

TRUMP'S INFLUENCE IN IRAN AND ISRAEL

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

Unfortunately, we have been truncated so I am not going to go to questions, I am just going to keep going with another question about Trump, Iran and Israel. Is there a risk that Mr. Netanyahu, with the wind in his sails, with his army done some pretty amazing things and pretty awful things I should also say, does he go after Iran when it is vulnerable as some on the American and Israel right want him to do? Is there a risk that he just presses his luck too far and would Trump let him do it? I do not think the Americans are going to go in with him, because Trump does not want to do that. I will start with you, Itamar.

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

I very much hope that he does not because Netanyahu was at a very low ebb on October 8, and he then managed to turn the tide with the achievements in Lebanon, with the decimation of Iranian power. He thinks that the fall of Assad, everybody thinks it is a great blow to Iran and Israel is one of the beneficiaries. I think he has been overly active in Syria itself, Israel has done too much in the last few days. I very much hope that given the fact that Iran has no air defenses now and that Israel alone cannot destroy the nuclear program, even though they could degrade it, that he would not be tempted to do it. I will not vouch for that, I can only hope he does not.

Nabil Fahmy, Dean Emeritus of the American University in Cairo, former Foreign Minister of Egypt

Of course, Itamar is better versed to answer this because he is an Israeli but from the other side of the table and following the Israeli Prime Minister, he thrives on tension. Trump will definitely not want active warfare in Gaza and the West Bank, which is embarrassing even for supporters of Israel. Assad is not there; Assad was not a threat to Israel he has not actually used a gun across the border in 30 years and for the last six months he was disagreeing with Iran more and more. The natural target will be Iran and then you have a problem because if he chooses Iran, it literally goes against Trump's inclination not to use force and not to engage and if he does it, America will be in a very difficult position not to support Israel. I would argue that you are immediately going to see a double order of pressure on Iran with the hope that this pre-empts the use of force and leads to a wider understanding between Iran and America, Iran and the region. Let me just make one point, which is wishful thinking. When the JCPOA was first negotiated, I was Foreign Minister at the time and I went to John Kerry and said I was a disarmament person, so this goes right into my portfolio, but you are leaving regional politics out of this package and it does not make sense, even for us as Arabs; his answer was, we could



not do all that at the same time. That was a mistake because at least you should have done something in parallel with that. However, I do believe that Trump will be open to the idea of a grand compromise with Iran or a grand package, but I do not think he will succeed in doing that.

Steven Erlanger

Unfortunately, we have run out of time and unfortunately, this is a story that keeps on giving. I want to thank you both for engaging and for your patience.