

Dalia Ziada on Iran International, analyzing the Iran War developments

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Over the weekend, while VP Vance and team were in Pakistan to negotiate with the remnants of the Iranian regime, I had this interview with Iran International to discuss the future of the Middle East as the people of the region view it.

Dalia Ziada is a Middle East scholar. See full bio here: <https://www.daliaziada.org/biography>

Broadcast: To dig deeper into how the ceasefire is impacting regional partners, we're joined by writer, activist, and Middle East expert Dalia Ziada. Thank you so much for being here, Dalia. It's really great to meet you in person finally.

Dalia: Thank you so much, Nigar. I'm so happy to see you finally.

Broadcast: Dalia, regional neighbors, uh, specifically the Persian Gulf countries are really being hit hard by the Islamic Republic even during this apparent ceasefire. Um, how do you view the ceasefire in that light?

Dalia: So first of all, I wouldn't call it a ceasefire. It's more like uh maybe a break, a short break that both the US and Iran needed. Uh the US, as we all know, they were looking for an off exit and or an offramp uh that saves their face and makes them look victorious. On the other side, the Iranians as well or the Islamic regime in particular was looking for a safe exit that makes it look victorious.

So when Pakistan suggested this deal, they immediately jumped to benefit from it and they said okay we now are ready to talk but maybe it will be an exaggeration if we say that it is a day after negotiation that's coming up it's only maybe a discussion about how to proceed with the second stage of the war which I think will be even harsher and and I expect this uh agreement or this short break will not hold for long in that from that perspective.

If we look at how Arab countries are reacting to this, actually they are very concerned especially Gulf Arab countries uh who are thinking that they have been sidelined from this uh agreement for this short break uh or so-called ceasefire. uh although they have been the ones most

affected by this war, they have been hit by Iran constantly uh and uh I think the regime there was trying to move the battle from Iran to Arab Gulf state or Gulf Arab states and and we ended up with a big mess in the whole region.

So being sidelined now is making them concerned and there is also a sense of disappointment in the United States actually in the Arab world right now and within the Arab world could this potentially move them closer to Israel and the United States potentially even the Abraham Accords. I mean interestingly enough they didn't want to get involved in this war. They didn't want to give their airspace. None of that but Iran got them involved by hitting them.

Ironically, all the signs tells us that Arab states are getting closer and closer to Israel. Actually, if you look at that while the war was ongoing, there were two visions for how it should end, how the end game should be. uh and one vision is Israel's vision which is about complete destruction of the regime and paving the way for the young people in Iran to take the lead and so on and build a new future for Iran which actually comes from a very um regional perspective that I think everyone agrees on because Iran is not going anywhere and the goal is not to destroy Iran.

The goal is to remove this regime and create a a situation for a new Iran that is friendly to everyone else that can live in peace with everyone else in the region. So Arabs in that regard are very much in agreement with Israel and they agree with this v vision in contrast to the American vision which does not mind having someone from inside the regime to work with as we are seeing right now.

So uh so I believe as the time proceeds even after this war ends the Arabs will come closer and closer to Israel for many reasons. One of them is the shared vision, the shared future, the shared destiny, this regional sense of having to sense of leadership like leading our own future together. But also another reason why they will get closer to Israel because Israel is getting stronger and stronger and they are now I mean especially in the Gulf States they are looking for a security guarantor someone who can provide them with security with military power when they need to.

They are very disappointed in Egypt because Egypt did not step up to help them while Iran was striking. Why didn't they? Uh well, Egypt is because there's a truce between Egypt and Israel in so many ways, right? There is, but also um the Egypt has or the current Egyptian regime has always been promising Gulf states that whenever there is a threat you're facing, we will just come. They even call it mafika which is a term used by the Egyptian president which mean just across the street like it will not take any time much time to take and rescue you.

And when they really were in trouble under during this war, Egypt just ignored it under the claim of adopting a policy of what they call strategic balance which in my opinion is a very um unwise strategy. There is nothing in the region called strategic balance. You have to take sides.

It's the Middle East. It's not Europe. It's not, you know, the Western world. You have to take sides. And by Egypt trying to play all the sides at the same time, unfortunately, it lost a lot.

Nobody cares for Egypt's power right now for Egypt's regional role as it has always been the case. And uh surprisingly, there were some elements in the religious institution in Egypt. And it is a very powerful institution. I mean I'm speaking about alazar who showed uh something that I cannot understand actually. He who showed support to the Iranian regime on religious grounds. Egypt was a Shia country before it becomes a Sunni country and Azar itself was Shia before it became Sunni.

So they are looking at at the Iranian regime as a representation of the Shia authority that they aligned themselves with which was very exactly very strange very hard to understand and uh all of this of course is causing a lot of disappointment on the Gulf state in the Gulf states towards Egypt and thus they are looking for an alternative. They are now disappointed in Egypt. They are now disappointed in um the United States. They are also disappointed in Pakistan which is clearly I'm they are leading the or mediating a so-called ceasefire right now but actually not keeping in consideration the interests of uh Arab states especially those in the Gulf affected by this war.

So all this combined will push Gulf states more and more towards Israel and make them uh see Israel as a partner unlike before.

Broadcast: You know you mentioned Pakistan which is also fascinating because it's one of the um countries that wasn't attacked by Iran. I mean Iran attacked dozens of countries in the region but not Pakistan. And Pakistan also has a defense pack with Saudi Arabia and Saudi Arabia was hit by the Islamic Republic. So what do you make of that?

Dalia: So this is a very interesting question and thank you for asking it because many people are ignoring it. First of all, Pakistan has a history of supporting the Iranian regime has a history also of supporting uh the regime in Turkey of President Erdogan which is very much also supportive of uh it's a kind of a frenemy relationship with the Iranian regime.

