




COMMENTARY


The Warsaw Summit on Iran – A Breaking Point for the “United Europe”

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THE WARSAW SUMMIT ON IRAN – A BREAKING POINT FOR THE “UNITED EUROPE”

After the US unilateral withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal in May 2018, Europe's positions have always been in support of it. In the margins of the 2019 Munich Security Conference, EU High Representative Federica Mogherini insisted once again that the EU believes JCPOA is crucial for “both regional and global security”¹.

However, following the support of German Chancellor Angela Merkel for staying in nuclear deal with Iran in her speech at the 2019 Munich Security Conference, US Vice President Mike Pence invited Europeans to withdraw from JCPOA². The clear difference between the EU and the US government on how to approach towards Iran also shows itself in the Warsaw Summit.

Almost concurrent with the 40th anniversary of Islamic Revolution in Iran, the United States led a two-day conference on “peace and security” in the Middle East in Warsaw. The summit was held in days preceding to the Munich Security Conference organized by US government and Poland. The first focus of the summit was mentioned to be on Iran and to convince more countries to accompany US policies against Iran. However, after the EU reactions along with Russia and China including no-shows and sub-ministerial representations, the organizers broaden the summit's title to: “Ministerial to Promote a Future of Peace and Security in the Middle East”³.

The Munich, Warsaw and Sochi conferences, which were held shortly one after another, showed that the present security system of the world is in danger of collapse. One of the disagreements between the main actors in the international security scene - Europe and the United States - is how to deal with Iran. The participants in the Munich conference were worried about the current security vacuum in the world. The contradictions between the two pillars of the system - Europe and the United States - have been rising for some time, and the acts of unilateralism by the representatives of the Trump government in Munich did not reduce these tensions.

The unpredictability of the current US government and its one-sided approach on different issues has increased the likelihood of a global leadership problem. The coincidence of this situation with the rise of influence exerted by China and Russia over Europe is very worrying in Europe where member of the European Union face division over crucial issues such as immigration.

¹ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/58230/federica-mogherini-meets-iranian-foreign-minister-zarif_en

² <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/02/16/politics/mike-pence-munich-european-allies/index.html>

³ <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/led-middle-east-summit-warsaw-190212230343271.html>

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Poland an EU member state, led by right-wing government, is the US long time ally in Europe. The US has more than 900 troops in Poland and is going to establish a new permanent military base in this country⁴. Although Warsaw officially supports EU position regarding JCPOA, it was among the first EU countries who called for more EU empathies towards US policies over Iran⁵ and proposing to mediate between these two allies⁶. At the same time, the current government in Poland has some discussions with Brussels on different national issues such as rule of law and energy policy⁶. It seems that the US tries to use and increase the gap between EU countries to achieve its goals.

Although both the EU and the United States are against Iran's regional and missile activities, they disagree on how to deal with it. The US' Vice-President Mike Pence urged Europeans to step down the nuclear deal, but EU continues to emphasize this agreement. US position in Munich and Warsaw indicate that this is a must-win match for Trump government, however, US knows well that the maximum pressure it could exert against Iran is with the support by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Israel. US efforts to attract more allies to confront Iran both in Munich and in Warsaw seemed to fail although the explicit Arab-Israel alliance against Iran remains de facto.

That being said regime in Iran celebrated the 40th anniversary of Islamic revolution against the last Shah of Iran in early February 2019. However, 40 years after revolution Iran is struggling with massive economic and social problems inside the country. A survey in early 2018 by Toronto-based IranPoll showed that more than 58 percent of Iranians are in opinion that economic conditions are getting worse, compared with 28.5 percent in August 2015, a month after the nuclear deal⁷.

Today people are under much more economical pressure because of mismanagement of national resources, corruption and long-time foreign sanctions mainly imposed by US. Additionally, there are serious concerns about human rights in Iran including the situations of religious and ethnic minorities, women rights, and freedom of opinion and expression⁸.

⁴ <https://www.thenational.ae/world/europe/why-is-poland-washington-s-choice-for-its-iran-focused-global-summit-1.812343>

⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-poland/poland-says-eu-needs-more-empathy-toward-u-s-over-iran-deal-idUSKCN1I0KL>

⁶ <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/poland-breaks-with-eu-on-iran-deal-plans-to-defend-u-s-stance-1.6112178>

⁷ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-08-09/as-sanctions-hit-iran-s-on-the-verge-of-economic-breakdown>

⁸ https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IR/A_73_398.docx

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Taking into account these concerns, the Islamic Republic defends its role and its activities in the region. In his last speech, the supreme leader Iran Ali Khamenei warns officials “not be deceived by European states’ smile” and considers a number of European governments as “cunning and unreliable”⁹. While Islamic republic is facing tremendous pressure both from inside the country and internationally, Iran’s supreme leader is warning about the real effect of the EU’s support on Iran nuclear deal indicating that EU showed no practical and beneficial action. Will these words mean changing Iran's policy towards JCPOA? The Islamic republic accusing Europe for using JCPOA to put more pressure on Iran without giving any actual benefits to Iran.

So far the EU claims that preserving Iran nuclear deal could support regional security¹⁰, but how long this deal will last if EU continues to act as a passive player as claimed by Iranians. The recent remarks of the Islamic republic supreme leader, who has been always the main determinant of Iran's internal and external policies, show that the current situation of JCPOA is in favor of Iran's hardliners on one hand and Trump administration on the other. But what is the role of the EU in preserving the nuclear deal?

EU faces different views on Iran at national level inside the union, meanwhile confronting with the US unilateral policies. In this crucial moment, EU officials are under pressure on how they should decide to deal with US pressure in various fields, such as commerce, and security. Regarding Iran, if EU wants to continue supporting nuclear deal with Iran, we propose that Europeans continue to keep dialogue with Iranian government while proposing more practical supports mainly beneficial to Iranian people. While different problems could not be solved in one step, we believe the best starting point is building more cooperation with Iranian people inside the country.

Contrary to the US attempt to put pressure on civilians inside Iran to speed up the unrest against Islamic republic, one may not neglect that this behavior could lead to two results at the end. First, the hardliners could accuse sanctions for all the problems inside the country and benefit more from monopoly economy which is letting them to kill the voices of the opposition parties. Second, ordinary people who are under economic and societal pressures in everyday life could not trust US as their “savior”. Iranians are struggling now with different pressures from inside and outside which let them feel alone in this situation.

⁹ <http://en.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13971129000871>

¹⁰ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/58230/federica-mogherini-meets-iranian-foreign-minister-zarif_en

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Considering that Iran passed a revolution and a long-lasting war with Iraq in last 40 years; it would be unlikely that civilians inside Iran support either of these ways to make any changes. Empowering and supporting Iranian people inside the country will finally lead to democratic changes in Iran. The EU should focus to find ways of support and cooperation with ordinary people and young generation.

This could initially create trust between EU and Iranians and paving the way for more dialogue in one hand; secondly the empowered civilians will opt for more constructive ways to change their society and go for governmental changes in peaceful ways. This is to say that the key players related to issues regarding Iran both at national and international level should focus more on practical ways to empower 80 million Iranians both economically and socially if they are in favor of peaceful changes in Iran and avoiding another conflict in the region.

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