

Trump's second administration: Opportunity or threat?

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PERSPECTIVE

With Donald Trump's administration in power, Iran has found itself facing a range of events and choices. Analyzing the upcoming conditions will assist decision-makers and stakeholders determining suitable approaches. Several key issues regarding this matter are addressed below:

1 It seems that Trump, while aiming to continue some strategies from his first term, has fundamentally changed tactics in pursuit of his objectives. The sidelining of the Pompeo-Bolton-Hook triangle and the selection of figures like JD Vance, alongside the involvement of figures like Elon Musk, indicates a more pragmatic strategy. By opting for more conciliatory methods rather than focusing solely on aggressive tactics, his recent tweet about not promoting hawkish personalities symbolizes that Trump is keen on conflict, but not in a military sense. He is an expert in trade wars and tariffs.

2 The dissolution of the Middle East team and the appointment of Steve Witkoff and Morgan Ortagus as Middle Eastern affairs officials, according to Western media analysis, is a chance to revive diplomacy. Ortagus, whose main expertise lies in real estate transactions, is leveraging his successful experiences from the Gaza conflict to secure a lucrative deal for America. Yet, we all know that real estate brokers are more focused on maximizing their gains, often at any cost, rather than prioritizing fairness.

3 The biggest blunder in strategy stems from a misjudgment of one's own situation and that of the other parties involved. Excessive self-importance is dangerous, while self-deprecation is equally misguided and meaningless.

As Iran, even though our playing cards have diminished over the past years, we still remain the most significant country in West Asia. Due to wrong approaches and pressure from our adversaries, we have lost some of our advantages, but thanks to our history, geography, and rich cultural heritage, we still possess enough leverage to compel both ourselves and the United States to arrive at a correct assessment of each other.

4 Both Imam Khomeini and the Leader [Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei] have repeatedly emphasized that the severance of relations between Iran and the US cannot last forever. Now, after establishing strategic agreements with China and Russia, it's time to make the next move. If we are ever to enter into comprehensive negotiations with the United States, today is one of those critical choices.

A new government has taken office on both sides. The moderate government of Pezeshkian, backed by popular support and the Leader, is in play. The experience of the JCPOA (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) negotiations and the ongoing behind-the-scenes talks is in the mix. If both sides are genuinely committed to dialogue, they can focus on the matter of lifting sanctions (which is currently in our best interest) with dignity and wisdom.

5 In several recent speeches, the Leader has wisely avoided any remarks that would indicate opposition to new innovations. The wisdom of the Leader suggests that perhaps he has requested trusted individuals and institutions to prepare reports on this topic. We must acknowledge that Pezeshkian's government is one of the limited opportunities before us. Should Pezeshkian fail to resolve the sanctions issue, he will neither gain the trust of his domestic audi-



ence nor will he be able to tackle crises and shortages.

6 We recognize Masoud Pezeshkian for his honesty and integrity. He has a good rapport with the Leader. If his evaluation pertains to resolving international issues, he must speak candidly and straightforwardly with the Leader. The Leader spoke of an 8% growth rate. This is achievable, but securing his approval without lifting sanctions and unlocking the national economy is impossible. If Iran fails to reach a reasonable agreement, we should not doubt that trade pressures on China will drastically reduce Iran's oil sales. We must, for once, take decisive action under non-crisis conditions, driven by win-win assessments.

7 All studies conducted in the global community following World War II indicate one thing: no country—let us repeat, no country—has been able to enter the development orbit without foreign investment. In conditions of sanctions, no suitable or unsuitable investment can materialize. Agreements with European countries are unattainable without resolving issues with the US. We must not pursue impossible paths; even if we are concerned about the Resistance Axis [against Israel], we need to be an independent, prosperous, and powerful nation.

8 Iran is a paradise for investment. The sovereign funds of Arab countries are brimming with cash. China's economic growth has significantly slowed. The economic growth of the three major European giants—England, France, and Germany—is in the negative. Iran is ready to attract a thousand billion dollars into its economy. In the aviation sector alone, it needs five hundred passenger planes. In oil, gas, and petrochemicals, it is thirsty for three hundred billion dollars. In transportation, railways, port expansion, and tourism, tens of billions of dollars can be drawn in. Iran needs the world, and the world needs Iran for prosperity. We must intelligently leverage this advantage.

