

What is the endgame in the Middle East?

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Is there a path to peace in the Middle East? In this video, admittedly made before this weekend's attacks by the USA, but which do not in any way change the key message, I unpack the issues and suggest that current leadership is failing.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_UUJusupiQI?si=r_PN-usXkUR8RKia

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=wwf3k-18e3940-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=auto&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

This is the transcript:

What is the end game in the current Middle East crisis?

Let's not deny we have a crisis. It's been developing in Gaza for two years and, well, since 1947.

The Israeli-Iran conflict now going on is obviously a massive escalation, and we have uncertainty on where the US is going and for how long.

The point is, we are therefore seeing the escalation of war, emanating from Israel in the

first instance in every case, and the end game isn't clear.

What is obvious is that Benjamin Netanyahu is incredibly good at creating conflict, but what nobody knows is where these conflicts end.

He might say, and he does say, that his goal in Gaza is to eliminate Hamas, but Hamas is a culture within some parts of the Palestinian community. He can't get rid of an idea any more than he can eliminate the idea of Palestinian nationhood; people have the belief in that nationhood, they are Palestinian by choice. They ethnically believe that is what they are. So he can't end that by a war.

And it's very clear from commentary coming, even from within the USA, that there is no way in which a war against Iran can result in a successful regime change. Let's be honest, President Macron has said this. He has said that regime change in Iran, if that is the goal that Israel has, and the goal which the US might share with it, is going to lead to crisis, chaos and uncertainty on a scale which is utterly unacceptable.

And we've seen this before. Let's be clear. It happened in Iraq. The aim there was regime change, and it happened. But we hardly solved the problems that Iraq faces, nor did we liberate the people of Iraq to choose their own future, any more than we might, I'm afraid, not liberate the people of Iran to choose their own future if it is imposed externally. That is not a route to peace.

Nor is there any military way at present of eliminating Iranian nuclear resources if that is what the goal is. We were succeeding with that goal until 2018, under agreements to regulate, monitor, and control those weapons. It's Trump who abandoned that, and now we face the consequences.

So, the point I'm suggesting is that, actually, what we are seeing is a situation where Netanyahu is totally politically cornered and legally exposed on so many fronts that it's almost impossible to count them. And Trump is excited by the possibility of war, but that's because he doesn't really understand US diplomacy. But what we actually need is an agenda for peace because all we are currently seeing is fascists in alignment against the possibility that we can have a peaceful outcome.

And other regional powers are looking for that outcome.

Let's be clear about this. The players I've already mentioned are basically Israel, the USA, France and other European powers. But let's also bring into the scene Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt. They all have roles to play, and all of them have opinions on the issues that are going on.

Turkey is vehemently anti-what is happening in Israel.

Egypt is treading a careful line around Gaza, but clearly wants a rebuilding process to take place.

Saudi Arabia and Iran have been implacably opposed to each other for decades - centuries - because of their adherence to different types of Islam, but they too have opinions to take into account. So there is no one solution here.

There is only the idea of diplomacy. And what that diplomacy has to lead to is, first of all, a genuine ceasefire; not a surrender, because a surrender is not an acceptable option for Iran, and it's not an acceptable answer, of course, for Gaza. And it isn't language that Israel would want to use either. So it has to be a situation where change is created by diplomatic discussion.

There has to be real reconstruction at the core of that for Gaza.

There has to be a solution for the problems of the West Bank, and there is no doubt, as a result, that Israel is going to have to back down and find new solutions, because let's also be honest, Netanyahu is one of a group of very old men who are heading many of the countries involved in this dispute, and they are against the general prevailing norms.

Polls show that most people want peace and justice in the Middle East.

Palestinian statehood is very popular around the world, including in countries which are denying it, like the UK.

Civilians everywhere are the hostages to failed leadership in that case.

I'm not belittling the hostage dispute that is going on in Gaza by saying that.

I'm also not belittling Israel's holding of Gazans in Israeli jails by saying that.

I'm saying we are being failed by our leadership, who are trying to force us into positions of hostility, which none of us want to be in.

Real peace means listening to people, everywhere. Not just generals, and not, most especially, ageing politicians.

So, the US must now push for a ceasefire, and it must now push for a permanent settlement.

Shuttle diplomacy has to be back on the agenda, and the recognition of Palestine as a state is absolutely essential by everyone, including those countries that have been holding back, like the US and the UK.

It is possible to recognise Palestine as a state because countries like Spain, Ireland, and Norway have done it. We know that this is possible, and what we have to do is talk about a new relationship between partners who are going to be sustainable. All of them, of course, including Israel, absolutely fundamentally including Israel, but in

relationships which can be maintained.

And that does, of course, require that Iran complies with the requirements of the agreements that it signed more than a decade ago, to regulate its nuclear industry, which Donald Trump abandoned, and it does require that Israel also sign up to nuclear non-proliferation treaties because they have refused to do so to date, indicating just how partisan their situation is.

But bombs aren't the solution to these problems in the Middle East.

It's been said before, and no doubt it will be said again, but the point is that just because it's been said before and it hasn't happened, doesn't mean to say it isn't the right way to go: peace has to be the goal for the Middle East. There can't be anything else.

And in the absence of any other agency able to assist that delivery, the UN must also be involved in these issues because they have the capacity to provide peacekeeping troops, borrowed from other nations. But they are, and it has worked in so many territories, and they can call out what is going on if things go wrong. So, multilateral talks are required. The UN is the only agency capable of delivering that at the end of the day.

And peace is not naive.

It's necessary.

Escalation now would be failure.

Negotiation is leadership.

Recognising Palestinian rights is central to finding a solution, but so too is recognition that Iran can choose its own leaders, even if we don't like who they are, and we don't like the way in which they emerge. We have to live with the reality that there are multiple ways in which governments are created, and by no means all of them are very good, including, let's be honest about this, some of those in democracies, in the countries that are supposedly imposing solutions here.

We must reject endless war, and we must choose a better future. And the only way in which we can do that is by finding a pathway to peace.

Taking further action

If you want to write a letter to your MP on the issues raised in this blog post, there is a

ChatGPT prompt to assist you in doing so, with full instructions, [here](#).