

The Iran Crisis #15: Dr. Moeed Pirzada on Pakistan's Role and Fears of Renewed Conflict

Transcript of the conversation Helena Cobban had with Dr. Moeed Pirzada late on 4/23/2026. The video is [here](#). The audio is on [Apple Podcasts](#) and [Spotify](#).

[Helena Cobban]

Hi everybody, I'm Helena Cobban, the president of Just World Educational, and I'm delighted that today, for episode 15 of our Iran crisis project, my guest is the Pakistani journalist, Moeed Pirzada, who is located here in Washington DC, but has a huge following back home in Pakistan. So, Moeed, I'm really delighted to have you with us.

[Moeed Pirzada]

Helena, thank you so much for inviting me to your discussion.

[Helena Cobban]

So, people who are watching this might want to know that it is late for me in the evening on April 23rd. It's April 24th in much of the world already.

So much to talk about with you, Moeed, and I'm just going to fire the questions at you. Please go on as long as you want.

So, first of all, what are you hearing about the status of the ceasefire that has been negotiated and mediated to some extent by your government there in Islamabad?

[Moeed Pirzada]

Helena, this is a very confusing and a very complex situation. If you look at the statements that are coming from President Donald Trump, when he had a press briefing, which was originally about health issues and health policy in the United States, but it soon turned into a discussion on Iran, and he had furious interaction with the media. He kept on condemning the New York Times.

He kept on blaming CNN. He kept on blaming *Washington Post* for all the lies and the fake news. But, you know, he sent really confusing signals.

For instance, he said that he wanted a pause from the war. He said that, you know, his team had actually proposed to him a kind of a peace proposal, which was coming from the Iranians and maybe Pakistanis. I think the Pakistanis are also recommending it.

And it apparently, from his own suggestion, it looks as if the proposal, which he rejected, I personally rejected it, meant that the American team, the Donald Trump's own team, were recommending that they should actually accept Iran's suzerainty or sovereignty on the Strait

of Hormuz. And he said that, 'As per that proposal, Iran could have been making 500 million a day. And I said, no, no, this is not acceptable. And I have rejected it.'

Then he said, I have no hurries. I'm not in a hurry or a rush. People think wrong. He says this *New York Times* and CNN and *Washington Post* are misleading the American public. 'I'm not in a rush. I have no problem, no anxiety. I can wait for it, for getting the right deal. And Iran is the one that is in trouble. And I just want to get a deal which is good for America, which is good for the whole world.'

At the same time, you know, the American media are reporting that the third U.S. carrier, which is Herbert Walker Bush, has already reached Persian Gulf. It took it more time because instead of actually entering the Mediterranean from the Gibraltar Strait, it actually took a longer route along the west coast of Africa, went down to South Africa, took up.

But now it's positioned there. So-- and also we're hearing that Gerald Ford is actually back into the Red Sea. So Red Sea is being protected. Persian Gulf has U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln. Now there are dozens of U.S. warships. So he's looking for some sort of action.

Now, when you look at the Press TV and Tasnim News Agency, which are the Iranian news sources, there the experts are basically saying they're expecting Trump was only regrouping itself, was only reorienting and reorganizing his forces, and anytime they expect another attack on Iran. So what kind of attack that would be?

One gets a sort of indication when you look at the press talk, which Israel's defense minister, Israel Katz is his name, he did several hours ago. And he says that we're just waiting for the right signal for Donald Trump to resume the war with Iran. And this time it's going to be a different war. So at the same time, you see the headlines which have been appearing, quoting Donald Trump because of his tweets on Truth Social, in which he says that Iran's government is fractured.

And now he's creating an idea which is being rejected by Iran's government. But the idea which he's planting and which is being carried by the American media or by the international media is this, that peace is not happening because Iran's government is very fractured. And whereas they were banking upon Ghalibaf, that is the Bagher Ghalibaf, that is the head of the Iran's parliament, and the foreign minister, Dr. Abbas Araghchi or the president Massoud Pezeshkian, the shots are being called by IRGC, the Revolutionary Guard, which are headed by Brigadier General Waheedi.

So you can also expect that there can be surgical strikes on the IRGC leadership to create a new argument that these were the troublemakers who have blockaded the Strait of Hormuz and we have removed them. And now the way that Donald Trump will say now we are ready for negotiation.

So this is a complex picture. Yes, Donald Trump says it's a ceasefire. But of course, the naval blockade of Iran, which became the thorny issue was not a ceasefire. You can't really have a war action, an act of war like a naval blockade and then say, well, this is a ceasefire.

