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Jim BITTERMANN

Let me just begin the discussion and feel free to jump in and disagree with each other and that sort of thing. I want to begin by asking Renaud, because his President, Mr Macron has made a thing of being the Trump whisperer. He is the person who seems to be the only world leader who can get along with Trump. I guess the question is how he manages to do that, but also what has he got back from Mr Trump in return for his attitude towards the United States?

Renaud GIRARD

I completely agree with what Jim has just said. By that I mean that Macron, in my opinion, was smart enough to understand that Trump was highly sensitive to personal dealings, and that he did not really read the memos he was given, receptive to direct explanations between leaders. He was well aware of that, and this particular aspect of Trump's character may be detrimental further down the line. We saw that during a telephone conversation he had on 6 October 2019 with Turkish President Erdogan, where the Turkish President managed to get the green light from him to invade the north of Syria.

But I think Macron is doing well. I think that not much headway was made at the beginning, you cannot fundamentally change Trump's convictions, which have always been very strong. There was no agreement on the climate or on Iran from the get-go, nor the JCPoA, the Iran nuclear deal. Macron did not manage to change Trump's mind.

And yet, I think that by maintaining this personal relationship, which all began with a dinner at the Eiffel tower, Macron had rather an important role, which we saw in Biarritz, for example. He made an incredible move in Biarritz. He managed to completely isolate Trump from his advisors and Cabinet, which was not part of the plan, taking him aside, while Bolton was over 200 meters away, and speaking with him for two hours without an interpreter.

That was clearly the point at which he asked him: "*Would you mind if I invited Zarif, the Foreign Affairs Minister of Iran, so that we can talk with him?*" And of course, Trump then naturally gave him the green light. You cannot hold a conference where the American President is there and force him to invite a potential enemy. Macron's plan worked.

Macron did not manage to set up the meeting that he had tried to arrange in New York between Iranian President Rouhani and President Trump, but that does not matter. Why did not he succeed? Because Rouhani is not the leader of Iran. He is the regime's most senior advisor, but he is not the leader of Iran. The leader of Iran is Ayatollah Khamenei, and Ayatollah Khamenei did not give Rouhani permission to attend this meeting with Trump.

But we cannot criticize Macron on this, even if he failed, because it is beyond doubt that the cause of peace in the Persian Gulf advanced after Biarritz. That is undeniable.

Another positive aspect, I think, of Macron's policy toward Trump concerns Russia. I think that Russia is on his agenda. Macron has sought or is currently seeking a rapprochement which will bring Russia into the international community and into the discussion. I think that Macron has understood that it was foolish to want to drive the Russians into the arms of the Chinese, and we will see whether that works. He is keeping Trump updated and that is very important. Recall the Brégançon talks, for example.

How will the meeting go in Paris with the Normandy Format, that is, with the heads of Germany, France, Ukraine and Russia, which I believe is set to take place in November or possibly December? Is progress going to be made on the Donbass issue? It is a possibility, given the new deal with Ukrainian President Zelensky. It is by all means possible and, if progress is made on the Donbass issue, meaning if it can be resolved, progressing towards a resolution of the

Donbass issue which has a fairly straightforward solution – amnesty, cultural autonomy without political autonomy, that is the deal – one could envisage a discussion between the Europeans, the Americans potentially, and above all the Europeans and Russians on the Middle East. Because clearly, the case of Syria shows us that we need cooperation between the Russians and Central Europe.

In summary, what is the current situation in America? The situation in America is that Biden is out. His candidacy is doomed to fail – everyone knows it – because of his son, Hunter. And so Elizabeth Warren is gaining traction.

Jim BITTERMANN

Not everybody would agree with that.

Renaud GIRARD

OK. I am giving my take on this so that next year you can tell me that I was wrong. My take is that Elizabeth Warren is on the rise, but as she seems to have some extremely far-left ideas – in particular, I think she recently suggested removing guards from the US borders – it will be fairly easy for Trump to wage a campaign directed against her with one sole slogan (and nothing more) which will be: “*Pocahontas* [his nickname for her] *wants to open up America’s borders.*”

It might work. I am saying that I think Trump could be re-elected and is still in the running to become President again. If that happens, I think that Macron was right to look ahead because if we have another four years of Trump, well, Macron will be there. I think that he also has strong chances of being re-elected himself. Macron will be there to take it upon himself to do what is known as – and this will be my only word in English during this session – what is known in English as four year of *damage control*.

Jim BITTERMANN

As you say, at no negative consequences for Macron, in the sense that Trump’s famous for throwing his friends under the bus. So, there have been no negative consequences.

Renaud GIRARD

I do not think so. No, I do not think that this is bad for Macron at all. There are people who mock him: he made an effort in New York, he was left waiting in a hotel lobby, etc. So what? Is peace not a higher cause?

I do not think there is any reason to blame him for this. He tries his best. It would be very serious if there were to be a fourth war in the Persian Gulf. We saw the catastrophic consequences of the American war in Iraq in 2003. I think that Macron is doing all he can to find a deal between Iran and America. As for the deal, like with Ukraine, we know perfectly well what the deal is. The deal is abandoning what are known as *sunset clauses* in English, meaning that Iran renounce its nuclear weapons forever.

But clearly, the Americans are letting it have the main line into the Arab capitals it has conquered, including in Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut and Sanaa. And perhaps the Iranians will finally release Yemen, given that it does not hold much interest for them.

We will not call it a main line: we will call it a common market. We will find a less aggressive name for it, but that is essentially the deal. The deal is ready, and Macron thinks that this deal can be achieved. He is trying to achieve it with Trump and clearly has perfect reason to do so. In any case, Macron has already advanced peace in the Persian Gulf. That is absolutely indisputable.