

## STUART EIZENSTAT

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### **Fareed Yasseen, Ambassador of Iraq to the United States**

After this view from Moscow, let us move to Washington and the Honorable Stuart Eizenstat. He has a stellar career working for the US government and has been Undersecretary of State on two occasions, Deputy Secretary of the Treasury and of course, he is well known for having resolved many of the pending issues Holocaust Survivors had to deal with to recover some of the assets that were confiscated by the Nazis.

### **Stuart Eizenstat**

Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador, I am sorry that I cannot be with you personally. First, I want to outline the policy goals of the Biden administration in general. First, it is to move from the Trump administration's America First unilateralism and neo-isolationism to an America fully engaged as a leader to solve global problems and promote global order and the rule of law. Second, it is to reinvigorate alliances with Europe, with NATO and the European Union, which I have been an ambassador to in the Clinton administration, and with the Asian-Pacific countries to take on 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges. First, to deal with any terrorism, Al-Qaeda and ISIS. Second, global health issues, particularly the Covid pandemic where the administration has donated more vaccines to Covax for Africa and developing countries than any other country. Third, it is a real emphasis, which was totally rejected by the previous administration, on climate change. Former Secretary of State John Kerry has been designated as the leader appointed for Glasgow, but we realize that this also requires global cooperation. The US emits only 15% of the world's emissions and we need to enlist other countries if we are going to meet the Paris goals. As we speak now, the administration is seeking legislation [inaudible] divided Congress for the Biden Administration's Build Back Better program, which has a substantial climate change component. I believe with all the provisions that we have read, that by the end of this month a substantial part of that package will pass.

A third priority for foreign policy is to enlist allies to deal with challenge of China, which is considered by the administration as the greatest geopolitical challenge. Secretary Blinken has put it very clearly this way: "We will compete economically, technologically and militarily with China. We will collaborate whenever possible with China, for example, on climate change and if need be, confront China when it moves in inappropriate ways in areas like the South China Sea."

A fourth concept and goal of the Biden foreign policy is to relate it to domestic policy in the belief that a stronger America at home will mean a stronger America abroad.



Let me be frank in talking about the problems with these goals and then I will go directly to the Middle East. The first problem in achieving these goals is quite frankly that the United States, which is still the strongest power militarily and economically, does not have the unchallenged supremacy it did 10 to 15 years ago, in dealing with the rise of China, a more assertive and aggressive Russia and the rise of regional powers from North Korea to Iran and beyond.

Second, it is very difficult to achieve many of these goals without the projection of military force and here the absence of boots on the ground, the loss of Bagram Airforce base in Afghanistan, the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan without prior notification to our allies, who actually had more troops in Afghanistan than the US, combined with the submarine deal with Australia, have left problems in seeking to build and rebuild those alliances. At the same time, the administration has continued Trump era tariffs on European steel and aluminum and on China.

Let me move now to the Middle East. I have to be candid, and of course I am not speaking for the administration but someone who I think is quite knowledgeable about it and its key players; I have worked with them in previous administrations. The administration sees the Middle East as a lower priority on its foreign policy agenda than dealing with China, Russia and the Asia-Pacific. The Middle Eastern wars have drained many trillions of dollars from domestic needs and in an era of high domestic political polarization, there is bi-partisan agreement to focus more on China and less on what are called endless wars. To move from a policy based on military force to what President Biden called in his UN address, towards diplomacy.

Let me quote my good friend Secretary of State Tony Blinken and he said: "Just as a matter of time allocation and budget priorities, I think we will be giving less to the Middle East, not more". The national Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said that one of the mistakes of US foreign policy in the Middle East over the last several decades under both Republican and Democratic administrations was putting greater priority to military than to diplomatic components. In their recently released interim national security strategy guidelines it is notable how little attention has been given in that document to the Middle East. There is a statement about maintaining ironclad commitments to Israel and security and promoting a two-state solution. However, there is a realization that trying to relaunch the kind of aggressive peace process that then Secretary of State Kerry did in 2014 and the Obama administration, is not going to be fruitful. Neither side is prepared to make the kinds of compromises that would make such a peace agreement possible. Therefore, the administration will put greater emphasis than the previous administration on improving the lives of Palestinians and opposing the expansion of Israeli settlements, which would complicate an eventual two-state solution.

