

THIERRY DE MONTBRIAL

Founder and Chairman of the World Policy Conference

Thierry de MONTBRIAL, Founder and Chairman of the WPC

I am relatively struck that so far the importance of the Iranian agreement has not been mentioned that much, so before I move to Bernard, the last speaker, I would like to ask each of you to answer yes or no to the question whether the Iranian nuclear agreement is good news from the perspective of the reduction of the degree of chaos in the Middle East.

Youssef AMRANI, Royal Cabinet, Morocco

Yes and no; yes, because it offers Iran the opportunity to reach agreement, it offers the international community the opportunity to verify, and we need Iran to be able to play a positive role in solving the conflict in the region, because Iran is important. The question is whether this nuclear deal will be implemented fully and faithfully.

Elisabeth GUIGOU, President of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the French National Assembly

I think it is very good news, firstly because, as you know, France was very demanding and we have a very solid agreement. It remains to be implemented, of course, especially with regard to the US where we have to see what Congress will do. However, it is good to have this agreement, though it is probably wrong to think that because we have this agreement Iran will completely change its views on the Middle East question. I went to Iran on two occasions recently, in July and about a month ago, and I have quite regular meetings with my counterpart, and I can see that, although there is a fight inside Iran between the reformists around Rouhani and his government and the conservatives inside the Majlis, and whatever their differences, there is an obstacle in terms of their position.

One of the main questions in the Vienna Process is whether we can keep Iran around the table, which is absolutely indispensable, and whether Iran and Russia can work together to get Syria and members of the regime around the table, since along with others I believe that Mr al-Assad cannot be the future of his people.

Mona Makram EBEID, Egyptian Senator and Member of the Senate Constitutional Committee

It is a very good deal, but we must not forget that it must not implement what it has promised to do, and also that Iran is a major player because it is an old civilisation, it is not a new state, so it is a main player in the region.

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That is why I asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs for Qatar why we should not put Iran and Saudi Arabia at the same level. They are not comparable.

Vitaly NAUMKIN, Scientific Director of the Oriental Studies Institute, Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences

I agree that it is a good thing, but there are some problems. There are hardliners in Iran who are criticising Rouhani for this deal, and some experts believe that, in order to deter these criticisms, he may become more assertive in regional affairs. Please do not exaggerate the extent of the alliance between Russia and Iran. We still have different agendas; for instance, Russia has no religious agenda in Syria, whereas Iran has a powerful religious agenda in its regional policy by defending all Shia everywhere in the Muslim world, which it is fully entitled to do. However, Iran is a very pluralistic society with a lot of elements of democracy, a rare case in this part of the world, and is one of the most stable states in the Middle East at present.



I have nothing against Egypt, and there are a lot of similar cases, but you cannot deny that Iran has fewer internal problems in terms of the stability of its system, whether you like it or not, which means that we still have to see how events will unfold in this country.

Jim HOAGLAND, Contributing Editor to *The Washington Post*

My answer to your 'Yes or no' question is, 'Up to a point,' but basically I agree with the positive sentiment expressed by my colleagues and their qualifications on it. Iran and Saudi Arabia are clearly not the same state, but they are engaged in an existential struggle to see who will dominate the Gulf that is very deadly and destructive.