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Thank you. First of all, I am delighted to be participating in this panel, with people from different backgrounds. I am only speaking for myself. As it's "on the record" I repeat, I am not representing anyone. But I am going to try to put myself into the shoes of the various players involved in the crisis which will soon have been going on for ten years: the Iran crisis.

Let's start with President Obama. His re-election was a resounding victory; he has four years ahead of him. I get the impression that he has mixed feelings about the Middle East. He ends two wars, Iraq and Afghanistan, in 2014. He is very happy about this, because – let's be honest – America has not been as successful as it would have liked in these two wars. And he certainly does not want to start a third. Also, America is less and less dependent on oil from the Middle East, thanks to the revolution in shale gas and oil. There is growing opinion that perhaps it does not need to be quite so involved in affairs in the Middle East.

And he has a vision of the role that America should have in the 21st century, which is no longer that of the sole superpower responsible for sorting out everything. He wants allies, he wants to act collectively. And so, I have a feeling that he will only want to take action on the Israel-Palestine conflict if both of those countries are ready for it. For now, it is more a question of waiting from behind than of wanting to act. We can see this in relation to Syria too: I have the feeling that he is resisting any pressure to act. Except perhaps if chemical weapons were used, but that is an entirely different matter.

So, in this general feeling of an America slightly in retreat, I see an exception, which is Iran. Iran, because what is at stake is not only regional balance, it is also the world order. In other words, the issue of nuclear proliferation, which has long been very important to President Obama. If Iran gets the bomb, then other countries in the region will follow: Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt. It will be the end of the non-proliferation treaty. This is an issue which is crucial, in my opinion, for President Obama.

If we want to see what is happening with the other players, I think it makes sense to move on to Tehran. Iran is subject to economic pressures, unprecedented economic sanctions, which are working. Exports are down by one million barrels a day due to the sanctions; which means receipts at the Iranian treasury are down by three billion dollars a month. In addition, extremely severe sanctions have been imposed on the banking system, and therefore the Iranian economy is being hit very hard. To such an extent that discontent is spreading, particularly in the bazaars.

What conclusions can the Iranian leaders draw from this, first and foremost President Khamenei? Paradoxically, I think that his reaction is to accelerate the nuclear program, insofar as possible, because Iran's leaders think a bit like North Korea's leaders: to have the bomb is to have a shield against all attempts at destabilisation, whether political or military. It is also about asserting Iran's status. After all, if Pakistan has the bomb, why should not Iran? And in the shelter of this shield, it wants to assert Iran's dominance in its environment. Religious dominance and political dominance.

In the face of these very strong motivations, first among which is the protection of the regime, I think that the current economic sanctions have the paradoxical effect of accelerating the nuclear program. Are negotiations out of the question? Not necessarily.

The third player is obviously Israel. If you say to Israel's leaders: the bomb is not against you, actually they want it for all the reasons I have just listed, and primarily to protect the regime. If you emphasise that if the nuclear weapon was used against Israel, there would be more Arabs in the region who would be victims of the strikes, and the cloud would return to Iran, all of that is important, but it does not convince Israel's leaders in the slightest. They would reply: we were hit by what happened in the 1930s, at a time when no one took Hitler's threats seriously. One holocaust is



enough. So when Ahmadinejad and Khamenei talk about wiping Israel of the map, we take them seriously, and we will not let it happen.

And time is of the essence, because what matters to the Israelis is not the building of the weapon, it is the point at which things become irreversible. That is, the point after which it is no longer possible for anyone, Israeli or otherwise, to stop the progress towards a nuclear weapon. And that time is counted in calendar quarters.

After Iran and after Israel, I think that you have to go and see what is happening in Washington, in the atmosphere I attempted to describe, where President Obama has been re-elected for four more years. He is mindful of both his legacy – prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon – but also of not wanting to commit America to a new war. What will he do? He will try to relaunch negotiations in the best possible way. There is a format which, unfortunately, has not come to anything so far: what is known as the 5+1. Three Europeans: France, Germany, the UK, plus the US, Russia and China. There is now an opportunity to relaunch these negotiations. And no doubt he will want to add, if possible, direct negotiations, which I think is advisable, between Iran and the US. Those two have to talk to each other, and follow through on what they say to each other.

These negotiations will start again as quickly as possible, but it is far from certain that they will produce results. If they do not produce results, President Obama will have to make an exceptionally unpleasant choice. Either he lets Israel strike on its own or he decides to strike. The worst-case scenario, in my opinion, would be for the US and Israel to strike together. If it comes to this, President Obama will probably want America to be involved, but not on its own.

At this point, I would like to remind you of what the 41st President, Bush, did for the 1991 war against Saddam Hussein in Kuwait: he created a coalition of the willing, which included all the significant countries on America's side in that affair. Is it realistic to think that President Obama, having demonstrated that negotiations lead nowhere, can gather a coalition of the willing around him? It seems to me that the answer lies first with Moscow and Beijing. Because if he manages to bring Russia and China along, then others will be prepared to sign up.

So we must now go to Moscow and Beijing. The two countries are in completely different situations. Starting with Russia, since his re-election President Putin has adopted a posture of asserting himself against America. And in addition, Russia has a vested interest in this matter, which is to see the price of oil rise as high as possible, for reasons linked to the evolution of the Russian economy.

However, if we go to Beijing, the situation is exactly the opposite. Here you have a China which imports more and more oil and gas, and increasingly from the Middle East region, and which has every reason to avoid an economic crisis which would be catastrophic for the whole world, and above all for China.

The question which arises is the following: as Xi Jinping has only been in office for a few weeks, if Putin says no to America, will China, with the new team which has just arrived, have the ability to take the major strategic direction of getting involved in this affair, without having the benefit of a few years in charge?

And so, all my arguments lead to imminent disaster. However, I would not want to leave you with the impression that 2013 is going to be absolutely disastrous, and I would therefore like to insert into the debate an idea which I think is promising.

I think that if we limit diplomatic activities to just negotiations on Iran and the nuclear weapon, we will be heading straight for disaster. I therefore suggest that we add the Israel-Palestine conflict. Because it is an entirely different matter for President Obama to go and see President Putin, President Xi Jinping and other leaders and say to them: "I call you as a witness, I have done everything possible to stop Iran's programme. Negotiations were exhausted, you were in the room, you witnessed it. There is nothing more we can do, the choice now is between letting proliferation and disaster happen in the Middle East, or taking responsibility. But in the same vein, I suggest to you that we work together towards peace between Israel and Palestine. It will not happen between the two partners, because we know, we see it every day, they are not capable of it. It is up to us to help them, it is up to us to really push to achieve peace in a precise time frame. I suggest that we do both together. We strike Iran because we have no choice and it is our



collective responsibility to avoid proliferation, and we impose peace on Israel and Palestine, because that is our responsibility too.”

In short, President Obama would suggest to his key partners that together they build the new collective political order that the world needs in the 21st century.

In this context, I think that other countries would be prepared to join the group of 5+1. I think it is very important to immediately include a country as big as Turkey, but also India and Brazil, others which could join this coalition. You see that with this movement, an essential step would be taken towards a new order in the Middle East, towards a global political order that we want to build collectively.

If I had one last comment to make, I would say that the arguments and the suggestion I have just presented to you are an additional reason for moving very quickly towards peace, or in any case a solution in Syria, because the worst-case scenario would be to have to manage both Iran and Syria. Thank you.