The second piece of this new national security strategy is to work with regional partners in the Middle East to deter Iranian aggression. A third component of the Middle East piece of this strategy is to disrupt Al-Qaeda and related terrorist networks and to prevent a resurgence of ISIS, and next is to resolve armed conflicts. However, with a clear statement and I am virtually quoting from this document, we do not believe that military force is the answer to recent challenges, and we will not give our partners in the Middle East and that means in part Saudi Arabia, what they call in their document a blank check to pursue policies at odds with American interests and values. They say in this document, that is why they have withdrawn

US support for offensive military operations in Yemen and back UN efforts to end the war. They state that our aim will be to de-escalate regional tensions and create space for people throughout the Middle East to realize their aspirations. They further state that in the Middle East we will right-size and frankly that is a diplomatic term for reduce, our military presence to the level required to disrupt international terrorist networks, to deter Iranian aggression and to protect other vital US interests. Now I believe that those would have better served if we had continued to keep 3 000 US troops in Afghanistan, but that obviously was not the decision that the President made.

Beyond that, there will be support for the Trump era Abraham Accords and an effort to expand them. In my opinion, there will be continued support for the condition of Morocco entering into normalized relations with Israel, namely Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara. I have been to Morocco many times and have the privilege of serving on the advisory board of OCP, one of their largest companies. I also think the administration will continue to keep Sudan off the terrorist list, the so-called SST list, which was their condition for normalization.

Let me close by talking about Iran. The administration recently used military force against Iranian-backed militias that were targeting US and coalition forces, Mr. Ambassador, in your country of Iraq. There is a strong desire to get Iran back into the JCPOA, and there is a feeling that the decision by President Trump to withdraw from it, with all its imperfections, has opened the door for Iran to play through the limits of the 2015 agreement and to get perilously close to an ability to produce weapons-grade nuclear fuel. If I can be more specific, under the 2015 JCPOA, Iran was limited to a uranium enrichment of less than 4%. May I say to my Russian colleague, the Russians played a very constructive role in the JCPOA, not just in the negotiations, but it was the location in which Iran sent its enriched uranium. Now, since the Trump administration withdrew, Iran is building a large stockpile with uranium to 20% and even to 60%, with faster spinning centrifuges, which are very close to weapons grade. Experts believe it is only a short few months before they will be able to reach that weapons grade level and they have gone from having over 300 to over 3 000 kilograms of enriched uranium.

Let me give a forecast that may or may not turn out to be correct, but it is the best assumption I can make. For many years I have heard the Atlantic Council's Iran Taskforce, the think tank on Iran. I have met with former Minister Zarif on several occasions, and I think it is a tragedy that many more moderate regimes with President Rouhani and Foreign Minister Zarif, we could not have built on the JCPOA. Instead, we now have a very hardline new government of Ebrahim Raisi and the Foreign Minister's comments at the UN within the last few days were very tough. Where Secretary of State Blinken has called for a longer and stronger accord to replace the 2015 JCPOA, which runs to 2030, the Iranian Foreign Minister directly rejected what he called the so-called longer and stronger deal and he said that they expect greater sanctions relief than they got under the JCPOA. Given this confrontation, I still believe that both the US and Iran see it as their national interests to get back into an accord. My friend Rob Malley is negotiating that for the US, and I believe that the best we will be able to see will be an interim accord that will get Iran back into a slightly stronger basic POA with perhaps slightly more sanctions relief, but nothing more. I know that many of our colleagues in the region rightly want Iran constrained, not just in this dimension, but in terms of their building missiles, their support for terrorist groups and for their violation of rights and intervention in countries like Lebanon and Syria. Unfortunately, that will not happen, more weight than the



nuclear agreement can bear, but I do want to mention to my colleagues from the Arab states that even if there is a re-entrance of the US and Iran into the JCPOA or a slightly expanded JCPOA, the US continues to maintain separate sanctions on Iran for its nuclear missile program and its support for terrorism. It has shown by the recent military attack, that I mentioned, on Iranian-backed militias operating in Iraq, it will not hesitate to take such actions. Thank you very much for allowing me to participate in this panel at my dear friend Thierry de Montbrial's World Policy Conference. I am more than happy to take any questions.

**Fareed Yasseen**

Thank you for staying up so late, I think it is around two or three o'clock in the morning.

**Stuart Eizenstat**

It is not so much staying up late as getting up early.

**Fareed Yasseen**

Thank you all the same.