that was on that coast, and all they needed to do is basically give in to American demands. And I think, you know, that was a microcosm and heightened form of so much of what I've seen over the years of America, of American, not all Americans, but a number of Americans, particularly some senior officials, who didn't take the time to understand that other people also driven by emotion. It's not fanaticism. It's not sort of, you know, they're not that they're crazy, but we all that's what motivates all of us.

And so in the case of the Palestinians, yes, I get it that some people said, I've heard, actually Trump administration, senior Trump administration official in the first Trump administration at one point, asked to see me, and he said, I don't get it. Palestinians, okay, they're not going to get everything they want. They're not going to get a capital in Jerusalem. They're not going to get the right of return. They're not going to get, you know, any self defense, military defense. But they're going to get more money, and they're going to get a better material life if they accept, you know, what was then called the peace to prosperity plan, again, as if we Americans that we too could be if somebody told us just, you know, sell yourself just to the higher bidder, but give up whatever you hold dear and historical and emotional and and what makes your identity but so, and I see this so often. It is, again, sometimes magnified with the Trump administration, which thinks that, you know, you build the Riviera in Gaza, you offer Iran, sort of, the ability to sell its oil. You offer North Koreans this El Dorado, and that they will all come and beg for that deal. It usually doesn't work that way.

And you know, there may be some exceptions, and maybe people in say, conditions of despair might agree, but that's not the way human history has worked so far. And that's part of my answer to your question, is that not understanding what drives people, what motivates them, makes it very hard to get them to stop fighting for what they care for.

### **Khaled Elgindy 40:17**

So I'm going to push back a little bit and ask you, do you think it's is it really true that the US decision makers were equally unaware of or equally not tuned into each side's kind of historical narratives?

### **Robert Malley 40:40**

No, I don't think. I think people who listen to me over the years, no, and I know the examples that I would I think we mentioned it in the book, but I certainly have mentioned it, that we mentioned it since is during Camp David. It is clear, absolutely clear. And that's that we could

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

talk about after Camp David as well. We could talk to up to today, that there's a greater familiarity with sympathy, for understanding of empathy for the Israeli narrative. Now that's or I'm not, I don't even cast blame on it. That's just a fact, right? I don't think anyone in their right mind could deny that. And so when the Israelis make, you know, when they make a concession, and their concession is that they're going to, quote, unquote, give back 8090, 95% of the West Bank that is viewed in American eyes as an extraordinary act of generosity, right? And that's what happened after Camp David, that how could the Palestinians not accept that? Right? I mean, they lost the war. They lost everything. So they're going to get and when, when ARPA tells President Clinton, you know what, I'm prepared to accept Israeli sovereignty on Israeli settlements, what Israel called neighborhood of East Jerusalem.

The president dismisses it and says, what else are you going to do you have? I mean, that's not a concession, but I and I could give you 1000 examples of and it may sound trite and trivial, but it's not because it shows how you view one side as making a concession, and the other side is being flexible. Again. Just think about the way the US has dealt with Iran, the Iranian regime, over the this this negotiation, but probably more it's not understanding that there's something that you may view as a concession, which they may view as not, and other things that you may view as inflexible, ideological rigidity, which just reflects, you know, aspirations, national aspirations, or, in case of the Palestinians, national aspirations that they're not going to simply do away with because America tells them to.

So I'm not, you know, again that would be, I think would be, an absurd claim that US is equally empathetic, or understanding or misunderstanding of both sides. It is a history of familiarity and empathy for one which just simply has not existed for the other. And you know the whole narrative, and I'll stop here, but the whole narrative of the Palestinian missed opportunities assumed a certain historical position about whether they were opportunities and whether they should have been viewed as opportunities by the Palestinians at the time.

### **Khaled Elgindy 42:36**

Trita, do you want to jump in?

### **Trita Parsi 43:10**

Sorry, I'd love to jump in with that question. And later on, I realized that there's a very important wrong question that I forgot to ask. I'll take that at the end. But let me first say this, I really also thoroughly enjoyed the book, and it's not just all of the analysis, etc. A lot of these personal sides of your story that I personally was not aware of. I did not know you were hanging out with Arafat at age 17, for instance, you've had a front row seat to this for a very, very long time, which I think puts you in a rather unique situation. At the end of the book, though, I don't get a sense that you're really landing on any particular preference, or even any particular prediction of what is more likely to work.

