

Gaza war

There's a good argument to be made that a deal with Iran will not save Biden's presidency, but the same cannot be confidently said about a possible deal between the Israelis and Palestinians. Netanyahu's onslaught in Gaza is a gigantic enough problem that it can make or break the presidencies of other countries, Iran included.

Tehran has already sided with the Palestinians, and that will most certainly not change with Pezeshkian. However, there's a degree to which Iran can remain involved in the future and the end of the conflict.

On one end of the spectrum, there's a significant possibility that Iran and other members of the Axis of Resistance in the Middle East may enter the war. Judging by the events of the past few months, it seems that this possibility entirely depends on how far Israel is willing to go. There may well come another moment when Iran or its allies in the region, especially Lebanon's Hezbollah, will be under Israel's attack. Not enough has Pezeshkian said about the conflict or shown about himself to make predictions about his response to such an attack accurately. However, the general atmosphere of the country and

its top officials will likely force his hand to make a strong, deterrent response in some shape or form. Pezeshkian's challenge here would be about how he can get his own way in the face of such external and internal pressures.

On the other end of the spectrum, Iran may be able to play a part in a compromise between Hamas and Israel. The US and other Western actors have repeatedly asked Iran to play such a role, especially at the beginning of the war, but Iran has only so much influence it can exert on groups that are in for a penny, in for a pound. Pezeshkian, a doctor and a soon-to-be former lawmaker, is in no better a position than Iran's late president Ebrahim Raisi to mediate a cease-fire or permanent deal.

It's impossible to imagine that Iran is happy with the fact that thousands of Palestinians have been killed. The same can be said about almost any other country in the world. Nevertheless, Iran is ultimately yet another third party to this conflict. When the whole world, including Israel's closest allies, cannot force a cease-fire to happen, how can Iran? This, then, falls more on the Israelis and Palestinians to reach an understanding of their situation and a deal to end this agony.

Aradicalizing Europe

A less urgent objective for Pezeshkian's Iran would be to find a way to deal with the shifting tides of European politics. In recent history, most leaders of European powers have historically been more moderate than their American counterparts, allowing the former group to mediate between Iran and the US. However, following the victories of Far-Right forces in elections in the UK, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain, to name a few, the EU and NATO are going through a major change themselves. What Pezeshkian will also be facing in any future round of talks is an unprecedented situation where the representatives of some European members of the P5+1 that were party to the JCPOA may be fanning the flames of discord.

For example, Marine Le Pen, a French Far-Right leader, scored a big victory in the first round of a snap legislative election but just failed to consolidate that victory in the form of a majority government in the second round. However, she and her party will remain a key player in French politics. Le Pen

has taken inconsistent positions on Iran. She originally sided with Tehran and defended its right to pursue a civilian nuclear program, according to Haaretz. However, in a recent interview on French television, she expressed concerns over Tehran's attempts "to circumvent the limits concerning its nuclear program." In an attempt to distance herself from her father's antisemitic views, Le Pen has changed her party's name and pandered more and more to the French Jewish community. While the French president is in charge of negotiating international treaties, it is unclear how the weakened president will proceed in any negotiations with Tehran when Le Pen's party holds the third most seats in the French parliament.

Many of these radicalized nationalist parties that have garnered considerable support in their respective countries have already taken hostile positions toward Iran, and their challengers are not any better. Keir Starmer, the newly-elected leader of the center-left Labour Party in Britain, has previously called for the proscription of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary

Guards Corps (IRGC) as a "terrorist" organization and condemned Iran's response to Israel's attack on its consulate in Damascus.

As is the nature of politics, there may arise unforeseen circumstances that trump all other foreign policy issues currently at hand. Regardless, there are some other challenges Pezeshkian may face sooner than later. For one thing, he has to make up his mind about whether he will continue implementing the "Look to the East" policy of his preceding government. Russia and China, which have each sealed a 25-year agreement with Iran, will not be happy to see the Iranian president occupy himself with the thought of mending ties with the US to the detriment of other ties. For another thing, the war in Ukraine is still ongoing, and as a strategic partner of Russia, Iran remains at risk of getting roped into that mess in one way or another.

From what we have seen from Pezeshkian, he seems rather confident and hopeful that he will handle every curveball thrown at him when the time arises. Time will tell if his can-do attitude is misplaced or not.

Iranian reformist wins presidency, seeks engagement with West



By Susannah George
Journalist

PERSPECTIVE

A little-known reformist and cardiac surgeon, Masoud Pezeshkian, defeated his ultraconservative rival to become the next president of Iran, campaigning on more social freedoms and engagement with the West and describing his victory as the start of "a new chapter" for the country. In a speech Saturday, Pezeshkian, 69, vowed to be a leader for "all Iranians" and said the government must be held accountable and "move forward with reforms". He also acknowledged widespread public apathy — voter turnout was only 50 percent — and said he hopes to bring Iranians relief from US sanctions and the threat of war.

