

sistance and spiritually leading it against the American-Israeli order. On several occasions, we have seen a divide between America and Europe, but under America's leadership and within NATO, they try to present Iran as a common threat. Concerns about Iran's missile capability, nuclear program, etc., cause this atmosphere of mistrust to expand.

Will the results of the elections in Iran and Pezeshkian's announcement of his cooperation program help alleviate mistrust between Iran and the West?

ABEDI: Case-by-case agreements are being considered right now. The West, and especially the US, has come to the conclusion that if it does not move towards case-by-case agreements with Iran, the nightmare it fears — an alliance between Iran, Russia, and China — will come about, which will undermine Western interests in West Asia and Southeast Asia.

Very soon, the time will come for Pezeshkian to deliver a speech at the United Nations General Assembly. Which issues do you think will be his focus? Will he propose an innovative plan to end the conflicts Iran has been dragged in, such as those in Gaza or Ukraine, or will he keep the status quo for now?

KARIMI: Part of Iran's power in the international sphere comes from the Axis of Resistance, so there is no reason for the new president to want to reduce our level of support for them. This held true under the Khatami and Rouhani governments as well, and it does not conflict with Pezeshkian's foreign policy. Just as Saudi Arabia, with its friendly relations with major regional powers, carries out its desired activities, so too does the Islamic Republic in the region. The other side does not expect Iran to withdraw from the Axis of Resistance because of an election either.

But as for the United Nations General Assembly speech, it is too soon for Pezeshkian to propose a plan for the region or the international system. Nevertheless, we will see the government's real program when the proposed foreign minister goes before the parliament and delivers his speech. We should wait until then. If the proposed minister gets a vote of confidence, it shows that parliament also backs the new government's proposed program.

There will be a change in Iran's foreign policy under Pezeshkian, but this does not mean losing forces that give the Islamic Republic its power. Pezeshkian aims to close existing gaps.

What we have seen in these past few weeks was also partly the result of the ambiguous atmosphere around the American elections. With Biden's withdrawal, this uncertainty has increased. While we criticize the behavior of the Europeans — by which I mean Britain, France, and Germany — towards Iran, we should also remember that when president Rouhani handed over the government to president Raisi, even though Iran was not in a good position internationally and Trump had reinstated sanctions, the Rouhani government had managed to keep the Europeans politically beside itself and, of course, indebted to Iran. We even saw in the United Nations Security Council that the Europeans did not go along with Trump's demands against Iran in several instances.

However, over these past three years, the approach of the European Troika towards Iran has become negative and harsh. This calls for the reconstruction of relations through bilateral and multilateral dialogue. They also have to admit that they first dropped the ball.

Regardless, Pezeshkian seeks to adopt an opportunity-oriented foreign policy. If other countries embrace this change, the road ahead of them will be easier and there will be more benefits for both sides. Implementing the JCPOA is one important example of opportunities for embracing the change, and confronting Iranophobia is another.

Mr. Karimi said that Pezeshkian's policy is based on seeking opportunities. Considering Kamala Harris is likely to replace Biden, who has historically



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

always sided with Israel whether as senator, VP, or president, might she soon break with the pro-Israeli ways of Biden? If so, what effects will this have on Iran?

ABEDI: By alternating between an East-facing policy to constructive cooperation, Iran seeks recognition by the West and the world. Iran has always sought recognition as a regional power, at least, and tried to consolidate that position in the eyes of the East and the West with alternating strategies.

Iran managed to achieve the recognition of eastern powers as a result of certain international developments like the war in Ukraine. Despite criticisms regarding China and Russia's treatment of Iran, Iran earned its status as a regional power in the eyes of those countries, and now it seeks to achieve the same thing in the eyes of the West.

The talk of seeking constructive cooperation that Pezeshkian raised was not uncritical of the West, but his language was different and revolved around trust-building. So, if we are to expect anything from Pezeshkian's speech at the United Nations, we should expect to still see a critical approach towards the West, despite it being paired with opening doors for negotiation.

Iran is seeking to create a gap between Europe and America, or at least to exploit this opportunity by its own account, to show that Iran is a norm-abiding actor. America's unwavering support for Israel in the Gaza war has obviously bolstered Iran's discourse, both regionally and internationally. All the goals that Pezeshkian pursues may use newer language, but they follow the same previously established goals that strengthen the fundamental discourse and strategy of the Islamic Republic.

Iran can make the most of the gap that has opened up between Europe and America. Iran can now raise the issue of a JCPOA without the US again. Overall, I am optimistic. We have arrived at a strategic policy, and Pezeshkian has shown that he agrees with this policy. The government's diplomatic apparatus should implement the same strategic policy. I think higher-level institutions that report back to the Leader, including the Strategic Council on Foreign Relations and the Supreme National Security Council, will play a more decisive role in foreign policy from now on.