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

You're not very optimistic about two states. You're at the same time, not throwing your weight entirely behind a one state or a variation of a one state reality. One thing I wanted to question, which also kind of brings it back a little bit to Iran. Oslo, from the outset, was intertwined with the US Iran policy. Martin Indic made it very clear the whole thinking was, you combine the Oslo process and dual containment, the containment of Iran and Iraq. And the argument was, the more you isolate Iran, the more you can make peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The more you make peace between the Israelis and Palestinians, the more isolated Iran and what later on emerged as the Axis of Resistance would become.

So these two things were intertwined, which also meant that Oslo was meant to create a bifurcated Middle East. It was not an effort to just resolve the Israeli Palestinian issue towards a two state, but also to help it reinforce a scenario in which the region was divided. In the sense that the organizing principle was to get much of the region to isolate the two countries at the time in the 1990s which was Iran and Iraq, and later on, that principle has survived. It was at the very center of the Abraham accord, at the better order process project at Quincy. We had a different approach. We're thinking that perhaps two states is still possible, but it should be intertwined with a regional architecture that would be fully inclusive. Israel also must be included in that regional security architecture. And any other state that wants to be in there also has to accept that Israel needs to be included.

But the ticket price for the Israelis to actually be able to be included is for there to also be a Palestinian state in existence. The architecture would be moving forward being created, the Israeli would actually see what they're missing out, but the door would always be open to make sure that they could be included, but it required them to make the concessions that are necessary to live up to international law, the principles of international law, ending the occupation, and that way actually flip the principle behind the Oslo process, which is based on the idea of isolating other countries. Here's it's based on the idea that, let's find a way to completely include Israel in the security architecture, but the ticket price is a Palestinian state. Want to get you a quick reaction to that.

### **Robert Malley 46:23**

So I have many questions in that. I'm not sure that I could answer one, but I'll make a few points, and I'll try to answer your broader question. First, you asked about, you know, what is we don't offer a solution. That's true. I mean, I have my own preference. I'm sort of my ethics and my moral compass. Say what I want. I don't really care how they portion statehood, one state, two states, three states. For we what matters that everyone living between the river and the sea has equal rights, equal political, civil, economic rights, that. And so that's my, my North Star. But we don't offer certainly, a prediction, because it, you know, I think it would be a bit of a blueprint, because I think that would be the height of hubris, you said, and I've been associated for decades, and him for longer than me, with the attempt to reach a two state solution. It failed. We're not now going to say, here's trust us. We have the next best thing. And right now, at this point, it's just so disconnected from reality, because, you know, the asymmetry of power and where the Israel is going doesn't lend itself to any talk about of a solution, or at least a

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

negotiated and an acceptable one by both sides. Second point I make is you're absolutely right that the logic, and this goes to my answer to Khaled about what was motivating us, policy was not a desire. And I'm not saying they didn't want it, but the core national security interest was we need was not we need peace between Israel and Palestinians. It was always derivative of other goals. Yes, ensuring the survival of the Jewish state. Yes, isolating Iran. Yes, defeating Islamists, whether they're radical Islamists in the region or in or in Palestine, those were the objectives.

And, you know, working towards a two state solution seemed to be enough to, you know, to advance those objectives, you didn't really need to reach that solution. And from Palestinian ears, I'm sure it didn't sound and Khaled could speak to this. It didn't sound particularly convincing to hear Americans say we need two states because we need to protect the Jewish state and because we need to defeat Iran, or because we need to defeat Hamas. It's not the most compelling case that you're going to make way to trying to convince the Palestinians that you understand what their fight is about.

On your last point, if I understand that, listen, I do think that if at one point they have been or they will be the two states, which, again, I'm very skeptical of, but if they were, I do think that could be a ticket, as you said, for a different security architecture in the region. I'm not sure it truly addresses the Iran question. That's where I get I need to throw the question back to you. I mean, Iran's beef with the US and Israel has not been the absence of a two state solution. In fact, they've never really claimed that they're in favor of a two state solution, even though at one point they voted in the Organization of Islamic problems, of Islamic states for for Arab Peace Initiative. But so maybe I do think there's a issue about Iran, Israel, the United States, which I don't think would have been resolved by this. So maybe I will throw the question back to to understand better, what what you had, or what Quincy had in mind.

