

PERSPECTIVES

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2024 ELECTION IN EUROPE AND THE U.S

THE PROSPECTS OF IRAN RELATIONS WITH WESTERN POWERS

The image features three concentric circles in a light gray color, centered on the page. Within the innermost circle is a detailed, symmetrical floral mandala design, also in light gray. Overlaid on the center of the mandala is the text:

**In the Name of Allah
the most Compassionate,
ever Compassionate**



PERSPECTIVES

2024 Election in Europe and the U.S
the Prospects of Iran relations with western Powers



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2024 ELECTION IN EUROPE AND THE U.S

THE PROSPECTS OF IRAN RELATIONS WITH WESTERN POWERS





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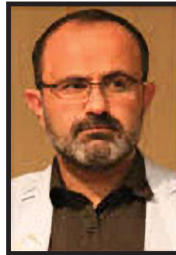
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End of the U.S. Presidential Election and Trump's Strategic Framework Regarding Iran and the Region

Ibrahim Mottaqi, Professor at the University of Tehran

Introduction

The U.S. presidential election took place in the context of the Gaza War and the security crisis in Lebanon, making it a highly contentious and challenging event. Each of the presidential candidates sought to define their national security and foreign policy in light of the evolving realities of the Ukraine war, the genocide in Gaza, the Lebanon crisis, and the possibility of the conflict escalating into other geographical regions. Over the past four decades, Iran has been one of the main subjects of competition among U.S. presidential candidates, and this process has been heavily influenced by regional conflicts.

The central question examines the foreign policy tools and approaches Trump may employ in the regional context, particularly regarding Iran and escalating high-risk conflicts. The key issues addressed in this paper include: the potential outcomes of Trump's election on the economic sanctions against Iran, nuclear diplomacy, crisis management mechanisms, and regional alliances.

1. The Realities of the Strategic Environment During the U.S. Presidential Election

During the U.S. presidential race, there were indications of a systemic crisis and the expansion of geopolitical conflicts. The United States executed its political and strategic role through offshore balancing—a strategy avoiding direct military engagement—while managing escalation with Iran or its regional allies.

Over the past two decades, U.S. presidents have consistently recognized that Southwest Asia was marked by escalating crises, and managing this required utilizing "proxy action" mechanisms within the framework of "offshore balancing." The United States, due to geopolitical and strategic reasons, has supported Israel's military and security needs, attempting to maintain an advantage for Israel in ongoing conflicts and escalating disputes in the region.

Many geopolitical and strategic realities lead to relatively uniform policies in the behavior of states. While both Donald Trump and Kamala Harris emphasized the necessity of applying offshore balancing policies in the Iranian regional context, it was natural that U.S. foreign policy towards Iran and the region would not significantly differ during the presidency of either candidate. Therefore, the idea of alteration or continuation of U.S. foreign policy is dependent on changes in the country's security strategies and perception frameworks under critical security conditions, with the president adjusting to these shifts. Thus, it was expected that with Donald Trump's second term as president, the U.S. would adopt a more pragmatic policy toward the Islamic Republic of Iran. In his first term, Trump utilized high-risk strategies and sought to diminish Iran's strategic power through "coercive diplomacy" and escalating sanctions, including through the "12-point roadmap" of Michael Pompeo.

2. Revisionism in Trump's Aggressive Strategy Towards Iran

The behavioral pattern of Trump in the current period will show significant differences from the past. In his second term as president, Trump is expected to use more pragmatic mechanisms to address regional crises. In his first term, Trump sought to achieve broader outcomes and more widespread advantages for the United States through coercive diplomacy and escalating security challenges against Iran. This approach aligned with Iran's "strategic flexibility," where any security pressure or demands based on increasing expectations led to stronger reactions from Iran. This dynamic elevated U.S.-Iran relations into a "tactical confrontation" zone. Therefore, Iran's reciprocal actions against

Trump's adventurist policy would be one of the behavioral patterns in his use of "tactical reconciliation" strategy with Iran.

Trump, in the current context, is aware that any military confrontation with Iran would create more security challenges for the United States. While Biden's offshore balancing approach has significantly reduced the tactical and strategic costs for the U.S. in this volatile region, it is expected that in the current situation, U.S. foreign policy under Trump would inevitably rely less on aggressive mechanisms. Trump is anticipated to prioritize a strategy combining balancing, cooperation, and conditional reconciliation. The previous foreign policy approach of Trump and Pompeo created more challenges, and this has paved the way for inevitable signs of revisionism in Trump's foreign policy regarding Iran and even Russia. This approach can be considered part of a broader strategy of balancing to reduce future costs for the United States. In this line, Trump understands that ignoring Iran in the regional dynamics would lead to significant security challenges for the United States.

3. Limited Revisionism in U.S. Foreign Policy

A series of changes in international politics and the regional environment are currently taking shape, and the presence of Trump, along with his ties to Elon Musk, indicates that the U.S. is set to experience a new wave of power in the coming years, economically, militarily, and technologically. Trump is expected to implement the America First policy more rigorously. Any revisionism in foreign and security policies by countries will be a function of the "balance of power" doctrine. The United States has been able to establish a certain level of regional balance in its relations with Iran, Saudi Arabia, and other regional actors, including Israel. The balance, in the view of U.S. officials, is understood as maximizing Israel's military and strategic power.

Although Iran has consistently worked to create a specific level of power to control Israel's expansionist tendencies in the regional environment, it has also employed its military power to enhance its economic strength. Iran's strategic realism in recent years shows that a certain level of deterrence, which is both tactical and regional in nature, has prevented the United States from engaging in direct military confrontation with it. The current conditions in U.S.-Iran regional relations reflect signs of "armed peace" within the framework of "tactical deterrence." However, the economic and strategic challenges between Iran and the U.S. have continued to a significant degree. The October 7 incident and the subsequent war on Gaza can be viewed as subjects and processes that have

created considerable "security ambiguity" for both Iran and the U.S. In such a situation and process, one of Iran's main weaknesses remains its dependence on the financial and foreign exchange resources derived from energy sales and petroleum products.

