

MIDDLE EAST

Thierry de Montbrial, Chairman and founder of the WPC

That is a short answer. Let us move to the Middle East. I will make a provocative remark first and then I will ask a real question. The provocative remark is that the Western intelligence services, including the American intelligence services, have not done very well in the Middle East, in 2003 in Iraq, but also this year. This is regarding the sudden emergence of DAESH, or as Prince Turki likes to say, fahesh. You will have to learn what it means, but I will leave it aside for the moment. That is an observation, and if we are systematically wrong in our assessment of the situation in the Middle East, that can carry some consequences. Now my real question is that. What is your prospect for both of you regarding your foreign agreement with Iran in the foreseeable future? The foreseeable future means before the end of Obama's term.

Joseph Nye, University Distinguished Service Professor, Center for Public Leadership, Harvard Kennedy School

We have until June to see what happens with this current round of negotiations. I was speaking with somebody who has been closely involved with the negotiations, and his reaction is that he thought that the chance of success was about 40%. I have no idea whether that makes sense or not, as I do not know enough of the details. However, I think there is a pretty broad consensus that if you have that large a probability, you probably ought to play it out.

The danger and the policy dispute right now centres on those in Washington, particularly some in the Congress from both parties. They say, 'Let us add more sanctions to put more pressure on the Iranians.' There are also people in the administration who say, 'If you put more sanctions on now, you are going to reduce that probability to 10% or zero.' That is the battle which is being fought out right now.

My own inclination is to give it a shot, or in other words, give diplomacy a shot. You could threaten additional sanctions afterwards, but at this stage, it depends on whether they really have got that close to a potential outcome. Again, I am merely repeating what somebody who is internal to the negotiations has said to me, and I do not know whether that is an accurate assessment or not. I think we should go for it.

Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations

Let me put it this way, and this will probably either confuse or disappoint most people. You may 'get an agreement,' and the goal is a framework by March and a so called comprehensive agreement by the end of June. It is important to keep in mind what 'success' looks like. Success would mean that Iran would have thousands of centrifuges of various capabilities. It would have an unknown amount of enriched uranium. Delivery vehicles and the rest, such as missiles, are not covered. There would be an inspections regime and a degree of transparency. That would give you some confidence, but not complete confidence, about what Iran was doing, and whether it was doing things that were not permitted by the treaty.

This would be a treaty of limited duration. I point this out simply to say that if there is 'success' and there is an agreement, it does not put the situation away. There will then be ongoing conversations about how much sanctions relief Iran should get, given the limits to the agreement. More importantly, there will be endless compliance debates, which is somewhat reminiscent of the way the three of us grew up. These will be about whether Iran is living up to the



letter and spirit of the agreement and how we on the outside will react. One way to think of this is that even if you get an agreement, it does not resolve the situation so much as it sets it up for an ongoing debate.

If you do not get an agreement, it is not all that much different, because people will be focusing on what Iran is doing away from the table. Whether we continue to negotiate or not, they are going to be asking how many centrifuges, how much uranium will be involved, what else is going on, whether they have reopened the facility at Araq, and all that. I am not saying it is not preferable to have an agreement, but it is not a panacea to have one and it is not the end of the world if you do not. What still matters is whether some of the arrangements that have been in place for the last couple of years continue to be in place and whether they are seen to be lived up to.

Either way, I would think that this is now something of a permanent feature. At best, Iran is positioned as a threshold nuclear state. What amount of time would it take them to become a weapons state if they so chose? How much material and how many weapons could they come out with? What kind of warning time would we have if they chose to go down that path? My sense is that this is going to become something permanent. Permanent is a big word, but at least for the foreseeable future, this will become part of a permanent feature of the scene.

Joseph Nye, University Distinguished Service Professor, Center for Public Leadership, Harvard Kennedy School

Could I add a remark in one minute or less? I agree with what Richard says. However, one of the differences in having an agreement relates to the intrusiveness of our inspections. Our capability to learn not only the time in a break out, but also the dangers of a sneak out, is greatly enhanced.

Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations

I agree. On balance, I would say that a good agreement is preferable. Besides the sanctions debate, the debate we are also like to have is about whether the agreement is good enough. I would expect that within and beyond the United States, there is going to be an intensive debate next spring or summer, depending upon what happens. This will be about whether what can be negotiated is acceptable and how it stacks up against the alternatives.