### **Trita Parsi 49:15**

Well, the premise of the reasoning there was that at the end of the state such as Iran. Of course, this may now have changed in the last week in a dramatic way, but much of the motivation for them was actually the containment and the acceptance of their role and standing in the region. They have been excluded from all alliances in the region, and it's been very clear that they've been trying to get a way back in, and they use their influence either through the legitimate avenues that are available to them, if they are and if not, they use the legitimate avenues. But the acceptance and inclusion, I think, has been a central objective, and here they would achieve that, but the ticket price for Iran would be you have to accept Israel as well, and it would essentially be a massive compromise from all ends and and instead of using the Israeli Palestinian conflict in the manner that the US has done, which is to pursue other objectives towards isolating other countries, they would actually be aimed at bringing the region together and perhaps even more importantly, take the US out of the leadership role of this.

### **Robert Malley 50:19**

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

So I was, I think there were certainly better ways to try to deal with better ways than dual containment, better ways than the sanctions policy towards Iran. I don't know if we differ on this, but I do think that the ideology of the Islamic Republic is not simply a matter of symbol. I think there's nearly whole and deeply held beliefs by some of the leadership, and that is opposition as maybe this is what you mean, opposition to a US led Middle East, and opposition to Israel and those so I don't, I don't take not one who thinks, you know, Israel should just understand that Iran is not, is not, doesn't have any enmity. Yes, it does. There's no doubt about it. I do think there are better ways to try to construct a security architecture in which, rather than isolating, sanctioning Iran, you try to find, like the JCPOA, different means of engaging it and hoping and hoping, hoping it's not not a bit, but hoping that over time, it changes the dynamics.

But I once described this as sort of macabre dance in which Iran is animated by its own grievances and ideology, and you know, everything else that the Islamic Republic has about the US led order in the Middle East and Israel that then gets in any, you know, sort of exacerbated by the response, or by what if not necessary, I know who started it, but by a US policy which consists in encircling, sanctioning and and trying To isolate Iran, which again, just exacerbates on Israel, on Iran's side, the notion that they need to resist, they need to fight back, and they need to, they need to double down on their own policies. And so that has been an extremely negative dynamic, and I think from a US interest point of view, one that has been extremely self defeating in the long term.

### **Khaled Elgindy 52:01**

So I have a few more questions, and I know we have just eight minutes left, so I'm hoping we can get through these rather efficiently. So I want to ask you about October 7. I mean, as your book is not just about the past, but it's about the present, especially since in the last two and a half years. And as far as I can tell, your book offers I think, one of the most incisive and dispassionate, even clinical treatments of the events on and since October 7 that I've come across. You write October 7 and the furious reactions it unleashed removed layers and cobwebs of untruths about the Israeli Palestinian conflict and exposed its raw, original core.

I wholeheartedly agree, but I want to ask you specifically about the US role since October 7, one of the things that I find really remarkable is how we have two different presidents with very different worldviews and approaches to geopolitics, who more or less end up pursuing similar courses of action, and that is virtually providing virtually unlimited support for Israel. Now maybe you disagree with that, but at its essence, the basics were the same, the weapons to destroy Gaza and Gaza and so forth, and sort of green lighting Israeli escalations beyond Gaza, Lebanon, and then in Iran, we saw both administrations kind of do that. First, do you agree? And second, how would you assess Biden's handling of this issue? Post 10/7 Gaza, Biden versus Trump?

### **Robert Malley 53:47**

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

Yeah. So listen, there is continuity, no doubt. I mean, I think it would be dishonest not to say that, but where the differences are, and they cut both ways. I think whatever blank check was given was blander in the Trump's case, I mean, he really was not interested at all in mitigating once the cease the first ceasefire had broken down, or the Israel had violated it. There was no attempt by President Trump to do anything to restrain Israel. There was some attempt on President Biden's part. We could get back to that in a second. But I do think, on the one hand, yes, the blander check when it came to President Trump, but belong. President Trump did something that Biden administration never did, which is it sort of forced a real end of the worst part. Again, I wouldn't really call it a ceasefire, but the worst part of the slaughter.

