

THE ROLE OF IRAN

Steven Erlanger, Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, Europe, for *The New York Times*

Itamar, do you think this helps the prospect for a more regional solution including an Israeli-Palestinian rapprochement or does that part of it still seem distant?

Itamar Rabinovich, Vice Chairman of the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) in Tel Aviv, Distinguished Fellow at the Brookings Institution

Let us bring with the Israeli-Palestinian issue. This is a keystone and without any positive movement on the issue the Saudis will not recognize Israel and the whole Biden idea of building, call it a moderate coalition, will not materialize. There are limited prospects that this Israeli government will do it except for one issue I will mention in a minute. If Israel ends the war now, it is Hamas who is in power in Gaza, and one reason that Netanyahu does not want to end the war now is that he would not end it with a victory. He has only himself to blame for not bringing the PA into Gaza six months ago, the Palestinian Authority is the only actor that would actually fight Hamas. If you send European peacekeepers into Gaza, you would see the same thing that happened in Somalia and other places, where the Italians withdrew after they lost 14 people. It is essential that Israel agrees to have the PA in Gaza and if it comes to Gaza and does a good job, support for Israeli-Palestinian progress in the West Bank would increase because Israelis would appreciate the role that the PA could conceivably play. The Israeli position could be altered by Trump, who has the power to persuade Netanyahu to do things he does not want to do. He has the power to do that if he wants to go that route and I am sure he very much wants a Nobel Prize and that is a very promising route to do that. I do not rule out the possibility that the change might come from another direction. That is the Israeli-Palestinian situation.

Second is the larger regional picture. There are two prospects here, one is that there could also be an Iranian-American deal. I think there is a great deal of opposition to the regime in Iran itself, there is a lot of criticism with people saying they have suffered economically while billions of dollars have been wasted in Lebanon and other places and it all came to nothing, so maybe it is time to rethink the policies. From Trump's point of view, he could choose to either scare and force the Iranians into something or to come to terms with Iran, which is another road to the Nobel. These are two roads to an original situation.

Steven Erlanger

The Iran thing is interesting. When I have been talking to the Europeans, they are trying to talk to the Iranians, who are very interested in trying for a deal through Pezeshkian and to hold Trump off from installing maximum pressure 2.0 the first day. If he does that, I do not think the Iranians will want to play and then by October, if not before, you will have snap-back sanctions,

so on top or maximum pressure 2.0, all the UN sanctions will be back again, which will really be an economic blow to Iran. My sense is that Iran is at least open to an early deal, I do not know if the Trump people are but certainly the E3 are trying to create the space for that because the proliferation issue is significant.

Itamar Rabinovich

Iran would have to offer two things. One is to replace the deal the JCPOA made with Obama-

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That is gone.

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-with a better deal. It has not just to move forward but in some sense to move backward. Second, it has to end its role as a regional disruptor. These should be the two elements in a deal and the United States could offer normalization, end of sanctions, etc., though maybe not friendship.

Steven Erlanger

As well as a meeting between the Supreme Leader and our supreme leader.

Itamar Rabinovich

Actually, to remind you, during his first term, Trump was chasing after the Iranian foreign minister in the UN meeting.