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INTERVIEW

With the election fever dying down in Iran after the official announcement of Masoud Pezeshkian as the winner of its presidential elections, it seems there is little daylight between the approaches and policies of Pezeshkian and those of the late president Raisi's government on foreign policy and international relations. The portrayal of a deep divide in this area has been a product of some media and political campaigns to polarize the country's atmosphere.

Of course, the final candidates for heading the Islamic Republic's 14th government initially laid out differing views and interpretations of issues across various domains. However, a look at the president-elect's statements and positions over the past few days indicates that the foreign policies of Pezeshkian's government will, in many ways, including the prioritization of strengthening relations with neighbors, line up and dovetail with those of its predecessor.

Additionally, in a message lauding Secretary-General of Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, the Iranian president-elect stressed that his government would continue to strongly back the resistance. He also named China and Russia as allies and friends in challenging times and pledged to follow through on the agreements made with these countries during president Raisi's tenure.

It is, however, worth noting that the president-elect has also floated novel approaches to foreign policy and engagement with Western nations to tackle some of the country's challenges, particularly regarding sanctions and economic matters. The success of these initiatives hinges on the commencement of a new round of talks with Western countries.

In light of these developments, Iran Daily interviewed Mohammad Vahidi, a former Iranian lawmaker and an expert on political matters, to gain his insights on these topics.

Former MP echoes Pezeshkian's stress on law-abidance

Same foreign policy, 'new approach, opportunities'



Iran's late president Ebrahim Raisi (2nd-L) shakes hands with Masoud Pezeshkian, who would later pick up Pezeshkian's mantle, in Tabriz, northwestern Iran, on June 2, 2022.
● president.ir

IRAN DAILY: President-elect Pezeshkian speaks of the necessity to ramp up interaction with the world to boost economic growth and tackle the country's issues, with specific mentions of Europe and Western nations. What are your thoughts on this matter?

VAHIDI: One of the critical equations for various Iranian governments in their dealings with the international system is the mode of interaction the country should adopt on the global stage. In my view, any government that can strike a balance between maintaining values, upholding dignity, and fostering relationships grounded in mutual interests will reap benefits for the nation.

This aligns with the perspective of the leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution on the matter. On numerous occasions, the leader has asserted that even though we have had issues with one or two countries post-Revolution due to their negative outlook on the broader movement of the Iranian people against oppression, it doesn't preclude us from en-

gaging with other nations. History bears out that a shift in the practices of certain countries can pave the way for improved relations. A case in point is South Africa; once the apartheid regime was dismantled, our relations with that country strengthened.

However, the impetus for developing our relationships with other nations should stem from safeguarding national interests and addressing the country's challenges. In the recent presidential elections, the votes reflected a popular demand for enhanced interaction with the world. Admittedly, our people witnessed economic growth under president Raisi's government, but if the new government can make headway in international interactions, particularly concerning economic, monetary, and banking issues, we could attain even higher levels of economic prosperity. Many countries are keen to forge economic ties with us, but certain obstacles have impeded this.

How much of a departure is the new government's ap-

proach to foreign policy?

In my view, despite the discourse that emerged during the election campaign, and the fact that some individuals pursued polarization, my assessment is that the outlook favoring the development of interactions was also present in the previous government. However, new opportunities have since opened up for the country.

On the one hand, Pezeshkian, through his message to Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah in support of the resistance and his conversation with Vladimir Putin affirming Iran's unwavering commitment to agreements, signaled that we remain steadfast in our previous positions in these areas. At the same time, Pezeshkian has extended a hand of friendship and interaction to other nations, conveying to countries like the United States that they shouldn't assume Iran is dependent on the West for its development and problem-solving. Iran is pursuing enhanced interactions with a diverse range of countries and won't make concessions to the West. The message to the West

and America is clear: until they come to terms with respecting the national interests of Iran on the world stage, they shouldn't hold any expectations from us.

The president-elect has underscored the imperative of lifting sanctions to address some of the nation's issues. Do you believe there's still a possibility of reviving the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), or will the Iranian government explore alternative avenues to resolve the nuclear issue?

A point that all the candidates, including Pezeshkian, emphasized during the debates was adherence to the law. The law has stipulated the path of negotiations, as outlined in the Strategic Action Plan approved by the Islamic Parliament, which was crafted in coordination with the Supreme National Security Council. This law envisions strategies to safeguard the country's national interests, including in the realm of nuclear energy achievements, by making the country self-reliant and creating new opportunities to

benefit from nuclear energy in peaceful sectors. The leader has emphasized that compliance with the law is a principle for anyone engaging in negotiations, meaning they must operate within the boundaries of the law. Consequently, if the future government would like to design a framework for negotiations, it ought to build upon previous agreements and adhere to the law.

On the other hand, it's common knowledge that the other side walked away from the agreements, while Iran remained committed to its obligations. Thus, the outcome of future negotiations hinges on two factors: the other party acknowledging their non-fulfillment of duty and our negotiating team's steadfast adherence to legal matters.

It appears that an agreement rooted in the approved Strategic Action Plan, upholding the nation's rights in the field of nuclear energy, and culminating in the lifting of sanctions could be advantageous for the country. Simultaneously, securing the necessary guarantees for the agreement's implementation is essential.

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