

US-Iran Tensions: Pezeshkian's Foreign Policy, EU Role, and the 2024 Election Impact

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While analysts remain skeptical about the reduction of US-Iran tensions under a possible Trump presidency, the possibility of Trump altering his approach towards Iran cannot be ruled out.

In an article titled “My Message to the New World” which appeared in *Tehran Times* (July 12, 2024), Iranian President-elect Masoud Pezeshkian criticized the European Union (EU) for failing to fulfill its commitments to salvage the 2015 Iran nuclear deal after the US withdrawal in 2018. However, he emphasized his willingness to engage in dialogue with the EU, stating:

“..I look forward to engaging in constructive dialogue with European countries to set our relations on the right path, based on principles of mutual respect and equal footing.”

During his election campaign, Pezeshkian consistently stressed the importance of dialogue with the West to revive Iran's economy, which has been severely impacted by extreme sanctions. He argued that Iran could not afford to isolate itself, as high inflation continues to challenge Tehran's economic stability.

After the US withdrawal from the Iran deal in 2018 under the Donald Trump administration, EU nations initially supported reviving the agreement. However, in recent years, they have been critical of Iran for violating the conditions of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) by expanding its uranium enrichment capacity and providing military assistance to Russia during the Russia-Ukraine war.

In the article, Masoud Pezeshkian emphasized the significance of Iran's relationships with Russia and China, noting that Tehran has strengthened its ties with both nations following the US withdrawal from the JCPOA. He also highlighted the importance of Iran's relations with Gulf countries, especially pointing out the recent improvement in ties with Saudi Arabia. In 2023, Iran and Saudi Arabia signed an agreement to restore diplomatic relations.

The 69-year-old Iranian president-elect also affirmed his resolve not to succumb to US pressure. While the Biden administration has made some attempts to revive the nuclear deal and also eased some sanctions vis-à-vis Iran, regional instability and the intransigence of some Washington DC factions, along with anti-Western sentiment in Tehran, have hindered significant progress. Nevertheless, back-channel talks between Tehran and Washington continue.

Role of E3 countries and the result of the November 2024 election

E3 Countries – France, Germany, and Italy – along with the UK can play a crucial role in dialogue with Iran. Much will depend on the outcome of the November 2024 Presidential election. If Trump wins, based on his past tenure, it is likely that a more hawkish policy towards Tehran will be adopted, limiting the space for engagement. Trump has criticized the Biden Administration's approach to Iran as weak. However, several factors should be considered.

First, Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia and UAE share much better ties with Iran. In 2023, they resumed diplomatic relations through a China-brokered deal. Trump himself has a good relationship with Saudis, especially Crown Prince Muhammed Bin Salman (MBS). As a pragmatist and self-proclaimed deal-maker, Trump may be open to engaging with Iran through Saudi Arabia or other Gulf countries like Qatar. A moderate and pragmatic Iranian President could also facilitate potential engagement between the US and Iran.

Second, Trump shares a better relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin than Biden. While it may seem far-fetched, Russia, which maintains close strategic and economic ties with Iran, could potentially help reduce tensions between Iran and the US.

Third, in his previous tenure, Trump took credit for the Abraham Accords, which led to the normalization of ties between Israel and several Arab nations. He cited this as a significant step toward Middle East stability. In a potential second term, Trump might show pragmatism and flexibility towards Iran.

Masoud Pezeshkian's article is important since it provides important cues vis-à-vis his likely foreign policy. However, it is essential to remember that on critical issues, he does not have the final say. While analysts remain skeptical about the reduction of US-Iran tensions under a possible Trump presidency, the possibility of Trump altering his approach towards Iran cannot be ruled out.

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