4. The Impact of the Gaza War and Ongoing Middle Eastern Crises on Trump's Policy toward Iran

In the new Trump administration, significant attention will be given to Israel and the crises created by it in the region. The October 7th incident had a significant impact on the security and strategic policies of Iran and many regional countries. The main cause of the October 7th incident can be attributed to a shift in the balance of power dynamics. Both Iran and the United States, in the context of the Gaza War and the escalation of the crisis in Lebanon in September 2024, sought to implement a "crisis management" policy.

Although both Iran and the U.S. emphasized the necessity of managing and controlling the crisis, their tactical and strategic orientations were focused on supporting their respective regional allies. Whenever regional wars erupt, their impacts and consequences inevitably ripple through the surrounding environment and the international sphere. Therefore, it can be emphasized that one of the key issues in the relations between Iran and the U.S. is the October 7th event and the subsequent developments.

In this context, a significant portion of Iran's regional and strategic policy has been characterized by signs of "tactical balance." Iran will need power-building and crisis management to control the ongoing turmoil. If Iran, or any other country, lacks a balanced power structure, it will face more security challenges and become a victim of the chaotic environment in regional politics. When discussing the Southwest Asia, one refers to a highly chaotic area where any actor can strike another, but none can control the impact of the opposing side's actions. This situation can be observed in the interaction between Iran, the U.S., and Israel. Each of these actors was able to target the interests of others, but none could prevent the actions of the other parties.

Trump appears to recognize that aggressive actions in a volatile regional environment could jeopardize U.S. interests. Such policies risk destabilizing the Middle East, with adverse effects on the U.S. national and regional economy, including a decline in GDP. Trade both regionally and internationally for the U.S. would also decline in the context of crisis-induced disputes. In other

words, Trump's rhetoric and conceptual frameworks are not likely to present severe new security threats to Iran. In Trump's 2024 perspective, any balance in regional security and power will generate additional security benefits for the U.S. The situation the United States finds itself in will not be centered on US-centric regional power structures. Trump will focus on the necessity of a new regional balance of power based on Iran's role and will not possess the necessary motivation for new aggressive actions against Iran.

Donald Trump not only opposes the continuation of the Ukraine war but also views any war or similar security challenges in Iran's regional environment as detrimental to the U.S.'s interests, security, prestige, and authority.

Given this view, it is likely that Trump will pursue a regional policy based on constructive cooperation with Russia. Under the framework of a balanced approach, both the U.S. and Russia are aware that intensified actions against Iran will generate more challenges in the regional environment. In the current situation, Trump's interactive approach with Russia will function as a controlling force, and he will not seek to adopt aggressive measures similar to his first term as president. Trump is motivated to accept Putin's role as a mediator in the politics of the Southwest Asia, and this model could significantly enhance regional security.

Conclusion

During his first term, Trump employed tools against Iran that were hardware-based and had no relation to an interactive approach. Repeating this strategy will push Iran toward resistance against U.S. aggressive policies, gradually increasing the costs of America's aggressive actions toward Iran. Given that Trump has prioritized the optimization of the U.S. economy, any security challenge could exacerbate risks in the regional environment. Furthermore, it is expected that in this term, Trump will become more familiar with the novel political realities of the U.S. — realities that do not align well with his nationalist approach and populist mindset. Trump will realize that the "American elite group" plays a crucial role in shaping structural power configurations. In such a context, U.S. security policy in the Middle East and West Asia will likely focus on maintaining regional balance.

Additionally, the experience gained during his first term will assist Trump in avoiding undue influence from the goals and desires of certain regional allies and even his close associates in the government. He will likely take the initia-

tive in foreign policy matters. As Trump himself has mentioned, he may seek to redefine his legacy by resolving conflicts, potentially positioning himself for international accolades such as the Nobel Peace Prize.

The Portrayal of Iran as a Threat in the U.S. and the Role of Foreign Lobbies in This Context

Seyed Mohammad Kazem Sajjadpour, Professor at the School of International Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Introduction

An analysis of the political landscape in the United States reveals a contradiction between the consensus among experts in both the government and think tanks and the foreign policy behavior of the U.S. government. While experts agree that Iran is not the most significant security threat to U.S. interests, U.S. foreign policy and, at times, the positions of American policymakers portray Iran as the greatest threat against the United States. This discrepancy stems primarily from the influence of foreign lobbies—especially pro-Israel groups—that prioritize the interests of other states over those of the U.S. government, and shape the actions of the U.S. government accordingly. Therefore, this article will examine the notion that Iran is not the primary threat to the United States and explore the role of foreign lobbies, particularly that of Israel, in shaping this narrative.

Strategic Priorities of the United States According to National Security Documents and Scholarly Research

An analysis of the high-level official documents of the U.S. government reveals that Iran is not prioritized in terms of U.S. interests and security concerns when compared to countries like China, Russia, and North Korea. For example, in the National Security Strategy (NSS), Russia is mentioned 71 times, while Iran is only referenced 7 times. The NSS characterizes China as a revisionist global power with the capacity to fundamentally alter the international order. Russia is depicted as a global threat, destabilizing Europe and the world through its actions in Ukraine, and also as a nuclear proliferation risk after leaving arms control talks. North Korea is recognized as a power capable of targeting U.S. territory with missile attacks. In contrast, Iran is primarily characterized as a regional threat to its neighbors, with some concerns about the potential for Iranian-backed attacks on American officials.

