

PANELISTS DEBATE

Steven ERLANGER

Given that we have a pretty strict deadline to get ready for dinner, I just want to bring up a couple of things and ask people to react if they like. We have not talked too much about the JCPOA and Iran and the Trump effort to create dissent in Iran. I am curious what you all think about the Trump policy? The European Union says it is trying to create the special investment vehicle, nobody is sure it is going to work, or quite sure what it is. My sense is that the Iranians themselves do not want to break out of the JCPOA and the Europeans are trying to find them excuses so that they can stay in. I am curious what you think the end-result of this Trump policy against Iran is likely to be? Does anyone want to respond?

Renaud GIRARD

I do not think that Trump will achieve his goal. He said his goal was a regime change in Iran.

Steven ERLANGER

He has not quite said that, but that is what he means.

Renaud GIRARD

He wants Iran to just accept his conditions. I do not think that it will happen. I think that the result could be the opposite, with a radicalisation of the Iranian regime with General Soleimani being the new leader of Iran. I think the Europeans are right, including the American allies, the British, French, the Germans, as well as the Russians and the Chinese, to try to do this vehicle. I hope it will work. I think it is very important that we do not accept that America negotiates a deal with a lot of effort and then has it sanctioned in the United Nations with a resolution and then just throws it away. I think, of course, the answer, but I agree with you that most of the population of Iran wants to keep the agreement. They do not want to go nuclear, but if they are pushed and humiliated, there is something that we have to consider in the Middle East, which is the dignity of nations. I think the Americans should be careful of that. If they are pushed to the extreme, I think that all the American foreign policy in Iran would be counter-productive.

Mona MAKRAM EBEID

I think, first of all, that an attack would fail to destroy all the facilities, but it would radicalise the Arab and Muslim world more and generate more terrorists and anti-American activity. Therefore, military action against Iran is no good today, because it would be a preventive strike, which will not accomplish much good and it will fail, as I said, against organised militias and terrorists, who are much better armed, accepted by the local population and prepared to die for their cause. That is what we would get. It would cause the Iranians to rally round the flag.

Steven ERLANGER

Part of what interests me is the way that Trump has simply done what the Saudis and the Gulfis have always wanted. Miguel, what do you think?

Miguel Angel MORATINOS

Very shortly, I think that the Europeans have to stick, they must write down a deal that is going to work. However, we cannot ignore that Iran has an expansionist policy, so we cannot close our eyes and not see that Iran is in Gaza, Hezbollah. A new agenda has to be built. I think the deal now, is that the Europeans are going to say that they will stay

with them on the nuclear deal, but we have to address other questions, such as anti-ballistic missiles, the role of Iran in the region and how we engage with the Arab world. That is the new element but maintaining our position.

Steven ERLANGER

It is interesting because the EU three have had at least three conversations with Iran on security issues, outside nuclear, but they have not really gone anywhere.

Odeh ABURDENE

Before coming here on Wednesday afternoon, I went to a session on Iran and the official said the following: we want to apply maximum pressure, we want to be able to prevent Iran from exporting any oil. They are hoping that this will force the Iranians to come to the table and the administration would then have a treaty that deals with missiles, terrorism. If this does not work, then we have the military option. We have heard about the military option from Bush. We have heard that from Obama and if you look at Trump, first he is unpredictable. He said he was against the war in Iraq. He said he was against the war in Syria. My interpretation is that I do not think he wants to start a war and therefore, I do not where this policy is going. Perhaps Itamar could elaborate more.

Itamar RABINOVICH

Very briefly, I think that we do not know yet what Trump's negotiations with North Korea will actually produce. The tactic of first threatening and scaring the other side and bringing them to the table worked with North Korea, at least to get them to the table, will not work with Iran. You are dealing here with a proud nation with an imperial past and you will have to find a more accommodating way of getting them to the table, because I think ultimately it is in their interest to be there.

Steven ERLANGER

I know one of the things the European negotiators are worried about is that Israel, Bibi, who has thought about bombing Iran at least twice before and Obama tried to stop it, that Trump might not feel the same way and would get pulled-in to a military action, that the United States does not even start.

Itamar RABINOVICH

I think that the threats of military action by Israel were actually meant to motivate the United States to negotiate the agreement, but obviously Mr. Netanyahu was not happy with the specific agreement. The idea of an Israeli military raid against the Iranian nuclear is very problematic. Only one country really has the capacity to do that.

Steven ERLANGER

That is us.

Itamar RABINOVICH

That is it. Or the United States. I think that the threat of that action created an important effect on diplomacy, but the beauty of a threat is that you use it vocally and do not practice it.

Odeh ABURDENE

As I look at the Middle East and I look at the violence and the wars, it seems to me that all of the actors do not take into account what someone once said: when you act in defence of your security and the integrity of your country, make sure that when you act the act is moral, but more importantly, the end-result should be moral. I think that should be kept in mind.

Steven ERLANGER



One last question for you, if you would just be brief. I will do it in a not very sophisticated way. Does Mohammed bin Salman survive the next year, or will he be moved out as crown prince? Yes, no, or do not want to touch it?

Renaud GIRARD

I think he will do, because the King appointed him as president of the inquiry commission on the secret services. The King did not appoint a vice-crown prince and I think that Mohammed bin Salman controls the surroundings of the King, I think that the King does not make all the decisions. We see that now Mohammed bin Salman has got the support of Russia, which is quite important.

Mona MAKRAM EBEID

I do not think he will survive the year and this latest brutality has tarnished his reputation terribly. Even though he is supported by the young people in Saudi Arabia, he has made a lot of enemies, the conservatives, the princes, business and now the international community is not very much for him. There is the question of his younger brother, who I think is Ambassador to the United States, could take over.

Itamar RABINOVICH

I think the question is not will he survive as crown prince, but what happens next. Prince Hassan in Jordan can tell you that you can be crown prince for many years and then not become the king.

Steven ERLANGER

Please join me in thanking this panel. We have been great, and we are on time. Thank you all very much.