So they together formed an axis that many people called an axis of evil for so long. But now Pakistan is trying to redefine itself mainly because of economic pressures within the country. Saudi Arabia took advantage of these economic pressures and offered money in exchange for a defense agreement.

And so from the Saudis perspective they were thinking that they are um giving themselves or buying with the Saudi sense of way of thinking buying nuclear power on their side instead of just starting their own nuclear project inside which they tried by the way and they have been stuck into for five years now and unable to to develop or go further uh with it.

So it's easier for them just to buy Pakistan. So kind of having a nuclear umbrella. So whenever Iran decides to hit them they are they can call on Pakistan come and defend us. But what happened is that Pakistan did not do that and they said we will not involve which actually also once again created a sense of disappointment towards this Pakistan inside Saudi Arabia and uh uh there were reports recently that they are even asking them to pay back in the UAE and Saudi to pay back the loans.

Broadcast: Wow. they have given them for economic uh support. So it has such a an impact that it's affecting even their transactional relationship.

Dalia: Absolutely. Yeah.

Broadcast: Which goes always beyond political. So if it gets to that point when it affects the pocketbook, you know that it's very serious.

Dalia: Exactly. But also it's one thing [clears throat] I want to add here. It's interesting the situation now is very reminiscent of the negotiations that were happening around the Gaza war. Uh everybody was looking at Hamas as the government in Gaza.

The same thing applies to the Iranian regime, by the way. They are militia. Turn it into a regime. Turn it into a political power. **People tend to ignore that.** The second thing is that you're trusting so-called mediators who are already on the side of this militia. Like the case was in Egypt, for example, in the Gaza negotiations uh Gaza [clears throat] ceasefire ceasefire negotiations. The same thing applies to the negotiations about uh the ceasefire.

Now in the current war, you cannot trust Pakistan to be a mediator. You need a true neutral mediator if you want real ceasefire uh to succeed.

Broadcast: Seems like Pakistan's just really trying to take advantage of of this situation. In the meantime, what about Lebanon? We haven't really talked about that. There are strikes still happening in Lebanon. The Iranian regime, you can see that they're planting the seeds uh with regards uh to the country of Lebanon, saying that, you know, Israeli strikes are still happening in there. It's not part of the ceasefire. It's almost like again they're planting that idea in the mind of of the Western world and in Western media to say look we're we're not to blame. Um it's Israel's fault.

Dalia: Yeah. Exactly. I mean Lebanon has always been a victim to regional crisis, terrorism uh uh acts of or narratives of hate, anti-Israel hate narratives in particular. And they are actually the Lebanese people are so lifeloving. They are paying a price for something they never signed up to and never approved. Hezbollah has been occupying their country for decades.

And now Iran is using their own land as a platform to attack Israel first and also to [clears throat] um gain power in the ongoing war in the current ongoing war. So unfortunately Lebanon is in the middle of of a war that it never wanted to be involved in. Uh the Libanese people are paying a very very heavy price and I have like all I give them all my support actually but they have to do something about it. They have to renounce Hezbollah. They have to put an end to all the interventions also coming from the side of Gaza, the West Bank and so and all the other interventions from other Arab countries.

They have to lead their own future. They have to take the lead here otherwise they will keep they will keep just going on in this cycle forever and they deserve better. But but also in this regard I want to say something. Iran's power right now is not in Tehran anymore. The Islamic regime's power is in Lebanon and Yemen and in Iraq as well.

I mean if we consider the political the heavy political intervention there. So these are the areas that we should focus on next. The Iranian regime has already been very weakened by this war. I mean it's already emerging much weaker than what we thought it would. And the the problem now is not the problem is all the extending arms of the regime in other Arab countries. These are the ones that need to be put under control.

Broadcast: That's a very good point. And I speaking of that I in terms of kind of the Iranian regime's reach or arm within the region. Let's talk about Qatar. Uh Qatar was hit. They've got you know ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. Uh definitely acting as a regional partner towards the Islamic Republic of Iran, but yet they took a hit from this regime. So how is that all going to play out? And will they distance themselves from the regime or are they going to play all sides?

Dalia: So Qatar has anxious history of uh of taking the side of Iran, taking the side of all the Islamist forces in the region including terrorist forces uh ranging from the Muslim Brotherhood up to ISIS up to uh the Iranian regime itself and so on.

So Qatar has this history unfortunately. But what we've seen is that after the attack, after Qatar itself has been has been looked at by the Iranian regime as just a play field where they can you know fire missiles and without any respect to all the history of supporting them by the Qatari regime. I think there is a change in the regime right now.

They are reconsidering everything starting not only their relationship with this uh Islamic regime in Iran but their support to the Islamist agenda in the region in general. They are now thinking how it how how it benefited us and why we need to change. Actually, I believe the moment I saw this change starting to happen was the moment when Prince Tamim of Qatar was crying when one of his people was being uh in the funeral of of some of some of his people.

He cried and I think in situations like these it's when people's hearts and minds change and he's relatively young. So hopefully - hopefully this will be the moment of change that we see Qatar

finally cutting its ties with the Islamist uh movement in the region which by the way will be great because they are kind of the oxygen for this Islamist movement.

They will distance themselves from all this Islamist agenda and start a new future that depends on [clears throat] very pragmatic um uh vision to their own people [clears throat] and to the vision of the security of the Gulf. We need to I mean I I'm hopeful I'm hopeful that this will happen because we are really seeing a huge change in the Middle East right now. The Middle East will not be the same anymore.

Broadcast: It's incredible. hopefully brighter and better days for all in a in a huge shift in the region like you said. Thank you so much for joining us today on Eye for Iran.

Dalia: Thank you so much, Nar. It's great to be with you.

Broadcast: Likewise.