

STUART EIZENSTAT

Partner, Covington and Burling LLP

Miguel Ángel MORATINOS

Now we will hear from Stuart Eizenstat, from the United States. Stuart Eizenstat is a man who needs no introduction. Everyone knows him; he has a great diplomatic career. I have always said that he is the most European of all Americans. He's the one we always addressed when we wanted to hear a more positive response, and it's been a great pleasure to see him here again today, in Marrakech, to revive our relationship.

I would like us to be able to ask the question as to the role, the position and the attitude of America's geopolitics towards the Middle East. We have talked a lot about the Obama period, about disengagement. The Pacific, the Middle East remained the second, third priority. The new Trump administration is on the way. How can an American show us, share with us what the positions are and what, in his opinion, American policy will be in the coming months, the next few years in the Middle East?

Stuart EIZENSTAT

Thank you very much, Mr Minister. I want to congratulate Thierry de Montbrial on the 10th anniversary of the World Policy Conference and say wholeheartedly what a privilege it is to be on a panel of this distinction.

The political trends in the United States and the West have a direct impact on the Middle East. The upsurge of nationalist, populist, protectionist, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim sentiments and the weakening of the political centre are the thread that connects Brexit, the Trump election, the rise of right-wing anti-EU parties and attitudes in the Netherlands, Sweden, Germany, Austria, Poland and Hungary. In the US, Trump's America First doctrine is, and I cannot emphasise this enough, a dramatic departure from the bipartisan consensus that Republicans and Democrats have had since the end of World War II, a consensus that helped build an international order based on international institutions like the IMF, the World Bank, NATO, OECD, the World Trade Organisation and a whole body of free trade agreements, both bilateral and multilateral.

What we are seeing is a marked departure with neo-isolationism, a suspicion of alliances and multilateral agreements. The withdrawal from the long-negotiated 11-country Trans-Pacific Partnership, which was to be our answer to countering Chinese influence in Asia, done unilaterally after three years of negotiation, the threat to withdraw from NAFTA and the Iran nuclear agreement, the effective withdrawal from the Paris climate change agreement are examples of this new attitude. There is a direct opposition to nation-building in the Middle East, whether it is Iraq or Afghanistan, and the President only reluctantly agreed to a modest increase in US troop levels in Afghanistan.

With respect to the Middle East, it seems to me there is very positive news in a number of areas, mostly interestingly in the countries with monarchies. Saudi Arabia's 2030 vision by King Salman recognises the need to diversify an oil-based economy, to empower women and to encourage for the first time more private and foreign investment. The same is true in the United Arab Emirates, which are booming. Under King Hussein, Jordan is staying above water, which is saying something when you consider a country of 10 million has had to accept 700,000 refugees with few natural resources. Morocco is doing fairly well under a reformist King Mohammed VI and ISIS has been defeated on the battlefield in Iraq and Syria, although it remains a persistent problem for terrorism.

These are very positive developments and should not be neglected. At the same time, they tend to be overwhelmed by three negative trends. The first is the rise of non-state forces of disintegration, many, although not all, radical, threatening traditional unitary states. The Kurds in Iraq, for example, with their referendum of independence clearly overplayed their hand and the central government in Iraq quashed their movement, but it was an example of this effort at disintegration, of taking unitary states and dividing them.



Regarding the Syrian civil war, while Assad is now likely to prevail, it is hard to imagine a unitary state emerging after this conflict at any time in the near future. Hezbollah in Lebanon has created a mini state within a state and the Taliban in Afghanistan remains a very dangerous threat to the unity of that country, and this by the way is the longest-standing US war in American history. It is longer than the Civil War, longer than World War II, longer than World War I, longer than the Korean War, longer than the Vietnam War. It is 10 years now and inconclusive still.

In Egypt, after defeating the Muslim Brotherhood, a traditional lynchpin and the largest country in the region is facing radical insurgent forces in northern Sinai with sporadic violence that has decimated its economy, which is heavily dependent on tourism. President el-Sisi has cracked down not only on the Muslim Brotherhood and other radicals, as he should, but unfortunately on moderate secular forces, a peaceful opposition and the press.

A second negative force is the rise of political Islam, and Iran is the progenitor of that, marrying Islam to a radical terrorist agenda. I was unfortunately there at the creation as President Carter's Chief Domestic Advisor, and I lived through the whole revolution and the hostage crisis. Their nuclear ambitions are tied to medium-range missile development, their support for Hezbollah in Lebanon with 100,000 increasingly sophisticated missiles facing Israel, their deep engagement of the Revolutionary Guards and Quds Force in Syria and their plan to have a permanent military base in that country. Their support for Hamas in Gaza is another example.