And this is why the second round of the negotiations have failed. So yes, I mean, from Donald Trump's point of view, this is a ceasefire. But from Iran's point of view, this is not a ceasefire at all.

And we are expecting any new attack from both Israel and United States anytime within the next 24 hours.

[Helena Cobban]

Yeah, I mean, basically, you can't have a unilateral ceasefire. A ceasefire is something that is negotiated between the two parties. And this is not negotiated.

And from what you're saying-- I hadn't heard that about Israel Katz, the Israeli defense minister, but they could be a part of this new one. Of course, I think the Iranians have very good advance warning at this point. So if the Israelis are going to be flying over their air bridge across the Arab countries, then the Iranians will presumably see that in advance.

Back on February 28th, the Iranians were taken by surprise somewhat. I think that's when they lost so many of their leaders, including the late Ayatollah Khamenei. But I wonder if it's going to be that easy this time for the Israelis and Americans to undertake that massive kind of decapitation strike?

So what are you hearing from Islamabad or from here in Washington, D.C., about the possible Iranian responses to any U.S. or U.S.-Israeli resumption of hostilities?

[Moeed Pirzada]

Regarding the Iranian responses, there's no news from Pakistan. Whatever the news is coming is either coming from Iran or coming from within the United States, which is mostly in the form of an intelligence analysis or sort of an expertise analysis. Iranians do not have many very good options in responding, apart from the fact that they can again attack the GCC countries, which will be a very difficult position for them.

The ceasefire hasn't really worked for Iran. The ceasefire, or whenever there is a pause, it helps Donald Trump. Because the ceasefire always happens when Donald Trump is caught in his own folly.

He does a mistake, an exaggerated position, like he said that he's going to destroy Iran's bridges and power stations within 48 hours. Then he extends the deadline. He says that Pakistan's prime minister has requested him to extend the deadline.

So he extends it to another 10 days. Then he says that he's going to destroy the civilization. A civilization is about to be destroyed this night. He's very sorry for it, but there's no other way out.

Then he again, a few hours before that, he again relies upon the Pakistani side and the Pakistani prime minister in saying that the Pakistani prime minister has asked him and there is a ceasefire. And now once again, the 15 day ceasefire ends, he had already promised that he's going to start bombing.

But then he says the Pakistan's army chief, the field marshal, Asim Muneer, and the prime minister have requested him. So the Pakistani role unfortunately appears to be like giving a sort of a exit out to Donald Trump.

Pakistan is heavily dependent upon the goodwill of American administration. Not only because that's not a very politically legitimate government, it's not a politically popular government. There have been massive rigging in the elections. Election was stolen in Pakistan. So it's an illegal government in the eyes of most Pakistanis. So if for its own sustenance and legitimacy and from support from IMF, from World Bank, from Asian Development Bank, from all the European GSP-plus in European countries, from every Western institution, they rely upon the continuing goodwill of president Donald Trump.

So Pakistan mediating is not mediation per se. It is not Russia or China. I mean, they're a very dependent country on Donald Trump. So they are merely playing the role of a facilitator and Donald Trump is effectively using them.

This is not giving much of a space to the to the Iranians. Unfortunately, in this case, they are not in a position to-- I mean, it is not that they do not have the intention to. The Pakistani leadership at the moment will definitely like Iran as a neighbor. They have cultural, historic, geographic relationship with them.

About 10 to 15 percent of Pakistani population is of Shia belief. So they're very emotionally attached to Iran. Pakistan is the one country which saw the largest number of fatalities. About 30 people died in violent demonstrations when Iran was attacked on 22nd February. So Pakistan is very emotionally-- the Pakistani public is very emotionally attached and very deeply affected by the by the by the war. But the Pakistani government has serious limitations.

They would like to play a good role. They would like to advise Donald Trump. But Donald Trump is not going to listen anything to the-- If he's not listening to Britain, if he's not listening to Europeans, if he's not caring for major European allies and to the American public opinion, then of course, he's not going to care much for much for what the Pakistanis say.

So it's a very precarious situation that can turn into active hostilities once again. Iran can, right now Iran has a stranglehold on Strait of Hormuz. Donald Trump also said in the last 24 hours that he has ordered the U.S. mine sweepers to sweep the Strait of Hormuz. We haven't really seen any independent evidence of that, that United States mine-sweepers are in Strait of Hormuz. So far, Iran had taken control and seized two oil tankers, one registered in Greece, the other registered in Switzerland, and they are negotiating with them. They charge, so the Iranians are trying to exert sort of a supervisory control in the Strait of Hormuz.

And they say the Strait of Hormuz is not technically blocked. Any kind of cargo ships and oil tankers can cross the Strait of Hormuz as long as they coordinate with the Iranian authorities. They follow the guidelines which they have prescribed and perhaps they want to charge a fee.