Now, part of it was circumstance, and part of it is that when President Trump told Prime Minister Netanyahu that it was over, he meant, and I don't think that Prime Minister Netanyahu is going to play games with him, and it's more complex than that, but I do, and by the way, as part of that ceasefire deal, President Trump would prepare to open direct talks with Hamas, something that none of his predecessors, certainly not President Biden, but not even President Obama would have dreamt of. He never would have thought that could be politically sustainable or survivable, and President Trump did it. So I give him some minor Well, I give him credit for ending, as I say, the worst of the slaughter and putting some pressure on Israel, and understanding that if you're going to make peace between two parties, or at least try to reach some kind of modicum of calm. Again, I put that in quotes. You need to talk to both sides.

So I think that's, that's the picture now, President Biden, yeah, again, I've been quite revocable about in the book, and since, I think it's, it was, it's, it's something, it was a shameful approach after October 7. I mean again, as I said earlier, you cannot, on the one hand, say that you're working day and night to reach a ceasefire and not do any not do what it would take to make that ceasefire come to pass. It just doesn't pass muster with anyone. That's what we say in the book, that when President Trump was elected, it was somewhat among some Arabs a sigh of relief, at least spares the hypocrisy. If you're going to support, you know, the this onslaught on Gaza, then at least have the, you know, have the decency not to pretend to care, not to pretend that you're trying to end it, and that, I think is really something that has scarred is our public opinion, but I would suspect actually international public opinion about America and that happened. It started off on President Biden's watch. And I think that's something that is that they're going to, you know, they have to live with, and America is going to have to live with, because it really shattered whatever was left of the sense that actually the US meant what it said when it spoke about norms and values. Again, that was deeply eroded. But I think it away with any vestige that might have been left.

### **Khaled Elgindy 56:44**

So Rob, I want to ask you if I could one one final question. I'm going to turn it over to Trita to ask his last question. You write, what's the what the United States has done militarily and so egregiously since October 7, it had done politically and more subtly multiple times prior, and did at Camp David criticize with one hand Israeli policies, it enabled with the other the dynamic you

## Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes

just described. I see this basically as a function of the special relationship between the United States and Israel. Now it wasn't always the case that the special relationship was synonymous with providing unconditional, uncritical, reflexive support for anything Israel does. But that seems to be where things have landed. Why do you think that's the case? Why has that? Why has the special relationship become so much more special and so much more unconditional? And do you think now, especially in light of Iran, is it time to reconsider and maybe even think about ending this special relationship?

### **Robert Malley 57:48**

I don't know. I know we don't have much time, but obviously it's an important question. I think it's a combination of two dynamic, two dynamics that change evolve over time. On the one, as I said earlier, is how important is it to the United States, perhaps, to reach its objective through pressure on Israel, and certainly from the time that I started getting more directly involved, after the end of the Cold War in the early 90s, as I said earlier, the strategic interest was maintaining American primacy, ensuring that the US was the key interlocutor, not only of Israel, but of Arab countries, that there was no competitor, and that fundamental US strategic interest in the region were promoted and protected, and the US discovered or found out that they could do that by maintaining absolute support for Israel, having a peace process that would go on, but not in a way that endangered that relationship with Israel, but made our countries turn to the US for its own to say, we need your help to move this this bicycle, keep this bicycle moving, and everyone has sort of a coincidence of interest. The US looked like it was making an effort. It maintained close ties to Israel. Our country still look to the US, and no other country could interfere. So that level. So that's number one that it served, ultimately, for all the talk about we need a two state solution. We need peace. The US was satisfied with this condition of looking like you're moving towards peace but not getting there.

And on the other hand, we haven't spoken about it is a domestic equation. And the domestic equation, at least until recently, was that an American president paid a price whenever they were seen seen as putting pressure on Israel, and didn't pay a price if they were seen as putting pressure on the Palestinians. There was no cost on one side and it was all costs on the other. And so if you combine those two where strategic interests are not really aligned with kind of push to sort of pressure Israel and see how far you can go, and who knows how far pressure would have led. And on the other hand, this genuine, at least perceived domestic costs, when it's not that surprising that that's the answer you get.