Turkey is unfortunately also an example of a rise of political Islam. Mr Erdogan is moving sharply in an anti-Western direction, increasingly autocratic, cracking down on the press and the opposition and remarkably for two allied countries over decades, we now have today at this moment a dual visa ban. You cannot get a visa from either country going to the other. That is how things have deteriorated. Even in Morocco, which is a source of stability, an Islamic party won election and is part of the government, although under the close supervision of the king.

The third negative force, at least from my standpoint, is the resurgence of Russian influence at the expense of the United States in a region in which they were expelled by President Sadat in 1973 as he turned to America. This resurgence is seen in a number of ways. In Syria, it appears that Russia picked the right horse in Assad and is riding him to some kind of victory, and they did so when he was literally on his knees. In return, they are securing a permanent naval base in Syria. They have sold missiles to Turkey, an unbelievable development for a country that is a NATO ally. The notion of introducing Russian missiles into a country which is a NATO partner is almost unimaginable, but it is happening. Even with respect to Saudi Arabia, Russia is warming relations with them with arms sales, although they have been our traditional Arab partner.

Now, US policy under Trump has two priorities in this region. The first is the defeat of ISIS with modest help to pro-US forces in Syria and support of anti-radical forces in Yemen and Niger and in Nigeria as well. The second priority of the Trump administration in this region is to limit Iranian power in every way possible, short of war. The President's recent decision to decertify the Iran nuclear deal, the JCPOA, while it does not mean immediate withdrawal, certainly sets the stage for that because he has laid out the following conditions.

In order to stay in the JCPOA, there has to be a permanent ban on Iran's nuclear development, a long-term ban on their missile development and other conditions which will be very difficult, if not impossible to meet by January 12, and that date is important because that is the date on which the six-month rolling waiver of secondary sanctions will expire. If those conditions are not met, and it is hard to see how they will be, then he would have great difficulty in waiving the sanctions. If he re-imposes the secondary sanctions, which were a key part of the JCPOA, then in effect, we will have withdrawn and not only that, we will have engaged in a major trade war, Mr Minister, with the EU because those secondary sanctions will be targeted to any company that does business with Iran.

In effect, we are saying, 'Either choose the US market or choose the Iranian market', and that is a choice that will be very difficult. The EU is already developing its blocking legislation to protect EU companies and this will be a conflagration on the trade front. Let us remember that the only reason that Iran came to the bargaining table to begin with was not our unilateral sanctions. It was only when we got the European Union to join us in banking sanctions, in sanctions in terms of depriving the EU of 16% of their oil sources, that is why they came, so here we would be dividing ourselves from our allies in dealing with Iran, but that is the prospect that is likely.

The Trump policy places the Middle East peace process between Israel and the Palestinians at best on a second order of priority, despite having his son-in-law's involvement, whom he recently criticised, by the way. It is very difficult to see, for someone who believes as I do in the two-state solution, any likelihood of that being prodded forward in this administration because the administration and the President has aligned himself with very conservative elements in a generally liberal American-Jewish community and with a very conservative indeed - Itamar can correct me - perhaps the most right-wing government we have had in Israeli history, which is highly pro-settler. The conditions on either side, the Palestinians agree to some acceptance of Israel as a Jewish state, and giving up at least in significant part their 'right of return', and the Israeli side is very difficult to see and I can assure you that the President does not want to break any political china to resolve that impasse.

Likewise, there will be very little effort to break the Qatar/Saudi priorities, so we are left with a mixed picture. There are positive elements in the region. Those in my opinion are overwhelmed by many of the negatives that I have mentioned, but the traditional role of the US as a fulcrum, as a lever is potentially going to leave an empty vacuum into which negative forces will enter. Thank you.

Miguel Ángel MORATINOS

Thank you, Stuart, for a brilliant presentation and I think you are right. There are positive elements in the Middle East. Some countries are doing well and some negative phenomena, such as non-state, failing state, the rise of political Islam and then finally what we were waiting to hear from you about, which was the role of the US and the lack of role in such a chaotic region with a lack of control, leadership and guidance for the next few months and years.

You and Youssef Amrani mentioned the question of the failing state and state organisations.