



DEBATE

Korn CHATIKAVANIJ, former Finance Minister of Thailand

Listening to you both just now, I get the impression that what President Obama has to say about what America's strategy should be for the next year and a half is somewhat irrelevant. Is that really the case?

Jim HOAGLAND, Contributing Editor to *The Washington Post*

I did not mean to imply that at all. What I said, in fact, is that President Obama is still president until 20 January 2017, and what he says was what will happen. The point I was trying to make was that you cannot expect much of an increased involvement in the war on ISIS from President Obama's administration. It will be up to the next president to make that decision, because President Obama, for good reasons and perhaps some not so good reasons, is convinced that we have to flee from this burning building that is called the Middle East. We are not going to put American troops in, and we are not going to put the kind of leadership that America has traditionally exercised on the world stage into trying to resolve the multiple conflicts in the Middle East.

Therefore, he is very much in charge, he is very determined on some key issues, several of which we have outlined here, so he will still be calling the shots. He will be under increased political pressure, as we see now in the debate over immigration, where Republican governors have stood up and said that they do not want any refugees, and 47 Democrats voted with the Republicans in the House of Representatives of this week to try to restrict immigration, which is actually a federal matter, and governors do not really have the power to say that they do not want people coming in, that they are too dangerous.

When you consider the fact that Obama has talked about taking 10,000 refugees over a two-year period, it is not a big risk we are running given the tight screening procedures that are already in effect. However, this will be a very inflammatory issue, and he will have to figure out ways to address the American people and try to calm them down.

Nelson CUNNINGHAM, President, McLarty Associates; former Special Advisor to President Clinton

Let me disagree modestly with some of what you have said. I do not think that President Obama's vision regarding the Middle East is that we need to flee a burning building. Rather, I think he is asking the American people if they have any idea how complicated it is, and asking the Republican candidates if they have any idea how complicated this is—because he does not think they do. If he says, "do you realise who will be right next door to us if we go after ISIS? The Iranians," then the Republicans' heads snap back and they say that the Iranians are terrorists—but in response, Obama points out that the Iranians actually hate ISIS even more than we do. When we go after ISIS, we will have Bashar al-Assad next to us. Yes, he is a dictator and a terrorist, but he hates ISIS as well.

Therefore, when President Obama puts forward a "status quo plus," which is how I would describe what he is advancing, it is because he thinks the status quo has actually been quite robust. He believes the efforts of our special ops forces, the bombing that has been done in Syria and Iraq, the coalition that has been put together with many Sunni countries by our side, and the diplomatic efforts that Secretary Kerry has led in Vienna and elsewhere, are robust. Therefore, if we go much further than we already have, we risk getting bogged down by a mistake, which is something the American people still remember well. When the word "Iraq" is invoked, the notion of sending another large deployment of American troops to the Middle East concerns not only many of the American people, but also a number of leaders in our military, who would argue that we could not figure out how to create a sustainable peace last time and as such it's unlikely we could make one this time.

Consequently, I disagree modestly with Jim, as I believe that President Obama is moderate about what he believes the US can do in the Middle East, in part because history has shown that we have to be moderate, at least under current circumstances. This does not mean that he is not committed to finding a sustainable framework. He just does not see arms as the focal point of that framework.



Jim HOAGLAND, Contributing Editor to *The Washington Post*

I will just add that President Obama obviously wants to see an effective policy worked out. It is just that he is underestimated time and time again, and he has to bear some of the responsibility for that.

Vuk JEREMIC, President of the Center for International Relations and Sustainable Development (CIRSD), former President of the UN General Assembly, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia

It sounds as if both of you believe it very unlikely that, beyond a status quo plus, anything is doable with this administration for the next year and a half. However, what happens if there is a continuation, or actually an exacerbation, of the European crisis, and we see hundreds of thousands more refugees coming to Europe which Europe will not be able to cope with, combined with another terrorist attack, for example. The French Prime Minister spoke about a possibility that more is coming our way.

Therefore, we basically have a terrible situation, and somehow Europe comes together and actually asks the US to join, together with the Russians. Is that conceivable at all, given the electoral cycle?

Jim HOAGLAND, Contributing Editor to *The Washington Post*

Absolutely, and it is part of my rationale in emphasising the NATO dimension. It is interesting that you pose the question, because recent history shows that the reason that Bill Clinton got so heavily involved in the Balkans was primarily the argument that Richard Holbrook made to him, that the lack of American involvement was fraying the ties of NATO, that the European-American alliance was being weakened by the lack of American action. Should France take a role now in trying to forge a broader NATO involvement, we could come to exactly that situation where President Obama is forced to look at the consequences of not intervening more robustly.

Nelson CUNNINGHAM, President, McLarty Associates; former Special Advisor to President Clinton

I agree completely with that, and I certainly do not think that President Obama believes a "status quo plus" means walking away from the situation. Rather, it means finding the most effective way of destroying ISIS. There is no modesty in that goal, but the US cannot do it alone, and we certainly cannot do it with our troops in the lead. Therefore, the diplomatic effort that Secretary Kerry is undertaking right now to get the Russians, the Turks, the Saudis, the Europeans and the Iranians all at the table is very earnest and has every chance of success.