It has also been stated that some of the fee that was taken from the containers from the oil tankers has been deposited in the Iran's central bank. That is not in dollars, that is not in cryptocurrency, but that is in cash in Iranian rials. So they want to basically administer that kind of arrangement.

Donald Trump, on the other hand, wants to disturb that arrangement. As I mentioned in the beginning that he says that if I would have accepted the peace plan which was presented to me, then Iran would be making \$500. That's an exaggeration.

Iran cannot make \$500 million in a day. But this is where we stand at the moment.

[Helena Cobban]

So all of that business about the mine sweepers, as far as I know, I haven't heard anywhere that there are actually mines in the Strait of Hormuz. So I'm not sure what mine sweepers would be doing, but maybe I've got that wrong. Another issue is that obviously the American naval vessels are standing off quite a distance away from Iran.

[Moeed Pirzada]

200 kilometers away from the Iranian shore. They are in the open Arabian Sea. They do venture into Gulf of Oman, which is relatively more open, but they don't want to go into narrow water passageway like Strait of Hormuz, which is barely 23 miles wide.

And then this 23 miles wide is also misleading because the actual navigation pathway which large ships can operate is much smaller. So they don't want to be technically in a position which is very disadvantageous to them in terms of maneuverability.

[Helena Cobban]

But all of this must affect Pakistan because a lot of these coastal waters, part of that coast is Pakistan's coast on the Arabian Sea. And is it affecting your shipping? Or are Pakistanis seeing things happening in your coastal waters or further out that are of concern?

And what's happening to Pakistan's own trade routes?

[Moeed Pirzada]

Helena, Pakistan's shipping and Pakistani trade routes are not being affected by whatever the CENTCOM is doing there. Central Command's blockade is very technical. It's very Iran-oriented.

They're only intercepting because of that digital data they get or the information they already have. They are focusing on Iran-related shipping, the cargo ships or the oil tankers that are either originating from Iranian ports or heading towards the Iranian ports. And these operations are not restricted in the immediate vicinity of the Iranian shores.

They have also conducted three or four such operations deep down in the Indian Ocean or the Arabian Sea. For two Iranian containers were seized in the last 36 hours near the coast

of Malaysia, which is the coast of the Malacca Strait. And one of them from the Indian Ocean, perhaps another one in the last 24 hours in the Indian Ocean, which brings it to number four, I think, the Iranian tanker.

So it's not necessarily in that area. No, Pakistan is, if you look at the map, Pakistan is located further east of the Iranian coastline. Pakistani coastline is not affected by the American operations.

Pakistan's trade is not being affected by them. Pakistan is facing energy, gas and oil shortages because Pakistan had reliance upon the Strait of Hormuz. The Saudi-- Pakistan is reliant upon principally upon the Saudi oil, which they have a deferred oil, deferred oil payment arrangement.

And there are shortages. So Pakistan started load shedding of electricity because they produce from oil. They have also created a new contract with Qatar for gas.

But Qatar at the moment has declared *force majeure*. They're not in a position to supply gas to Pakistan. So yes, Pakistan is facing problems, but the problems are not related to the operations of the CENTCOM.

[Helena Cobban]

So Pakistan does have a very strong set of relationships with GCC countries. I mean, you have the mutual defense treaty with Saudi Arabia, which I gather something has happened in regard to that recently that some Pakistani Air Force planes have gone to Saudi Arabia or maybe something else. And you also, I'm not sure the formal status of the relationship with the United Arab Emirates, but I know that a lot of the people in the UAE armed forces are actually Pakistani nationals.

So, I mean, I'm assuming that that's been affecting Pakistani families whose loved ones are there in the UAE and have been receiving, you know, quite a lot of Iranian retaliatory missile and drone fire.

[Moeed Pirzada]

Number of questions, Helena. First of all, I don't think Pakistani military officials are serving in UAE. The Pakistan military has been involved in giving training to the UAE armed forces, especially in the area of the Air Force, giving them training on F-16s and other kind of planes.

So, such kind of cooperative arrangements exist. UAE didn't have a formal defense pact with Pakistan when Saudi Arabia and Pakistan signed a mutual defense pact in September of 2025. Within the same week or within the next few days, UAE Crown Prince, UAE President, Mohammed bin Zayed, who is the main power broker leader in UAE, was in India.

He was trying to find a mutual, some sort of defense agreement and cooperation agreement with India. They signed that agreement, but India has a very clear policy that India's armed forces are only for national defense and they cannot be involved in any other conflict. So, during this conflict, UAE might have expected India to help them.