Another relevant document, the Annual Threat Assessment (ATA), clearly shows that the most significant security threats to the U.S. are China and Russia, with Iran ranked lower in priority. According to this document, Iran continues to threaten U.S. interests, allies, and influence in the Middle East, aiming to solidify its position as a regional power while minimizing the risks of direct military conflict. Additionally, the document notes that Iran is not currently engaged in developing nuclear weapons capable of being tested, indicating that Iran is viewed as a regional threat with more limited scope.

The National Defense Strategy (NDS) further clarifies the level of threat posed by Iran, ranking it lower than China and Russia. This document highlights China as the most serious long-term threat and Russia as the primary short-term threat. It does not explicitly name Iran outside of discussions about nuclear and missile issues. Another key document, the National Military Strategy (NMS), which is classified but has been summarized for the public, also prioritizes China as the "most important strategic competitor" and describes Russia as a grave threat seeking to replace Western influence with its own Eurasian sphere of influence. However, Iran is mentioned only after these two countries.

The National Space Security Strategy (NSSS) only mentions China and Russia as potential threats to U.S. interests in space, with no mention of Iran. Similarly, the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), another important strategic document issued by the U.S. Department of Defense, notes that "Iran does not currently possess nuclear weapons," and the U.S. does not believe that Iran is pursuing

them at present. However, the NPR expresses concern about Iranian activities that were previously limited by the nuclear agreement, emphasizing the U.S. policy of working with allies to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. The National Intelligence Strategy (NIS), published by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), lists China and Russia as major threats to U.S. intelligence but does not mention Iran. The National Strategy for Counterterrorism (NSCT), last updated during the Trump administration in 2018, is the only document that specifically names Iran as the largest state sponsor of terrorism. This document, which is focused on counterterrorism, is perhaps the most politically charged, reflecting the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" policy against Iran. It can be argued that the document overstates Iran's regional influence as a threat to the U.S.

Finally, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), a set of federal laws specifying the budget and expenditures for the U.S. Department of Defense, also mentions China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea as threats. However, while it clearly prioritizes China as a global threat, it only characterizes Iran as a regional one with more limited scope.

Contradiction Between U.S. Strategic Priorities and Its official Positions and Foreign Policy Behavior Toward Iran

Although Iran is not considered the primary threat to the security interests of the United States, it has been framed as such within the political landscape of the United States. Consequently, the positions taken regarding Iran do not necessarily align with U.S. national interests. This issue is not confined to one of the two major political parties.

The U.S. foreign policy, however, has treated Iran as a global threat of the highest priority. For instance, the United States has resorted to various means to counter Iran's influence in the Middle East, including military strikes against Iranian interests in Syria and the assassination of prominent Iranian figures such as General Qasem Soleimani, the then-commander of the Quds Force. In contrast to its aggressive posture toward Iran, the U.S. has refrained from military retaliation or targeted assassinations against Chinese or Russian officials. In many cases, the U.S. has even limited Ukraine's freedom of action in terms of the types of attacks it conducts against Russia. The U.S. has never taken measures such as the assassination of prominent Chinese or Russian figures. While the U.S. has imposed crippling sanctions on Iran—being some of the

most severe and extensive sanctions in history—it has never used sanctions to curb China's expanding economic influence.

Therefore, it can be argued that, in its foreign policy behavior, the United States has effectively positioned Iran as the most serious threat to its national interests, a stance that contradicts both the high-level strategic documents and the consensus among experts.

The Role of Foreign Lobbies in the Demonization of Iran

Undoubtedly, one of the distinctive features of U.S. politics is the presence of foreign lobbies within the country. In this regard, the most significant role is played by the pro-Israel lobbies, as they (and to a lesser extent, Saudi and UAE lobbies) naturally focus primarily on the issue of Iran.

Christians United for Israel (CUFI), an evangelical Christian lobby with over 10 million members, surpasses even AIPAC in financial resources and political reach, despite its non-Jewish affiliation. This lobbying organization adheres to Christian Zionism and, with over 10 million members, is the largest Zionist organization in the U.S. Its president, John Hagee, is an American pastor and televangelist. In the U.S., some of the most prominent supporters of Israel belong to this ideology, including Mike Pence, former Vice President, and Mike Pompeo, former Secretary of State.

The most significant Jewish lobby supporting Israel is the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). AIPAC not only supports the interests of Israel but specifically advocates for the right-wing factions within Israel, ranging from the Likud party, led by Benjamin Netanyahu, to the more radical religious and secular right-wing elements in the country. In addition to CUFI and AIPAC, there are several other lobbying organizations that advocate for Israeli interests, including the Jewish organization J Street, which takes a more liberal stance than the two aforementioned groups and is often critical of Israel's actions. However, these two organizations represent the most influential examples.

But can lobbying in the United States truly exert such a significant influence on the country's foreign policy behavior? Numerous studies have been conducted on this matter, and the results have affirmed that such influence does indeed occur. Ilan Pappé, a historian and political activist critical of extreme Zionism, has written an important book on the subject titled *Lobbying for Zionism on Both Sides of the Atlantic*. Pappé points out that pro-Israel lobbies in the U.S. have shaped American foreign policy regarding Israel and, by extension,

Iran. He demonstrates that all U.S. presidents in the 21st century have been heavily influenced by these lobbies, particularly AIPAC. Pappe notes that the role of the Israeli lobby was more limited in relation to Iran prior to the 1990s because, until then, the U.S. considered Iraq, under Saddam Hussein, to be its primary asset against Iran. However, after the rift between Saddam Hussein and the U.S., Israel became Iran's main enemy in the region, and creating hostility with Iran became one of the core policies of the Israeli lobby. Pappe concludes that, without the influence of Israeli lobbies, U.S. policy toward Iran would have been different.

