

# Closing Session: Media Competition

## The US & Iran: On a Collision Course?

By Lim Wei Chean

*In the final session of The US & Iran: On a Collision Course? conference, four panellists [discussed how the narratives surrounding the two countries and their actions shaped perceptions and hindered greater understanding of the issues involved.](#)*

### **Ms Holly Dagres, non-resident fellow, Middle East Security Initiative, Atlantic Council Scowcroft Centre for Strategy and Security, United States**

**D**espite what the media has reported, Ms Dagres believes that Iran has not changed its “malign” behaviour, nor has it undergone regime change. It has not come to the negotiating table, and in fact, is acting like a lion lashing out.

One thing that disturbs Ms Dagres is that media reports in the US constantly deride Iran for pulling back on its commitment to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and violating the nuclear deal. However, the reports do not mention that the US unilaterally withdrew from the pact, and that Iran has the right to violate its terms if sanctions were imposed.

Also, she added, most media reports focus so much on what sanctions and the policy of “maximum pressure” will do to Iran that they do not really tell of the impact of these sanctions on the Iranian people. The Iranian population is the one that is hurting the most — some families cannot get by, and access to medication is the biggest issue right now.

### **Ms Ellie Geranmayeh, deputy director, MENA Programme, European Council on Foreign Relations**

The Europeans are in the same dilemma as many Asian economies, said Ms Geranmayeh. They struggle between wanting to naturally side with their ally in the White House and taking the stand that Iran has been abiding by the JCPOA.

Unlike in the US, Iran is not a toxic issue in European policy or public debate, she said. And one silver lining that has emerged is greater awareness and debate in the European Union over its autonomy on trade and foreign policy issues. The exodus of European companies from Iran following American’s unilateral sanctions shocked the European political elite, as it did not think a unilateral American action would have such a devastating effect.

### **Mr Meir Javedanfar, senior research fellow, Ezri Centre for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies, University of Haifa**

Mr Javedanfar said the biggest problem with Iran now is that the government is not allowed by the regime to do its job. For example, he cited that 60 per cent of Iranian economy is not in the hands of the government.

He added that Iran has also created an enemy out of Israel when it didn't need to.

### **Mr Esfandiyar Batmanghelidj, founder, Bourse & Bazaar**

Why is America's economic war against Iran not working? Mr Batmanghelidj said the key reason is the dearth of knowledge about Iran's economy. He argued that without accurate and insightful knowledge guiding policymaking, governments will not be able to achieve their objectives.

Firstly, there is insufficient economic and financial reporting on Iran's economy. Even though there is a strong foreign correspondent core in Tehran, the overarching editorial focus of international media, even from the likes of Financial Times and Bloomberg, is on political and social conditions in Iran.

Secondly, academic and economic studies of Iran are significantly underfunded and lack institutional support in the United States, Europe, or anywhere in the world. A small pool currently exists, most of whom are of Iranian descent, but they are hampered by lack of support. And thirdly, there is no culture of transparent corporate communications as a result of the various economic sanctions against Iran.

Adding on to Iranian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Kazem Sajjadpour's comment on the need to "de-emotionalise" and "de-politicise" knowledge during the Question and Answer segment, Mr Batmanghelidj said more people from around the world need to be encouraged to study Iran just because it is professionally fulfilling and interesting. It is only when more people without emotional connections or institutionalised agenda join the field that more accurate and neutral knowledge can be created.