India stayed away from the conflict and I think there was some kind of heart burning in UAE because in the last several months, the cordial relationship between UAE and Saudi Arabia has also not been the same. UAE and Saudi Arabia had enjoyed a very close, warm relationship, but because of their politics and conflicting interest in Yemen, in North African coastline, it is not the same. So, there has been a heart burning in UAE on the Saudi-Pakistani pact and they were expected Pakistanis to extend them the same kind of facilities to which we alluded that right at the end of the first round of talks in Islamabad, the Saudi Ministry of Defense declared that Pakistani contingent about 13,000 troops, combat troops, has arrived in Saudi Arabia along with an air force squadron, which is probably 16 to 18 advanced planes and they have been placed in King Abdul Aziz base, which was previously had large huge US presence as well.

So, this is a sort of a warning to Iran, sort of a, it's a symbolic thing. I'm not sure that what role Pakistanis can play in a combat operation against Iran, but it's clearly a warning to Iran that if you attack the Abdul Aziz base, which Iranians drones and missiles have attacked in the 40-day war, that means they will also be attacking the Pakistani military. So, on one hand, Pakistan is purportedly playing the role of a mediator.

On the other side, it's also aligned with Saudi Arabia, which is a combatant and a warrior in this conflict. So, it's a very tricky situation that Pakistan is playing. So, the UAE is upset with Pakistan, that Pakistan is not extending the same facility to UAE, which extends to Saudi Arabia.

So, this is where we stand.

[Helena Cobban]

So, I've been also looking, I mean, I looked obviously at the Pakistani Chinese five-point initiative. When was that? Maybe a few days ago.

March 15th or so. And your country's relationship with China seems to me to be a very important part of this whole geopolitical situation, including the fact that last May, when you had the air struggle/fight/war, not really a war, an air battle.

[Moeed Pirzada]

An air skirmish, an air battle with India.

[Helena Cobban]

With India, that the Pakistani air force, which was using advanced Chinese planes and missiles, actually swept the floor with the Indian air force, which was using, as I recall, French and I don't know what else, maybe some old Russian, I was about to say Soviet, but not that old. But I mean, that was a real win for the Pakistani air force using Chinese hardware and software. And I think when your general Asim Munir came to Washington, Trump was really impressed.

Like, wow, you guys really won big time in that. It was a strange reaction from Trump, but I guess like he's a strange person, so we shouldn't expect normal reactions. But all that's just a way of saying that the Chinese relationship with Pakistan is a longstanding one, and an important one, I think, for both countries.

And so when you say that this Pakistani government is sort of acting as a cat's paw or a facilitator for Washington, wouldn't you think that the relationship is more nuanced than that, because it is also working very closely, as I understand it, with the Chinese?

[Moeed Pirzada]

Helena, that's true that Pakistan has a delicate balancing act historically between China and United States. And it is to their great credit that they are still maintaining the balancing act despite the fact that in the recent years, they have, especially after Donald Trump, they have gone very close to the Donald Trump administration, and they need the Donald Trump administration. But at the same time, the relationship they had with Chinese for the 19-- since 1960s, is maintaining.

They are principally for the reason the Chinese are a very careful and cautious and non-reactive power. They do not react immediately to any situation. They take a longer term strategic view.

Their longer term is in decades. It is not immediate reactions. The way you look in the U.S. politics that U.S. is a different political system. So Chinese have an altogether very deeper, deeper thoughts. They don't react, for instance, throughout this 50 days of conflict between Iran and United States. The Chinese President Xi Jinping has spoken only once when he was having a telephone conversation in the last 48 hours, 48 hour-plus with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

He said the should be opened. That's the only comment he has made. And previously, the Chinese foreign minister and foreign ministry said two or three days earlier, before that, that the naval blockade they alluded is actually adding to the complexity and tensions. This should come to an end. There should be free trade and all that. But Chinese are very slow in reacting.

If you look at the maybe hundreds of statements that have emerged from Donald Trump in the last 50 days, Chinese have made very few statements. To the Pakistani credit, when the so-called mediation started, Pakistanis did try bringing in China. That was a great hope that if Pakistanis can persuade--

Initially, it was also reported that Pakistani side is trying that during the first round, the Chinese foreign minister should actually join the round. So Chinese would actually become sort of observers of the round. So Pakistan's foreign minister, who is also the deputy prime minister, Ishaq Dar, traveled to China for a single day.

Despite the fact that he had a fall the day earlier, he had a hairline fracture in his shoulder. But Pakistanis thought it was so important to brief the Chinese on the first round of the negotiation between US and China and also to invite Chinese into it. So he traveled to China, he met the Chinese foreign minister, and there was a joint statement on principles.