Mearsheimer and Walt (2007) demonstrate the Israel lobby's disproportionate impact on U.S. foreign policy, contending that American actions toward Iran—including military threats—reflect Israeli priorities rather than U.S. national interests. The authors argue that Iran, due to its geographic distance from the U.S., is not a major threat to the country. They also contend that the current sanctions regime against Iran is the result of the efforts of the Israeli lobby, which led to the passage of the Libya and Iran Sanctions Act in 1996. They claim that, without the involvement of Israeli lobbies, the U.S. would have imposed softer sanctions on Iran. According to Mearsheimer and Walt, Iran's nuclear ambitions do not constitute a threat to the United States, and this is why the lobby must constantly pressure American politicians to confront Tehran. This perspective on the role of Israeli lobbies is not confined to one political wing in the U.S. While many left-leaning politicians and scholars, such as Bernie Sanders, US Senator from Vermont, and members of Congress like Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, believe that the Israeli lobby has shaped U.S. policy in the Middle East, John Hoffman, a researcher at the right-wing Cato Institute, also touches upon this issue. In an article, Hoffman mentions that Israel has not brought any benefits to U.S. interests, and rather has posed threats to them. Hoffman further argues that Israel has indeed shaped U.S. policy toward Iran.

Conclusion

Based on sources such as the key strategic documents of the U.S. government and scholarly research from credible academics across diverse intellectual schools, it can be concluded that U.S. foreign policy towards Iran is in contradiction with the country's own strategic priorities and interests. This contradiction is largely the result of the activities of lobbies that advocate for the interests of Israel. In fact, the level of demonization of Iran in the U.S. is more a construct and outcome of lobbying efforts, media campaigns, and think tanks aligned

with Israel, rather than being based on the actual power and intentions of the Islamic Republic of Iran to threaten the United States. Thus, U.S. strategic interests necessitate curtailing foreign lobby influence to align policy with objective threat assessments. A government is expected to pursue the national interests of its own country. The interests of the U.S. necessitate the need to challenge the demonization of Iran and to assess the level of the threat posed by Iran in a realistic and accurate manner.

The Return of the Labour Party to Power and the Prospects for UK-Iran Relations

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Introduction

With the victory of the Labour Party in the UK general elections on July 4, 2024, the question has once again arisen regarding the approach of the newly elected government toward the Islamic Republic of Iran. Currently, Iran-UK relations are at their lowest diplomatic level, with Iran having had no ambassador in London for nearly two and a half years. Various challenges, such as the proscription of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the collapse of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the subsequent suspension of nuclear negotiations, the wars in Gaza and Ukraine, and Iran's response to the assassinations of Hezbollah's late Secretary-General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah and Hamas's late political leader Ismail Haniyeh, have all significantly contributed to the current state of UK-Iran bilateral relations. Predicting and analyzing the new UK government's policies toward these issues requires a deep understanding of the Labour Party and the complexities of Iran-UK relations—an endeavor this article undertakes to the best of its ability.

The Special Relationship and the Principles of British Foreign Policy

Following the decline of the British Empire and its global hegemony after World War II, successive British governments—especially during the premierships of Margaret Thatcher and John Major—deepened their alignment with the United States. The highest degree of adherence to American policies was observed during Tony Blair’s tenure, as he enthusiastically embraced US global hegemony. Blair significantly reshaped Churchill’s Three Circles Doctrine—encompassing the Commonwealth, the English-speaking world, and Europe—by redefining the UK’s international identity within the framework of US leadership, termed the ‘special relationship’.

Blair also preferred to act as a bridge between the US and the EU, another major global player. Since Blair’s premiership, almost all British governments have followed the model of “close partnership with the US” in the UK foreign policy. Even Conservative proponents of Brexit framed their vision of “Global Britain” around the UK’s special relationship with the United States. Consequently, the most significant determinant shaping British foreign policy today is its alignment with US policies. Other factors, such as national interests and geopolitical considerations, are reassessed in relation to this special relationship.

The July 4 UK Elections

The 2024 general elections did not produce a strategic shift in British politics, as the Labour Party’s right-wing faction—the ‘Blairites’—assumed power. Traditionally a socialist and left-leaning party, Labour’s approach to domestic and foreign policy underwent significant changes with the emergence of its right-wing faction in the 1990s. This transformation traces back to figures such as John Smith, Tony Blair, and Gordon Brown, who advocated for modernizing the party.

Under Blair’s leadership, Labour secured a landslide victory in 1997, ending the Conservative Party’s nearly two-decade rule (1979–1997) under Thatcher and Major. The Blairite faction championed the concept of “New Labour,” which promoted right-wing and neoliberal policies, distancing itself from traditional socialist and left-wing principles. Blair’s policies leaned so far to the right and aligned so closely with the US neoconservatives that critics derided him as America’s “lapdog.”

In contrast, the left-wing and socialist faction of the Labour Party was led by Jeremy Corbyn, who gained leadership in 2015 with the support of Labour's traditional leftist base, young members, and trade unions. However, Corbyn faced intense opposition from Blairites, the Labour Friends of Israel parliamentary group, monarchists, and hardline Conservatives, particularly Boris Johnson. These groups launched a concerted campaign to portray Corbyn as antisemitic, severely undermining his political credibility. These attacks contributed to Labour's defeat in the 2019 elections and Corbyn's resignation in 2020.

Following Corbyn's departure, Keir Starmer won the Labour leadership election in April 2020 under the slogan "Neither Corbyn Nor Blair." While he distanced himself from Corbyn, even expelling him from the party, he increasingly aligned with Blairite policies. Starmer fostered strong ties with pro-Israel factions and adopted a right-leaning stance in both domestic and foreign policy.

Labour's Victory and Starmer's Premiership

Following the July 4 elections, the Labour Party, under Starmer's leadership, took control of the government with a fundamentally right-leaning and conservative approach to policy. The similarities between Starmer's policies and those of his Conservative predecessor, Rishi Sunak, were so pronounced that opposition candidates frequently remarked during televised debates that there was little distinction between the two major parties' domestic and foreign policies.