Thierry de Montbrial, Chairman and founder of the WPC

In fact, both of you seem to agree on the point that negotiation is entirely about nuclear issues, and therefore, it does not fundamentally matter when talking about the situation in the Middle East. If I interpret your own feelings, even if we do not reach an agreement with Iran, it would not fundamentally affect the situation in the Middle East in general. However, some other analysts and observers believe that non agreement with Iran could increase chaos in the Middle East in general.

Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations

Let me just say that it depends upon the specifics. If there is no agreement, you could have a situation in which Iran would make a mad rush to move beyond the nuclear threshold. Yes, that would make the Middle East worse than it is now, because you would not just have an Iranian capability. You would have the question of whether we or the Israelis could pre empt it. Or you would have the reality that several other countries would be inclined to create nuclear realities of their own.



Yes, that would be considerably worse. One can imagine all sorts of alternatives which would make what is already the most complicated and troubled part of the world even more complicated and even more troubled. I thought you were getting at something else. Depending upon what happens in the nuclear conversations with Iran, how does that affect all the other places where the United States and Iran intersect? These include Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan.

Thierry de Montbrial, Chairman and founder of the WPC

That is what I mean.

Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations

It depends. I am sorry I cannot be black or white here. With or without an agreement, it is possible to keep open the option of selective cooperation, though not so much active cooperation as parallelism. This is as long as the situation does not descend to the point where it is a crisis between the United States and Iran. If we are at war with Iran or there is a crisis, that is obviously different, but let's assume we have a situation where, with or without an agreement, we decide we can live with Iran in the nuclear realm. Then regarding these other situations in Syria, Iraq Afghanistan, Bahrain or wherever, the United States and Iran will find their policy somewhat in parallel or somewhat diverging. What we do or do not do will not be materially affected by the nuclear situation.

My point is that I do not think you are going to see a situation of linkage, where we are willing to look the other way at some things because of the nuclear programme. There is this idea that everything is strategically seen as a whole, but I do not think it will be done that way. We are going to pursue the nuclear talks, and short of it being a crisis, we will pursue these other things. If there is an agreement, might it lubricate or pave the way for some other things? Maybe, but these other issues are still going to be decided on their merits, not as a reward for whatever it is we can negotiate on the nuclear issue.

Joseph Nye, University Distinguished Service Professor, Center for Public Leadership, Harvard Kennedy School

I would agree. I do not think we are on the verge of a great détente with Iran, because there are too many interests where there is divergence. If you do get a nuclear agreement, it is still going to have a fair degree of friction attached to it, as Richard said. It may make it a little bit easier to have an evolution in which we see common interests in some of those other areas, but it is not going to lead to one large détente overall.

Thierry de Montbrial, Chairman and founder of the WPC

The good news is that you agree and the bad news is that you agree. We will discuss one last point.

Joseph Nye, University Distinguished Service Professor, Center for Public Leadership, Harvard Kennedy School

At least it is bi partisan.

**Thierry de Montbrial, Chairman and founder of the WPC**

At least it is. Before we spend a few minutes on Eastern Asia, we will discuss one last question on the Middle East. Do you think that in your lifetime, there will be a chance of a settlement on the Israeli Palestinian issue?

Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations

Let me say three things about it. It is highly unlikely. Two, there is something interesting about all the problems in the Middle East. Even if there were a solution to the Israeli Palestinian problem, all these other problems would pretty much be the same. There is the idea that this is somehow the centrepiece. If we could only resolve the Israeli Palestinian problem and if we only had a Palestinian state or whatever, we would not have civil war in Syria. We would not have the problems in Iraq, the Iranian nuclear situation, the Egyptian situation. This seems absurd to me.

However, I am now thinking that that is not the right question. For the next few years, I am focusing less on how we can make the Israeli Palestinian situation better. I am actually thinking more about how we can keep it from becoming worse. In Jerusalem in the last few weeks, we have seen a very worrisome development. You might call it a kind of tribalisation of the situation in Jerusalem. It is dangerous for Palestinians and for Israelis, because it could really set large elements of Israeli society against itself.

I do not think this is a moment of strategic promise. Regarding Secretary Kerry, I did not support what he was doing, but I think no one can argue that we did not try. It is hard for me to imagine, to use my favourite phrase, that the situation is ripe for any sort of breakthrough. Right now, I would focus on confidence building measures and codes of conduct in Jerusalem. I want to prevent Jerusalem from becoming the new fault line in the Middle East.

Joseph Nye, University Distinguished Service Professor, Center for Public Leadership, Harvard Kennedy School

Speaking as an individual citizen, I hope my answer is yes, but when I speak as an analyst, my answer is no. If the prospect of a yes is even 10%, it is worth trying.