

Would Saudis and Emiratis broker a deal between Iran and Trump?

International Desk

ANALYSIS

There is a glimmer of hope that if Trump regains power, not only will Saudi Arabia and the UAE refrain from actively pushing an anti-Iranian agenda, but Iran may also be able to capitalize on its improved relations with these countries to create a breathing room for its economy to counter potential US actions. After years of hostility against Iran, these two countries have come to realize that the only way to achieve regional stability and development is to accept Iran's power and sphere of influence in the region and strive to iron out misunderstandings through dialogue and negotiation.

These days, a moderate government led by Masoud Pezeshkian has taken the reins in Iran, bringing a glimmer of hope to the country's efforts to break free from the shackles of sanctions. The political will demonstrated by the new government, as well as the overall makeup of its foreign policy team, has sparked a great deal of optimism that Iran may once again be able to wriggle out from under the weight of sanctions and gradually move towards economic repair and rebuilding. However, while creating a political will to tackle foreign policy issues, particularly sanctions, is crucial, the other side of the coin is the United States, which is currently on the cusp of a critical election, with a high likelihood of Donald Trump, who pulled out of the JCPOA and applied maximum pressure on Iran, taking the helm.

A Trump victory would undoubtedly pose a significant challenge to the Pezeshkian government, as a Kamala Harris victory would not necessarily put the brakes on the Iran-US negotiations that had already gained momentum during the late Ebrahim Raisi administration. However, a Trump win would undoubtedly turn the ta-

bles and raise new concerns for the Iranian side. Nevertheless, it's worth noting that Iran has experience dealing with Trump and can better navigate the potential challenges with a deeper understanding and more precise planning.

Separate from Iran's approach, another crucial question is whether a Trump administration would be willing to negotiate with Iran or continue to ratchet up sanctions and apply maximum pressure. While a Trump victory would be a significant challenge, it's worth noting that Trump has shown a willingness to negotiate in the past, and if his foreign policy team, including the likes of John Bolton and Mike Pompeo, hadn't thrown a spanner in the works, a different path might have been taken. One of Trump's most notable efforts was in June 2019, when he asked the late Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo to visit Iran and mediate between Iran and the US. Although the mediation failed, it showed that the door to negotiation remained ajar. Therefore, if Trump selects a more moderate foreign policy team, the prospects for negotiation may be more promising than during his previous term.



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (L) and Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan are seen in this undated photo.
● SAUDI ROYAL PALACE



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However, a Trump win would have a different dynamic than in previous periods. Notably, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia, unlike during Trump's first term, do not have a hostile policy towards Tehran. The anti-Iranian group, known as the "B-Team," comprising Benjamin Netanyahu, Mohammed bin Salman, John Bolton, and Mohammed bin Zayed, no longer has the same level of coordination as they did from 2016 to 2020. Bolton has now become one of Trump's most vocal critics. Netanyahu is grappling with numerous internal problems and may be pushed out of the political scene once the Gaza war is over. More importantly, Iran's relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE have improved significantly. The two sides have adopted a more friendly and non-hostile approach towards each other. In fact, there is a sense of optimism that if Trump were to regain power, not only would Saudi Arabia and the UAE not be actively involved in the anti-Iranian axis, but Iran may also be able to tap into its improved relations with these countries to create a safety valve for its economy to mitigate potential US actions. After years of hostility and proxy wars against Iran, these two countries have come to realize that the only way to

achieve regional stability and development is to accept Iran's power and sphere of influence in the region and strive to iron out misunderstandings through dialogue and negotiation. Another crucial factor that might prevent Saudi Arabia and the UAE from reactivating their anti-Iranian stance, as they did during Trump's first term, is that they have officially abandoned their sectarian and confrontational policies in the region in favor of a more national and development-oriented approach. Saudi Arabia is attempting to invest in technology and renewable energy sectors to chart a new course for the country in the digital age. This is evident in Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the futuristic city of NEOM on the Red Sea coast. These ambitious plans and goals require foreign investment, which in turn requires regional security and stability, which Saudi Arabia has been striving for in recent years. Therefore, any conflict or instability between Iran and the US that could compromise regional security and stability would be counterproductive to the mid-term goals that Saudi Arabia and other regional countries have set for themselves. This is especially true since the 2019 attack on Aramco by Yemeni forces and the US's lack of response have made these

countries skeptical of US support against regional threats and more inclined to avoid regional conflicts.

However, it's essential to note that while we should consider the new regional dynamics and take advantage of all opportunities, we shouldn't be overly optimistic about the potential role of the UAE and Saudi Arabia in helping Iran counter US actions. If Trump were to win, the foreign policy of these countries would likely undergo changes. Trump might try to reactivate the anti-Iranian stance of these countries by offering military and security incentives, which they have been seeking to normalize relations with Israel. This scenario, although unlikely at present, is possible, and we should be aware of it.

In conclusion, it seems that Iran should prepare itself with a coherent strategy for various scenarios that might unfold if Trump wins, taking into account its understanding of Trump's behavior and its experience with maximum pressure. However, it's worth acknowledging that if a national will to lift sanctions is formed, Iran can overcome the challenges posed by Trump and reach an agreement that won't fall apart.

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Republican presidential nominee former President Donald Trump speaks during a commercial break during a Univision town hall, on Oct. 16, 2024, in Doral, Fla.
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