Within Labour, two major factions persist: the traditional left-wing and the modern right-wing. The former, under Corbyn's leadership, historically supported migrant rights, minorities such as Muslims and Black communities, anti-war initiatives (opposing conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria), Palestinian solidarity, closer relations with Iran, and criticism of the British monarchy. Conversely, the right-wing faction, led by Blair since 1994 and now inherited by Starmer, shifted Labour toward capitalist, neoliberal policies, including privatization, high taxation, and reduced welfare benefits. Some Labour members even regarded Blair as a Conservative in disguise. The current British Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, is the political heir of this faction.

In the realm of foreign policy, the right-wing faction of the Labour Party differs from the traditional left-wing faction in at least two fundamental ways. The first difference is its alignment with and adherence to U.S. policies. This tendency reached its peak during Tony Blair's tenure as Prime Minister, to the extent that critics described the UK as a mere extension of the United States.

Keir Starmer, since assuming leadership of the Labour Party, has demonstrated his adherence to U.S. policies in various events, including the Ukraine war, the conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon, and others.

The second major difference between Blairites and the Labour Party's socialists is their belief in liberal interventionism. The right-wing faction of the Labour Party, much like the Conservative Party, considers militant groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and even Iran's IRGC as threats to the international system, labeling them as terrorist organizations.

Given this background, it becomes evident that, in many of its domestic and foreign policies, the right-wing faction of the Labour Party closely resembles the Conservatives. However, this does not mean that the Labour Party as a whole endorses this trajectory. Some members of the party may challenge the policies and actions of the dominant faction. For instance, over the past year, in response to widespread public protests against the crimes committed by Israel, some Labour Party members and British MPs resigned from their positions to pressure Keir Starmer.

There is even a possibility that, as in 2015, the Labour Party's left-wing faction could regain leadership and, by winning the next general election, form a government.

Starmer's Stance on Iran

Starmer's stance on Iran revolves around four key issues: the proscription of the IRGC, Iran's role in the Gaza and Ukraine conflicts, its response to Israel after Hassan Nasrallah's assassination, and the potential severance of Iran-UK diplomatic ties. This does not mean that all Iran-UK issues are confined to these four topics; other matters, such as the execution of British spies in Iran (e.g., the execution of Alireza Akbari) and the UK's pressure on Iranian-backed cultural and Islamic institutions (such as increased oversight and restrictions on the Islamic Centre of London), can also be included in this framework.

Proscription of the IRGC

One of the key issues that has influenced Iran-UK relations for over a decade is the potential Proscription of the IRGC as a terrorist organization. For instance, in 2010, the UK Foreign Office sanctioned the IRGC in connection with Iran's nuclear program. However, over time and through various negotiations between Iran and Western powers, this sanction became largely symbolic and

lost its effectiveness. Consequently, during different incidents—such as the street protests following the death of Mahsa Amini, the execution of British spies, and the sale of Iranian drones to Russia—UK prime ministers, members of parliament, and various institutions have repeatedly called for new sanctions against the IRGC. This issue is not exclusive to any particular political party; both the Conservative and Labour parties have, at different times, emphasized the necessity of such action. Nonetheless, the UK has yet to take a decisive and practical step toward formally Proscribing the IRGC.

On January 3, 2023, the office of then-Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announced preparations to officially declare the IRGC a terrorist organization and impose sanctions. Additionally, on January 19, 2023, some European Union leaders called on the EU Council to sanction the IRGC. However, despite sanctioning several individual IRGC members, the EU ultimately rejected a blanket designation of the organization. In response to these efforts, on February 23, 2023, U.S. President Joe Biden opposed the UK and EU's initiative to blacklist the IRGC, preventing its implementation. Once again, in April 2024, following Iran's missile and drone retaliation against an Israeli attack on the Iranian embassy in Damascus, calls for sanctioning the IRGC intensified within the EU and UK. On April 30, 2024, David Cameron, then serving as Foreign Secretary under Rishi Sunak's government, stated in the UK House of Lords Foreign Affairs Committee that Proscribing the IRGC was unnecessary, as it would significantly damage diplomatic relations with Iran.

Political debates over sanctioning the IRGC continued until the Labour Party, led by Keir Starmer, emerged as the winning party in the July 4, 2024, general election. Before his victory, Starmer had, like his predecessors, pledged to formally proscribe the IRGC. Similarly, David Lammy, who was the Shadow Foreign Secretary at the time, had strongly criticized Rishi Sunak's government for failing to impose such sanctions, particularly following the execution of Alireza Akbari and other alleged offenses. Just nine days before the UK general election (on June 27, 2024), Starmer's prospective Foreign and Home Secretaries, David Lammy and Yvette Cooper, publicly announced their unanimous agreement on the issue, vowing to push through the necessary legal changes to implement the sanctions post-election. However, six days after Labour's electoral victory (on July 10, 2024), David Lammy, now the new Foreign Secretary, stated that there was no urgency in proceeding with this measure, emphasizing the need for thorough legal examination, which could be a lengthy process.

Several factors explain the UK government's reluctance to proscribe the IRGC. This article highlights two primary reasons. First, the United States currently has little interest in seeing the UK sanction the IRGC, as it believes such an action could lead to the severance of diplomatic ties between Iran and the UK. For instance, in February 2023, U.S. diplomats opposed the UK's proposal to blacklist the IRGC on grounds of alleged Iranian plots to assassinate or abduct individuals in London, arguing that such a designation would undermine the UK's diplomatic role as a key strategic partner of the U.S. in dealing with Iran. The second major reason for the UK's hesitancy is its unwillingness to face the potential consequences of sanctioning the IRGC. The most immediate repercussion would likely be a reciprocal move by Iran to sanction British military forces, particularly the Royal Navy. This could pose challenges for British military personnel stationed in the Persian Gulf, Iraq, Syria, and other regions. Moreover, such a move could significantly affect British intelligence and security operations in the Middle East. Another foreseeable consequence would be the complete severance of diplomatic relations between Iran and the UK. Additionally, increased restrictions on the movement of European, especially British, commercial and oil tankers in the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea could arise as a result of such sanctions. This could lead to a global surge in energy prices, exacerbating inflation in European countries, particularly in the UK. It is important to acknowledge that the concerns surrounding the repercussions of sanctioning the IRGC do not imply that such an action will never take place or that it cannot be implemented at a lower level. For instance, if U.S. policy on this matter shifts, the UK may find itself compelled to follow suit and proceed with sanctioning the IRGC.

