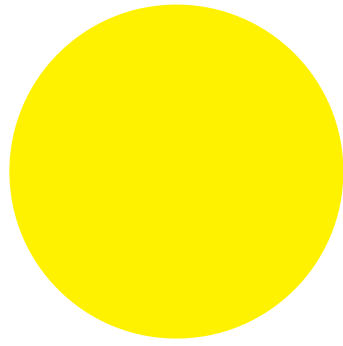


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Tehran's Trump card

Zarif: Iran will dictate US course

By **Maryam Salari**
Staff writer

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

The world has undergone many changes over the last few years, some truly big and some smaller than what they appear to be. Even experts are prone to overvalue some past and future changes, while others disregard them completely. It takes one who has first-hand experience in dealing with similar changes in the past to correctly identify challenges and opportunities. That is why Iran Newspaper sat with Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iran's former foreign minister who now serves as the country's vice president for strategic affairs, in an exclusive interview to discuss foreign affairs.



● REZA MOATTARIAN / IRAN DAILY

IRAN DAILY: How do you think Trump's second term as president play out?

ZARIF: Trump's personality will not change in his second term, so he will remain self-centered. This time around, however, he would be very powerful because he has both chambers of Congress, Supreme Court judges, and a significant portion of the states on his side. He has also managed to personally gain the favorable opinion of a large part of the American public without utilizing party resources. Therefore, he will be a powerful president. In my opinion, Trump himself is less inclined to collectivism. I do not believe in the claims that he is essentially a businessman. To me, only his individual character is significant, but I also believe Iran is a more significant actor; that is to say, we determine how Trump will approach us.

Considering the developments surrounding the Resistance Axis in the region, a viewpoint has emerged indicating that Trump would have an easier time negotiating with Iran compared to his first four years in office. Do you agree with this view?

In my opinion, it all still depends on Iran. Your power is based on the narrative you hold about yourself, and I believe the Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution's statement clarifying that Iran never had proxy forces captures the correct reality, and I have always expressed this in my own statements. Proxy forces are said to make moves at least whenever it is beneficial to you, but this has never happened. There has not been a time when we needed one of our foreign allies to act on our behalf. They acted against the Occupation based on their own interests and beliefs. I have been closely following

these issues for nearly 40 years, both as an academician and as someone practicing his profession. I do not know of any group that has acted on behalf of our country. This is a misconception, whether it is held by those within the country and those without. For example, the US barracks in Beirut were destroyed in 1982 because they had occupied the Lebanese territory. No one acted because of Iran. Did Hamas carry out its attack on October 7 for us?

Did they not coordinate either? No, there was no coordination. Therefore, the notion that we ever had a proxy force is incorrect. This implies that our power had not diminished either after the fall of those forces because they were not tools of our power. We supported them and continue to do so. This support gives us symbolic power, but they were not our tools for wielding power because they never acted on our behalf.

So, it should not be assumed that we are now weaker against Trump. Everything depends on our own agency. Now, states are no longer the only actors on the international scene, and non-state actors have gained agency and no longer depend on anyone else. Thus, the notion that we have lost our power today is a false perception.

What kind of agency do you expect from us during Trump's second term?

Iran is considered an important regional actor and an influential country that can still be effective. No problem in the region will be resolved without Iran, and Iran is part of the solution in the region. When Iran entered the field under the leadership of Martyr General Qassem Soleimani, we were able to combat extremism in the region together. I am not saying Iran fought against extremism alone, but Iran's presence played a major role in this regard. These challenges in our region have not been resolved. We must realize that we are valuable and have the capability for active agency.

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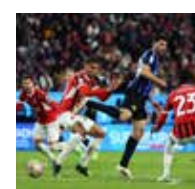
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