But the sum total interpretation was the Chinese stayed away from the process. And this is the way the Chinese are. Chinese don't want to get into this thing.

Had Pakistan been successful in bringing Chinese into this negotiation process, it would have been a great success on the part of Pakistan and a great success on the part of everybody. But the Chinese have stayed away from it. I think even Donald Trump expected the Chinese to play some kind of role.

And that is why he delayed his schedule because he was supposed to be in China in the end of March. But 31st March to 2nd April, he was supposed to be meeting Xi Jinping in China to settle all kinds of issues, trade and everything. But then he deferred.

He said he has taken and now that is taking place in May. But he expected China to help him, but China hasn't really helped.

[Helena Cobban]

So I've been looking at this. I see China also playing a long game, as you mentioned. And part of that long game is to build up economic power, economic relationships, an alternative to the petrodollar.

And aren't these things kind of happening now to a large extent, accelerated by this, from my perspective, disastrous U.S.-Israeli attack on Iran?

[Moeed Pirzada]

We hear a lot about it, the demise of the petrodollar. But the situation is uncertain. We don't really know how quickly the dollar's domination can collapse.

The dollar's domination and the hold of the dollar, the clearance, the SWIFT system, the New York banks is very deeply entrenched for all the major economies, China itself, India. Russia is struggling a lot. I think most of the initiatives of creating an alternate currency and currency swapper means between Russia and China and others are all actually originating from Russia, especially after the Ukraine war.

But I'm not sure. I've been reading conflicting analysis on the petrodollar's demise and petrodollar's survival from different sides. So I'm not really sure that to what extent.

Yes, of course, the Chinese would like the dollar's domination to become weaker. The dollar domination is a strategic stranglehold, increasing stranglehold since 1971 when Richard Nixon replaced the gold standard with the dollar payment system. And every dollar payment has to be cleared from New York banks, which actually gives rise to a whole skeletal arrangement, the structure and the architecture of the primary and the secondary sanctions.

Because had it only been primary sanctions against Iran or Iraq or any country, then it would not be such a huge problem for Iran, for instance. But because of the secondary sanctions right now, we believe that anywhere from \$27 billion to \$100 billion of Iranian payments, which Iran has delivered oil and gas to many countries, including Iraq, including Qatar,

including Japan, South Korea, India, even China is stuck because of the financial institutions cannot make those payments. Because if they make those payments, they violate the American sanctions.

And all of that is happening because of the hold of the dollar. So, of course, all these countries, almost every country in the world would like to get rid of the dollar denomination. But how successful they are to that extent, I'm not that sure.

[Helena Cobban]

So, I think we probably need to start wrapping this up now. But you have said some very disturbing things. You said you expect a large scale American and perhaps American-Israeli resumption of hostilities.

Is that right?

[Moeed Pirzada]

I don't know what form it will take. Will it be surgical strikes to eliminate IRGC leadership? Will this be take the form of attacks on some bridges to warn Iran to force them to accept Donald Trump's terms?

I think any kind of peace agreement is possible between United States and Iran. There are no direct hostilities. This war is not for United States.

United States has nothing to gain out of this war. This is all for Israel. And if you more specifically define it, this is not even for Israel.

This is for the ego and the vision or the political needs of the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and some people around him. So, I think some sort of hostility is feared. What form it will take, we are not sure.

[Helena Cobban]

Is there anything that you think the Pakistani government could and should be doing further to prevent this from happening?

[Moeed Pirzada]

Pakistani government should be doing many things but Pakistani government's position to persuade Donald Trump. You know this question was asked to Iranian analyst Professor Marandi by someone on an American platform. They said Pakistan is not doing or Pakistan is not being sincere or Pakistan has betrayed Iran.

He said no, it is not to do with Pakistan. Had it been Oman or Qatar or any country, the other side, the Donald Trump on the other side is not trustworthy. So, Donald Trump keeps on changing his position.

I mean you declare ceasefire and then you say I am going to have a naval blockade. You started attacking Iranian ships. So, it is not to do with Pakistan.

It is to do the way Donald Trump conducts his diplomacy.

[Helena Cobban]

Thank you so much. I really appreciate you giving us the time to share your perspective. I hope we can have you back on later.

I hope this crisis does not go on for too long but you never know. In the meantime, I hope you stay well. For people watching this, do go to our website www.justworldeducational.org where you can see all the conversations I have conducted thus far in this project. This is number 15. Thank you very much, Dr. Moeed Pirzada.

[Moeed Pirzada]

Thank you, Helena. Thank you.