And I, you know, by the way, I mentioned an episode with President Obama at the end of his presidency where he took his team and he said, you know. So people are say, oh, Netanyahu is leading Israel to suicide, and he's being irrational and he's being illogical. Why is he doing this? And President said, No, Prime Minister, Netanyahu is being entirely rational, tiny logical. He doing what he's serving his and what he sees as Israel's interest. The illogical side, the people who are irrational us, those in America who think that Israel is simply going to change course, because we ask them to. So again, that's the is the we don't put that kind of pressure because we don't see the strategic interest and we see the political cost. And I think that until that

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

changes, it will be perpetuated. It does raise the question about changes on a domestic scene, which I suspect we don't have time to get into, but that is an interesting new feature of this whole sort of puzzle that I painted, which is there's new voices, both in the Democratic and the Republican Party. Some of them are clearly anti semitic, but much of it is not. And that might start questioning not just our relationship to the region, our relationship to Iran, to the Gulf countries, to Israel, and hopefully in healthier ways.

### **Trita Parsi 1:01:04**

Thank you, Rob. I know we're out of time, but I do have to ask this question, my apologies that I'm asking for more of your time and others, and hopefully we'll be quick. You were there on 20 for 2015 for the negotiations with Iran that led to the JCPOA. You were the lead when Biden tried to get back, although we can talk about the board there, try to but nevertheless, you saw what offers were on the table. What could be achieved, what could not be achieved. You listen to what the Omani foreign minister said in his interview with CBS, saying that the Iranians had agreed to essentially go down to zero stockpile, and also other details of it, I don't know if he mentioned in that interview is that they would only enrich for needs, and the only two needs they would have is a reactor that is that on line for another seven years, and the other one is a trr, for which they already have fuel pads that you know, last for another five to seven years.

So the effective would be zero enrichment from the Iranian side, or five or so years before they would start enriching again under these control circumstances, could any of the deals that you were considering, envisioning, thinking were plausible, reach that level was this far stronger than what Obama or Biden could have achieved, that Trump nevertheless chose to reject and instead choose war?

### **Robert Malley 1:02:18**

So it's a good question. And again, you say we don't have much time. I think I don't know exactly what happened, because what the Omanis have said is what the Wall Street Journal, Lawrence Norman has a different version. We've heard, what Steve Witkoff has said. I for me. So I don't know exactly what the Iranians put on the table, but everything I've heard, I still believe, based on that, that the Iranians were prepared to put on the table and to agree to something that was stronger, quote, unquote, better than the JCPOA. Now for logical reasons. Number one, nuclear program had been, if not obliterated, had been devastated by American strikes.

And number two, yeah, they had a gun to their head, which was telling them, if you don't accept, if you don't build a bomb, well, if you build a bomb, will strike you. They're saying, If you don't accept zero enrichment, will strike you. So that made them think somewhat differently. I think it does have that kind of leverage. Does have an impact. It doesn't need them to surrender, but they agree, from what everything I understand, they were prepared to suspend enrichment. I think the Americans have even said that they were prepared to maybe even have more intrusive

## **Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

inspections. What they were prepared to do in the long term, I don't know. I suspect they were not prepared to give up on their claims they had the right to a civil nuclear enrichment program.

But again, I think where I would agree fully with what you said is that if president's objective was to get a deal that he could credibly say, and I think all of those who participate in the negotiations for the JCP would have said, and would have said loudly, that he reached a better deal. I think it was at hand. I think he chose not to, because that was, if not never. It certainly was not his prime objective, because he proved, and every reporting shows that he that long ago, the negotiations were sideshow. The military buildup was the real thing.

### **Trita Parsi 1:04:00**

Thank you so much, Rob for this excellent conversation. Thank you, Khaled for helping to moderate this. To all of you who have joined us, thank you for joining if you haven't already, please sign up for our mailing list at [Quincy inst.org](http://Quincy inst.org) so you get invitations for all of our future events and our publications. Thank you all again. This will be uploaded on YouTube within the hour, I believe. Thank you all again

**Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

**Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**

**Uncorrected Transcript: Check against Video for Quotes**