I have seen Secretary Kerry assemble these coalitions and cut these political deals before. For example, he did it in Afghanistan when they had a tight election in 2013. He did it in Iraq when support for the Maliki government had eroded, and Secretary Kerry had to cut the political deals to transition away from a possible Shia government. He is masterful at this, and what this means is we will eventually see a robust coalition effort that will destroy ISIS. This will require finding a way to set aside the issue of Assad for the moment, in a way that satisfies the Russians and the Iranians while at the same time satisfying the Saudis and the Turks. We will see how that works. However, the goal will be not to let ISIS fester, but to work closely with the French on a strategy to destroy ISIS.

Riad TABET, President, Berit International Holding SA

Je voudrais revenir – je vais parler en français si vous le permettez – à l'accord nucléaire avec l'Iran. Henry Kissinger, dans un article récent paru dans le *Washington Post*, dit que d'aucuns voudraient comparer l'accord de Nixon avec la Chine à l'accord d'Obama avec l'Iran, dans la mesure où tous les deux visaient à réintégrer ces deux nations, leur donner une respectabilité et les rentrer dans le concert des nations.

Il dit que la comparaison ne tient pas debout, d'une part parce que, depuis l'accord de Nixon avec la Chine, l'évolution des intérêts des deux parties était parallèle. Les deux parties avaient trouvé un intérêt dans cet accord et l'évolution des intérêts se faisait d'une manière naturelle.



Cela n'est pas le cas avec l'Iran car l'Iran, c'est vrai, peut être réintégrée dans le concert des nations. Mais dans la diplomatie iranienne il y a un double jeu dans la mesure où il y a des *non-nations parties* sur lesquelles ils s'appuient dans les régions, en Irak, en Syrie, Hezbollah au Liban, les Russes au Yémen. Donc on ne peut pas établir un parallèle. Qu'est-ce que vous en pensez ?

Nelson CUNNINGHAM, President, McLarty Associates; former Special Advisor to President Clinton

I spent an hour with President Rouhani when he was in New York during the UN General Assembly meetings this fall. He had asked to meet with a group of American business leaders, because he wanted to make the case that, when the US was ready to engage with Iran commercially, American companies would be welcome in Iran. It was clear that this was part of his vision for the nuclear pact. The agreement was not just a nuclear pact; it also sought commercial engagement, and not just with Europe and the rest of the world—if President Rouhani does not bring the US to the table with the rest of the world that engages with Iran, he has not fulfilled his mission.

It was clear to me from that interaction that Rouhani is sincere. The problem is that he does not control the entirety of his government. He does not control the national security apparatus, he does not control the intelligence apparatus, and he does not control the judiciary. The risk this creates for the US is that—unlike sitting down with Mao—we are not necessarily negotiating an agreement with 100% of the Iranian government. We are getting Rouhani, but we may not be getting all of the Iranian government. This is a substantial risk.

You have identified another important point, which is that within the US, when the Iranian deal went before Congress, every Republican voted against it, and if it had not been carefully structured it would have been rejected by Congress, forcing the President to use a complicated parliamentary procedure to bring it back into effect. Therefore, the Republicans remain adamantly opposed to Iran and the Iran deal, and it will continue to be a fissure going forward.

Jim HOAGLAND, Contributing Editor to *The Washington Post*

I am in the happy position of being able to say that I agree with the Washington Post.

Miguel Ángel MORATINOS, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain

We were all Americans on 9-11, we were all French last Friday, but the day after 9-11, the majority of Europeans were not Americans, and we did not really support or understand the response of the Bush administration. Some say that he missed target – the target was not Iraq or Saddam Hussein but some fanatic barbarians who were hitting us again, and, speaking modestly, he also missed the response. We have a different situation today. We know what the target is, ISIS, and for once we can all create this international coalition, with NATO for once, so we are really prepared to do the right job, and I hope that we will have a Security Council resolution very soon so that with international legality we can do a better job in getting rid of these fanatics.

My question is this. Even if we get rid of ISIS, and I am sure we will succeed in doing that, do we not have to think about the root causes in that other war which created them? Should we wait for the destruction of ISIS before we make another attempt to solve the Israeli-Palestinian issue? Do you think we even have time before the end of President Obama's term? Following the visit of Prime Minister Netanyahu, who said there would be no Israeli-Palestinian deal during his mandate, can we try to tell them that the time has come to make a final effort to bring peace between Israel and Palestine and to bring Israel, Palestine and all Arabs against these fanatics and barbarians?

Jim HOAGLAND, Contributing Editor to *The Washington Post*

I am taking part in a panel discussion on the Israeli-Palestinian issue, so will reserve my comments for then. However, I will quickly come back to a point your question raises, which is that one of the lessons from Iraq in particular, but also many other conflicts is that foreign intervention is doomed unless the neighbours of the country which is having a civil war really cooperate and really commit to a peaceful, or at least a just, solution, and that is one of the main reasons I put such emphasis on Turkey. I will come back to your question, if I might, in another context.



Nelson CUNNINGHAM, President, McLarty Associates; former Special Advisor to President Clinton

We did it right in the first Gulf War, and we did it wrong in the second Gulf War. The challenge is to try to get it right in this third conflict. Finally, I will say that I have known John Kerry for a long time, and he will not leave the State Department without another strong effort to lead to a Palestinian-Israeli accord.