Iran's Role in the Gaza, Lebanon, and Ukraine Conflicts

Regarding the Gaza War, Starmer, like the previous Conservative government, has closely followed U.S. policies, effectively attributing blame to Iran for the conflict. In the Ukraine war, the British government also perceives Iran as a supporter of Russia. Under both Rishi Sunak and Starmer's leadership, the British government has repeatedly held the Islamic Republic of Iran responsible for these events and regional instability.

In a phone call with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on August 12, Starmer stated that Iran-UK relations could have expanded further if Iran refrained from supporting Russia in the war against Ukraine. Similarly, during

a phone conversation between the Irish Foreign Minister and Abbas Araghchi, Iran's Foreign Minister, on August 23, the issue of Iran's role in the Ukraine conflict was again discussed.

Iran's Response to the Assassination of Hassan Nasrallah

The third major issue affecting Iran-UK relations is Iran's response to the assassination of Hassan Nasrallah. Previously, following the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, an emergency session of the UN Security Council was convened at Iran's request, supported by Russia, China, and Algeria. However, the British envoy at the session refrained from condemning the Israel's actions, instead reaffirming the UK's unwavering support for Israel and suggesting that the Islamic Republic of Iran was responsible for the crisis in Gaza.

Only two days after the assassination of Fouad Shukr (a senior Hezbollah commander) and one day after the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, Starmer's Foreign and Defense Ministers visited Beirut and then Israel, reiterating their support for Israel. These officials urged resistance leaders to exercise restraint and refrain from retaliatory actions, arguing that escalating tensions would benefit no one.

Interestingly, as speculation about Iran's response to Haniyeh's assassination intensified, Starmer took the unusual step of holding a phone call with Iran's new president on August 12. During this conversation, he expressed deep concern over the possibility of an Iranian response. In reality, this call served as a warning and a plea for Iran to halt its threats against Israel.

The Severance of Iran-UK Relations

The relationship between Iran and the UK has long been fraught with challenges and fluctuations. Despite these ups and downs, successive British governments have been deeply reluctant to sever ties with Iran. Historically, Britain has sought to maximize its strategic presence in various parts of the world to advance its interests. Through a combination of hard and soft power, the UK aims to maintain the highest possible level of influence in different countries.

In addition to Britain's strategic inclination toward maintaining a global presence, another factor preserving UK-Iran relations has been pressure from the United States. Currently, the U.S. does not favor a complete severance of Iran-UK relations, as Britain serves as a conduit for advancing American policies in Iran. Since the 1979 Revolution, U.S.-Iran relations have remained severed,

with the hostage crisis marking a definitive break. In recent years, the Trump administration's withdrawal from the JCPOA and the designation of the IRGC as a terrorist organization have further reduced even limited diplomatic engagements between Washington and Tehran. Consequently, the UK must maintain a presence in Tehran to pursue U.S. interests there.

Former British Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary David Cameron elaborated on the UK government's reluctance to sever ties with Iran during a session with the House of Lords International Relations Committee on April 30, 2024. He emphasized that during crises, particularly those involving Israel and Gaza, it is crucial for him to communicate directly with Iran's Foreign Minister. He stated that if a message needed to be delivered to Iran to de-escalate tensions, he would prefer to convey it personally rather than rely on a French intermediary.

Conclusion

The new UK government is unlikely to significantly alter Britain's foreign policy toward the Islamic Republic of Iran. As discussed, the right-wing faction of the Labour Party does not differ substantially from the Conservative Party, which held power for fourteen years. A defining feature of their foreign policy is their strong adherence to the policies and strategies of the United States in the international system.

Regarding the personality of the Labour Party leader, Keir Starmer, it can be observed that, unlike Tony Blair—who was characterized by his ambition and boldness—Starmer is a more cautious and conservative figure. He strives to maintain a balance by attempting to satisfy all parties involved in a given conflict. On the one hand, he presents himself as an advocate for a ceasefire and a proponent of peace in Palestine. On the other hand, he has consistently refrained from condemning Israeli actions, emphasizing Britain's steadfast support for Israel.

Starmer is also notably influenced by Israeli lobbies. During the recent electoral campaigns, significant Israeli lobbies in Britain, such as Labour Friends of Israel, provided financial support to many prominent Labour representatives. At present, individuals who received such financial support make up half of the new government's cabinet, including the Prime Minister (Keir Starmer), his Deputy (Angela Rayner), the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rachel Reeves), and the Foreign Secretary (David Lammy). The financial backing from these

lobbies indirectly suggests the extent to which the new cabinet may be shaped by Israeli interests in the United Kingdom.

However, it should be noted that Starmer's cautious and risk-averse nature would likely prevent him from taking actions that could lead to the severance of diplomatic ties with Iran. In this context, as with other significant policy matters, the future direction of UK-Iran relations will likely depend on the policies of the United States, particularly following Trump's election victory. Should the United States determine that further political pressure on Iran is necessary, the UK may eventually align with the U.S. and sever relations with Iran, which could lead to the proscription of the IRGC.

Furthermore, Iran's response to the assassination of Hassan Nasrallah could generate new dynamics in UK-Iran relations. If pressure on Iran escalates, particularly in the wake of Israeli attacks and Western efforts to alter the regional balance of power in favor of Israel, the repercussions could result in closer ties between Iran and Russia, greater geopolitical alignment against Europe, or even the potential development of nuclear weapons as a last resort. Such developments would, in turn, reshape the dynamics of UK-Iran relations.