Ms. Abedi characterizes the differences between Iran and the West as identity conflict and argues that Iran has a fixed strategy in foreign policy, with the government playing only an executive role. If we accept this idea, it suggests that Iran's governments do not differ greatly from one another and that Pezeshkian, for example, will not differ from Raisi in the field of foreign policy. We have even had tangible cases in the confrontation between Iran and the West that contradict Ms. Abedi's position.

KARIMI: The law states that the Leader determines the general framework of Iran's foreign policy. So, even the framework is not necessarily fixed and may change after certain international developments to secure Iran's interests.

In any case, when you have a foreign minister who the head of government introduces and parliament gives a vote

of confidence to, that minister has come out of a presidential election and a parliamentary election. The country's position and trajectory in areas that fall under the purview of the government are supposed to be determined by these elections.

Now, many of our country's problems stem from foreign policy. So, if people vote for a faction or approach that goes against the status quo in an election, failing to change the status quo amounts to turning your back on the people's vote. If there were to be no change in foreign policy with the new government, then president Raisi should not have changed president Rouhani's foreign policy, but we know that he did. So, this right is reserved for Pezeshkian too.

As the law states, the government holds responsibility for implementation and practical policymaking in the realm of foreign policy. Yes, the Leader has said that decision-making for the most important issues occurs in higher-level institutions, the most notable of which is the Supreme National Security Council. However, six members of that council come from the government, and the council's head is the president himself. Furthermore, in the past, we have seen the Leader, in keeping up with international conditions and national interests, allow the government to engage in the JCPOA negotiations and

er with the backing of Zarif, in particular, obviously helps to strengthen Iran's position to revive the nuclear deal, regardless of any obstacles from the West or even inside Iran. Iran seeks to negotiate with the US, and in the new government, holding direct or indirect talks with America will again be pursued. But if that does not work, Iran can look to Europe to fulfill that role, both for economic exchanges and deals, as well as for reviving the JCPOA or resolving the nuclear issue.

KARIMI: Pezeshkian's most important capital is his voting base in the presidential election. Based on his campaign positions, Pezeshkian and his government will seek to de-escalate and lift sanctions and international pressure on Iran. It has now become clear that you cannot separate the economy from foreign relations. In my view, the most important capital that Pezeshkian has, which the late president Raisi did not, is his voting and social base. Raisi's voting base comprised those who did not seek de-escalation, the lifting of sanctions, and cooperation with the world in the sense that Pezeshkian suggests. His second asset is that prominent technocrats are willing to work with Pezeshkian. It is a good advantage for a president to be able to draw on skills from any field.



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (L) meets with former foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif (3rd-L) and Sasan Karimi (2nd-L) during the race for the presidency in June 2024. [ISNA](https://www.isna.ir)

hold direct or indirect talks with America.

But Ms. Abedi said that decision-making in foreign policy in this upcoming period will fall not under the purview of the government itself, but the higher-level institutions of the Establishment that report back to the Leader.

KARIMI: No, I disagree. The government forms part of the governance structure. What is more, the Supreme National Security Council includes the president and some government members. If by the Establishment we refer to the Leader and all the institutions under the Leader, then not only the government is also part of the Establishment, it is the most important pillar of the Establishment after the Leader. For example, the 7th National Development Plan, as an upstream document, was written by the government.

What advantages or capital can the Pezeshkian government draw on to succeed with its cooperative policy?

ABEDI: The policy Iran has pursued these last three years centers on reviving the JCPOA. Pezeshkian's rise to pow-

Will regional and global relations and developments, such as the Gaza War and the Ukraine War, or the continuous competition between the US and China, lend themselves to the Pezeshkian government's cooperative approach?

KARIMI: First of all, I should say that conditions in the regional and international environment are much less conducive to reaching a nuclear deal than it was in 2020 or 2021. Iran has been wrongly turned into a security concern, and we overlooked this issue in the past three years. Even though the US relaxed its imposing of sanctions and looked the other way on our oil sales, we allowed our debt regarding the JCPOA to be forgotten. So, Pezeshkian's work is much more difficult. A testament to the fact that the situation is not ripe for reviving the JCPOA is that the world has seemingly adapted to Iran's absence from transportation corridors and oil and gas supply chains. Iran's role has been reduced to a threat actor, whether due to what it does or what it does not do.

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eign policy apparatus get limited in matters related to the nuclear case, like in Rouhani's period, things would become much more difficult. But if the negotiator can negotiate and bargain in different areas, it will make finding a solution easier. Of course, our overarching policy is to not tie nuclear and non-nuclear issues together, but there may arise a situation where we may need to give more freedom to our negotiators to resolve the issue of sanctions. The issue before us is the sunset of the JCPOA in October 2025. We have to make policies so that the JCPOA's snapback mechanism does not get implemented during the remaining period.

ABEDI: To add to that point, I would like to say that the change of governments and its technocrats creates an opportunity for approaches to change as well. Now, fortunately, the change of governments in Iran has coincided with that of some European countries, with the elections of the United States and possibly Ukraine approaching fast. There is even a possibility of a change of cabinet in Israel. These changes are momentous and create an opportunity for cooperation so that crises can subside, at the very least, through negotiations.