"I have come... to seek lasting peace and tranquility and cooperation in the region, as well as dialogue and constructive interaction with the world," Pezeshkian said from Tehran at the mausoleum of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979.

The candidate, a lawmaker from Tabriz, was one of six contenders approved by Iran's influential Guardian Council to run for the presidency after Ebrahim Raisi, who was elected in 2021, died in a helicopter crash in May.

Pezeshkian won the most votes in a first round on June 28 but failed to secure more than 50 percent, sending the election to a runoff Friday between him and prominent hard-liner Saeed Jalili. Early Saturday, state news media announced that Pezeshkian had received 16.3 million votes, with Jalili trailing at about 13.5 million, a sign that the reformist mobilized much broader support.

Here's what to know about Iran's new president and the challenges he faces.

Promises of reform

A veteran of the Iran-Iraq war who served in parliament and as Iran's health minister, Pezeshkian has pushed for moderate reform but without challenging the country's system of theocratic rule under Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's leader.

He has pledged to bridge what he described as the "gap" in Iran between the people and the government. "I will do everything possible to look at those who were not seen by the powerful and whose voices are not heard," he said at a rally this week.

While campaigning for president, he

advocated for loosening some social restrictions, including removing blanket internet restrictions and ending the enforcement of Iran's mandatory dress code for women.

He said he also supports greater transparency in the banking and financial sectors, including implementing measures that would allow Iran's removal from a blacklist maintained by the Financial Action Task Force, a global watchdog for money laundering and terrorist financing.

On the foreign policy front, Pezeshkian has emphasized negotiations with the West, including the United States. He said he wants to revive talks around sanctions relief for Iran and to court foreign investment to boost the ailing economy.

Iran under President-elect Pezeshkian "is more unified, resolute, and prepared than ever to tackle its challenges, strengthen its relationships with neighboring countries, and reassert its role in the emerging global order," Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iran's former foreign minister, posted to X on Saturday.

Zarif helped negotiate Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. President Donald Trump later scrapped the agreement, which curbed Iran's atomic energy program in exchange for widespread sanctions relief.

"The world must listen and engage with us in mutual respect, equal footing, and recognition of Iran's role in the world," Zarif said.

A limited mandate

Pezeshkian's surprise victory Saturday showed that he was able to expand his base of support, pulling from both the reformist and more moderate conservative ranks, said Mehrzad Boroujerdi, an Iran analyst and dean at Missouri University of Science and Technology.

Jalili issued a congratulatory note to Pezeshkian on Saturday, conceding defeat and vowing to aid the incoming president in the common goal of "elevating" the Islamic Republic.

Still, Iran's hard-line conservatives, who dominate most branches of the governing system, might frustrate the plans Pezeshkian set out during his campaign. "The conservatives will try to create obstacles from Day 1," Boroujerdi said. "He won't have much of a honeymoon... They will apply the brakes to whatever Pezeshkian will try to do."

Ayatollah Khamenei also issued a statement promoting unity. "It is time for competitive election-related behaviors to turn into the morals of companionship," he said.

At the same time, low voter turnout and widespread public apathy weakened Pezeshkian's mandate.

In his speech Saturday, the president-elect addressed voters who did not participate. "It is time for dialogue in Iran. The government should know what you are saying and why you did not come" to the polls, he said.

Earlier this week, Ayatollah Khamenei

also remarked on the lack of voter participation.

"If the people demonstrate better participation in the elections, the Islamic Republic system will be able to achieve its words, intentions, and goals both within the country and also in the broader strategic expectations of the country," Ayatollah Khamenei said, according to a summary of the remarks posted to X on Wednesday.

Crises at home, abroad

Across the Middle East — from Gaza to Lebanon and Yemen — armed groups allied with Iran are attacking Israel and its backers, threatening American military bases, and disrupting global shipping lanes. In April, after an Israeli attack on an Iranian diplomatic building in Damascus, Syria, Tehran launched its first direct military attack on Israel, bringing a years-long shadow war into the open.

The presidential campaign featured some rare acknowledgment of the challenges faced by the country's ruling class — a sign, analysts say, of how serious those challenges have become.

"It has reached a stage where it is just impossible to overlook it," said Ali Vaez, the Iran project director for the International Crisis Group. "The gap between the state and the society has reached a stage where it cannot just be painted over."

The full article first appeared on [The Washington Post](#).



Iranian President-elect Masoud Pezeshkian (C) delivers a speech after winning the election, during a visit to the shrine of the Islamic Republic's founder Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in Tehran, Iran, on July 6, 2024.

MAJID SAEEDI/GETTY IMAGES



Supporters of reformist candidate Masoud Pezeshkian participate in a campaign event less than a week ahead of a presidential election, called after Ebrahim Raisi's tragic death in May 2024.

ARASH KHAMOUSHI/THE NEW YORK TIMES