France's Foreign Policy towards the Middle East and its Relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran

Mohammad Reza Deheshiri, Professor at the Faculty of International Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Decision-Making Structure in France's Foreign Policy

In France's political system, power is concentrated in the hands of the President, who is the primary decision-maker in foreign policy. The Parliament typically defers to the President and Foreign Minister, though it may occasionally issue non-binding recommendations. However, since most of the time the President and the Prime Minister belong to the same political faction, their policies are typically in coordination. Occasionally, however, there may be a coexistence between a President from one faction and a Prime Minister from another. In such cases, the President's power is reduced, as it is the Prime Minister who, due to reliance on the power of the Parliament, influences the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in foreign policy matters. The President, however, has the authority to dissolve the Parliament in such situations, although the composition of the next Parliament may potentially be even less favorable to the President. Currently, the Radical Right Party holds about one-third of the seats, the Leftist Parties hold another one-third, and the Center-Right holds the remaining one-third of

the seats in the French Parliament. The formation of the government depends on a coalition led by Macron with one of the other two factions.

Before the rise of Nicolas Sarkozy, France maintained an independent foreign policy. Both the Mitterrand and Chirac administrations pursued independent policies, as exemplified in France's stance regarding the U.S. invasion of Iraq. With Sarkozy's rise to power, however, there was a shift in France's foreign policy strategy. Due to Sarkozy's strong inclination to cooperate with the United States, France became involved in NATO's military command structure, effectively aligning itself with U.S. policies. Even after this, with the rise of François Hollande from the Socialist Party, there was no fundamental shift in France's foreign policy. However, Macron, for reasons that will be discussed, failed to present a significantly different approach:

- Europe was in a weakened state;
- France had lost its leverage in its former colonies;
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for the following reasons, gravitated towards transatlanticism:
 - A transitional period in the international order had occurred;
 - Trump had come to power in the U.S.;
 - Russia had launched a military invasion of Ukraine.

Against this backdrop, any president who comes to power can only change tactics, and in terms of broader foreign policy strategy, they will inevitably align with the United States.

Macron has been one of the main supporters of the Geopolitical Commission within the European Union and a staunch backer of Ursula von der Leyen, who advocates for strengthening the concept of strategic autonomy within the EU. Strategic autonomy for Europe has been Macron's most significant idea. However, in practice, we have seen that French foreign policy under Macron's leadership still leans towards a transatlantic direction.

On the one hand, the tradition of French exceptionalism continues to exist, and Macron is compelled to present proposals such as strategic autonomy for Europe within this framework. This approach allows him to meet the expectations of public opinion. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, the prevailing international environment compels France to focus increasingly on the other side of the Atlantic. In other words, the duality in France's foreign policy stems from the contradiction between the social context of policymaking

and the international environment that influences the implementation of those policies. Therefore, Macron must balance managing public opinion with his relations with the United States. "As a result, we observe a dual approach: on one hand, France advocates for European defense and security autonomy to counter the far-right and secure voter support, while on the other hand, due to the declining influence of France—and even the EU—it aligns with the U.S. to confront threats from Russia and China's ambitions. In reality, the French government declares its intentions, but under current conditions, these goals remain unattainable."

Trump is not committed to the Paris Agreement and follows a top-down policy with respect to his European counterparts. Given Trump's ultra-nationalistic approach, Europeans are concerned that their trade relations with the U.S. may also face hurdles. With Trump's victory, they will eventually have to accommodate him, but they will be forced to pursue a more serious European foreign and security policy independent of the United States.

Trump believes that a country can only play a role in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to the extent that it contributes financially. With Trump's arrival, an additional financial burden is placed on France. Can France afford to finance both NATO and a European army simultaneously? While France advocates for an autonomous European defense force, fiscal constraints may limit its ability to fund such an initiative.

France's Middle East Policy

Since Sarkozy's presidency, France's Mediterranean initiative gained more prominence, and the country began to see itself as committed to supporting the nations of the Mediterranean region, considering it as its immediate security zone. Following Israel's attacks on Lebanon, the first foreign minister to visit the country was France's foreign minister. This demonstrated France's commitment to Lebanon. France has actively sought to align Lebanon's political framework with the March 14 Movement's objectives. Especially after the explosion at the Beirut port, France supported the Lebanese government to ensure it was formed without Hezbollah's influence.

The views of French political parties and movements on the developments in Lebanon can be categorized as follows:

- **Radical Right:** This faction believes that, while focusing more on domestic issues, the French government should also address the

ambitions of Iran-backed militia groups. While opposing Hezbollah, they contend that French fiscal resources ought to prioritize domestic welfare over foreign engagements. According to them, the taxes of French citizens should be spent on the welfare of the French people.

- **Left-wing:** This group holds a more moderate position towards Islamist groups, arguing that humanitarian issues in the Middle East crisis should not be overlooked.
- **Center-right:** Represented by Macron's current administration, this faction must balance between moderating the radical right's positions and addressing the left-wing's concerns. They consider themselves committed to supporting Israel, but also view Israel's attacks as unacceptable. They believe that all possible tools should be utilized to end the cycle of violence in the region.

France's Influence in the Levant: Challenges and Barriers

After the Arab Spring, the United States shifted its focus for two main reasons, particularly towards the Middle East and then more notably to East Asia:

1. The reduced strategic relevance of Europe (although, after the Ukraine crisis, attention to Europe increased from a security perspective, as well as its role as a market for U.S. energy exports).
2. The rise of ISIS, which led to prioritizing the containment of this group.

In a context where both the importance of Europe and the Middle East have diminished, how effective can France be? The U.S. asks France to dedicate even its limited influence towards containing China. However, the Middle East will not be excluded from America's calculations, and support for Israel remains a priority. Given the intensifying tensions, this priority is likely to persist. As a result, France's engagement with the Middle East may be reduced to arms exports, exemplified by the Rafale deal with the UAE.