9 Every decision in the realm of foreign policy and lifting sanctions, of course, faces serious opposition domestically. These opponents can be divided into two prominent groups: sanction profiteers and ideological adversaries.

10 The term "sanction profiteer"

is neither an insult nor an accusation. Specifically, since the Ahmadinejad presidency, in response to sanctions, the leaders of various factions might have, with seemingly good intentions, concluded that to keep the country's economy afloat, they needed to devise a strategy to prevent sanctions from harming the macroeconomy from above and the people's livelihoods from below. The solution they found was to coin the phrase "circumventing sanctions." While we know little about the individuals present in think tanks or the discussions held to justify this action, it appears that the outcome of those meetings led to securing the nation's basic needs through unconventional oil sales and even more unconventional import methods.

Given that such economic activities naturally thrive in opacity, the emergence of corruption within this framework is hardly surprising. Over time, these unregulated windfall profits become increasingly attractive to those involved, and they become unwilling to part with them at any cost. Consequently, the "sanction profiteer" becomes wealthier and more powerful each day, and due to their privileges and monopolistic position, they continue their unchecked activities. Worse still, they resist any oversight and are determined to protect their interests at all costs. Since any negotiations aimed at lifting sanctions would essentially mean the end of their lucrative dealings, they vehemently oppose such initiatives.

11 A sanction profiteer cannot openly promote their profession because it is disreputable and lacks public legitimacy. Thus, they have no choice but to create an appealing facade. They fill this facade with slogans that evoke Revolutionary ideals and values. The rest of the path is quite clear: to sustain their existence, they need to spread the word, and they easily delegate this task to proxy groups and individuals. The more naive and passionate these loudspeakers are, the closer they bring the profiteer to their goal.

They need to portray their opponents as infiltrators, liberals, and Westernized individuals. For this, they require those who can passionately shout and swell their neck veins while turning red in the face to label these tags. Only in

such an environment can the ships of the sanction profiteer dock safely in calm waters. In other words, they stir up dust to ensure society doesn't see their shady dealings. A review of supposedly Revolutionary positions in Parliament, discussions, round tables, delegations, speeches, and media appearances by relatively reputable individuals in recent years can validate this claim.

12 It is certainly unfair to label all hardliners, who associate any pragmatic approach to foreign policy with Western-leaning and capitulation, as lackeys and agents of sanction profiteers. Some of them have an apparently ideological viewpoint and a tendency towards dogmatism. Their writings and speeches are filled with verses and narratives from the country's leading figures.

While they can be counted among those who are genuinely concerned and value-driven, they nonetheless contribute to the pot of sanction profiteers. Perhaps they believe they are accumulating merit and passionately defending national interests. The challenge lies in justifying this segment of individuals, who don the cloak of Revolutionary fervor, as their adherence to their beliefs is not easily swayed. They have shown that even when the leaders of the country and Revolution vote in favor of something contrary to their ideas, they refuse to comply. Over time, some may gravitate towards realism, while others become dis-

illusioned and withdraw into isolation, and a few remain steadfast in their positions.

13. In our view, both domestic and foreign policy is rooted in our religious and Revolutionary beliefs as supporters of the Islamic Republic. With this perspective, any external or anti-revolutionary view on politics can lead to dangerous consequences that could even push us towards the brink of a revolution's dissolution. However, it must not be forgotten that within this religious and Revolutionary framework, we have resolved numerous issues facing the country without abandoning the Revolution, the Establishment, or our values. The conclusion of the eight-year Iraqi imposed war (1980s), non-intervention in the US-Iraq war, navigating through the Afghan conflict, re-establishing relations with Saudi Arabia, and the recent prudent decision regarding Syria are clear examples of decisions made with a revolutionary outlook while preserving the Establishment, which do not signify a retreat from values and also take national interests into account. In the current circumstances and in the face of the Trump administration, repeating the wise strategies of the past and steering clear of any extremist approach will lead Iran and its people towards tranquility.

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