The Breakdown of the Iran Nuclear Deal – Global Perspectives
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About the speaker
Now, we are very lucky. We have with us Tarja Cronberg. She’s a distinguished associate fellow with the SIPRI European security program. She is an expert on security and defence, nuclear disarmament, regional security, military-civilian relations, missile defence and border studies in Europe, Russia and the Middle East, mainly in Iran. She has a long record of activities both as an academic and as a politician in the European Parliament. Most recently, as a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, she worked with the Iran nuclear issue as the chair of the European Parliament’s delegation for relations with Iran. In December 2013, she led the first official delegation in six years of the European Parliament. Tarja, thank you for being with us.

Intervention by Tarja Cronberg
I’m going to speak about the European views.

I’ve been close by anyway but I think one of the things we should say is that the JCPOA is extremely important for Europe, not only because of multilateralism and the international order, which are in the core of European values, but also for European security and for European credibility. So, Europe, actually the European Union in effect, guided these 12 years of negotiations of the Iran deal, starting by the fact that Bush went to Iraq and everybody thought that well, Iran will be the next and so three European foreign ministers, Germany, France and Britain, they decided that we need to talk to Iran. And they actually started negotiations for 3 years where only the Europeans participated. We were very close to an agreement and the Americans came in and said, “Well, we need to send Iran to the Security Council”, which then led to European and US sanctions. But finally with Obama also, with the political world, with both presidents, Iran and US, wanting to have a deal. So we got a deal in 2015. This was very important for Europeans and it was interesting because when the deal was dealt with in the Iranian parliament, the hardliners were saying, “Why do you talk with Americans?” And the Iranian negotiators, they could say, “Oh, we didn’t talk with the Americans.” And Obama defended the deal in Congress. He was also attacked. “Why do we talk to the enemy?” And the negotiators said well we didn’t talk to the enemy. It was a multilateral deal with Europe.” And the Europeans also took an important role in 2015 as chair of the commission, the task of which was to actually implement the Iran deal. So the Europeans are sitting and chairing this commission which has the task now, after the US exit, to maintain the deal and to try to keep it going.

After it became clear that the US might exit, the Europeans took action. They lobbied in Congress in December 2017 and also Trump acceded to negotiations in the spring of 2018 where actually the regional issues, missiles and so forth, were discussed. And my impression, hearing from the people who were there, is that one was very close to an agreement in May 2018 but actually Trump decided to exit. And I think this was a very strange situation for everybody because, when talking to the negotiators, everybody says, “Well, we thought that Iran would cheat. We never thought that the US would actually cheat.” And so after there has been this problematic situation with the US not being part of these negotiations, Iran requiring that US should re-enter the deal and the Europeans being responsible for implementing the deal. And the Iranians actually focusing on Europe saying, “We need you, as Europeans, to actually guarantee us the economic
benefits that the deal actually promised to us.” And the situation, actually, is that during this past year, the Iranians have had great strategic patience. They have waited for the Europeans to be active. The Europeans have tried to do something, they have tried to be careful. The transatlantic link is the backbone of European foreign policy but they have tried to institute a new channel, the Instex, which is a channel tool for non-sanctioned goods to be traded with Iran. The Americans have been very much opposed to this. They asked at the Munich conference for Europeans to leave the deal. They also have said that they will, maybe, sanction companies that use this channel, the Instex, so there are a lot of problems still there.

It is now operational and some deals have been carried out, but only minor ones.

So there is this problem; how do the remaining partners actually guarantee the economic benefits to Iran so that they will stay in the deal? Iran has now taken some actions, like Emad was saying, that they are applying a less-for-less policy. Less from the Europeans and the others, less from us. And so they are applying a policy where they cross some of the limits which are reversible but still indicate that they are not satisfied and the Iranian government is under great pressure domestically. People on the streets, they don’t have medicine, it’s very difficult to get, the price of food is going up, and also the politicians are very undecided about what to do. The hardliners are clear that this deal was bad from the start.

So the situation right now is not the best and the question is whether nuclear diplomacy will survive and I agree with Emad that this is a question of many things other than Iran and sanctions and economic benefits and what to do with the JCPOA. But what could be done, I think, it will have an extremely symbolic importance that the JCPOA survives. What could be done is, first of all, I think the Europeans have, like Emad said, been very weak in actually standing against the US due to the fact that it consists of 27 countries, 28 countries, sorry, and also the fact that the transatlantic link has always been very important in European minds and it is now starting to crack and there are lot of cracks in the transatlantic link due to the Iran case. So it’s actually affecting European foreign policy but not enough for Europe to stand up. What could be done is that European partners, together with other partners, the Russians and the Chinese, who are in the same boat, and so with these Europeans, Russians and Chinese it would be very important to do something together. They have just supported again the deal even in spite of the provocations in Saudi Arabia and so forth. They have supported together but individually, in the sense that they take action only individually. Iran is leaving Europe and is leaning towards China but it would be important for all these remaining partners to actually make a statement that the Iran nuclear deal actually guarantees that Iran will not become a nuclear weapons state and, secondly that there’s a need for a new channel which is independent of the dollar and the American influence.

Actually all the European companies have left Iran so far and it will be difficult to say when they could or would return. So in this sense the importance of the JCPOA will also be felt until the NPT, the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty 2020 meeting, next spring. If it has collapsed then nuclear diplomacy is collapsing and the question is, what happens with the NPT? And maybe the survival of the JCPOA is tied to the survival of the NPT.

These are the sort of things to keep alive the JCPOA.

The question is, how do you support multilateralism today? How do you actually challenge the possibility that a country, here in this case the US, can actually sanction all other countries so that their companies don't do anything within Iran? Is this isolating countries a possibility in the future for any country? And this
may happen to many others other than Iran. So these questions are, I think, those that are raised by the JCPOA and its implications on the global nuclear order. And I hope we can discuss those. Thank you.