Some of the key barriers to France's role in the Middle East include:

- **The securitization of the Middle East:** This shift has undermined France's policies, which emphasized cultural diversity and the need for civilizational connections. Consequently, France's soft power has been significantly weakened.
- **The diverse diplomatic approach of Arab countries:** These countries engage with Russia, China, the U.S., and Europe simultaneously, reducing France's share of influence within this diplomatic portfolio.

- **Brexit:** As a result, the role of the European Troika, which had traditionally acted in harmony, has diminished. The UK shifted further towards the U.S., and the signing of the AUKUS pact was effectively supported by the UK.

Prospects for Iran-France Relations under Mr. Pezeshkian

Despite the change in government in Tehran, France's approach towards Iran remains one of threat perception. Consequently, Iran continues to be regarded as a security threat to the Middle East and the Mediterranean. Additionally, France believes that Iran's support for Russia in the Ukraine war is detrimental to European security. Another prevailing perception in France is that, with the new government in Tehran, there will not be significant shifts in Iran's overall policies. Major decisions are still largely remain firmly under the control of the Supreme Leader's office and the institutions he oversees. This is evident in the fact that Operation True Promise I took place under the administration of late Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi, while Operation True Promise II was operationalized during the tenure of President Pezeshkian.

French policy toward Iran aligns with the EU's overarching strategic framework, and the EU is currently not inclined to engage in any transactions with Iran.

What Iran is interested in, however, is the segmentation of issues. Iran would like Europe to adopt a pragmatic policy towards Iran, similar to its approach towards Russia. For example, Europe still imports 16.5% of its energy from Russia. This is the moment when Iran should engage in subject-specific dialogues. Discussions should take place on issues such as prisoner exchanges, the Ukraine crisis, and others. Each of these issues should be addressed separately, and Iran should negotiate for necessary concessions in each case.

Another important point is that Iran-France relations have become increasingly security-oriented, and there is a need to de-securitize them. To achieve this, it would be beneficial to start in non-security domains, such as economic, environmental, cultural, scientific discussions, media cooperation, intellectual dialogues, and think tank collaborations.

Notably, Europe lacks both a diaspora-driven Iranian lobby and a pro-Iranian advocacy network. By Iranian lobby, we mean the Iranian diaspora, which is predominantly made up of anti-revolutionary groups working alongside the Israeli lobby and some Arab countries against Iran. The lobby for Iran, on the other hand, refers to non-Iranian, pro-Iranian lobby groups, such as Armenians

and Lebanese individuals who are sympathetic to Iran. Iran can leverage the support of these groups to influence the French foreign policy decision-making circles. France shares common views with Iran on issues like Armenia, or even the necessity of protecting civilian lives in Lebanon.

The Outlook of the European Union's Strategic Autonomy Initiative

Abdolghasem Delfi, Former Ambassador of Iran to France

Introduction

Although internal relations within Europe have always been a subject of discussion since the inception of the process of European integration, what Europe is currently grappling with is largely influenced by the situation created by China's rise. The capacities that China has defined for itself in the international arena have necessitated a redefinition of international relations. Furthermore, with the election of a new U.S. president and America's economic conditions, a new definition of political relations has emerged between the United States and its allies across the Atlantic. Consequently, European states now perceive a heightened risk of U.S. disengagement from continental defense and security commitments. Part of the backdrop to this new situation is captured in the conversation between President Trump and Elon Musk. In this conversation, Trump claims that before he entered the White House, only 7 out of the 32 NATO member countries were paying their membership dues, and the rest were falling short in their payments, forcing the U.S. to carry the burden. According to Trump, the European Union benefits from economic, trade, and military relations with the U.S., yet fails to bear the necessary costs in the Ukraine crisis. These two aspects could form the foundation of the new discussions that will redefine the transatlantic partnership.

Within the European Union, not all members discuss the issue of strategic autonomy, and there are varying inclinations regarding this matter. During the past years, Europe has undergone a significant transformation compared to the past, primarily due to the withdrawal of the United Kingdom -a permanent member of the UN Security Council- from the EU. The role of London in Europe is undeniable. Its economic, military, intelligence, and hegemonic capacities as one of the former colonial powers, along with its unique transatlantic relations, cannot be replaced by other EU members. This situation has prompted Europe to reconsider its capabilities. In this context, the country making the most effort towards an independent Europe is France, particularly under the leadership of President Emmanuel Macron. In fact, it is mainly France that has been advocating for the idea of European strategic autonomy, even facing numerous challenges in this regard, even before the Ukraine war.

Macron's perspective on the idea of European strategic autonomy is reflected in two key speeches he delivered. The first speech, delivered at the end of the third year of his first five-year presidential term at the Sorbonne, served as an introduction to the general concept of this idea. The second speech, delivered last April at the Sorbonne, provided a more precise outline of what Macron envisioned for a stronger Europe. In his speech, he expressed the desire for Europe to break free from being a "strategic minority" and to be able to recognize and secure its own interests independently. He stated, "We have given up what is strategically valuable; energy to Russia, security to the U.S., and equally vital prospects to China." Macron identifies enhanced defense integration as a prerequisite for overcoming Europe's strategic dependencies.

The Impact of the Strategic Autonomy on the EU's Common Defense and Security Policy

One of the most significant challenges to European integration in the past decade has been the departure of prominent political figures such as Kohl, Mitterrand, Thatcher, and some Italian leaders. As a result, Europe currently lacks a charismatic leader around whom consensus can be formed, particularly when the process of unity faces difficulties. The next generation of political leaders, such as Merkel and Macron, has not had sufficient capability to build consensus. This indicates that, despite all the considerations for galvanizing and equipping Europe to confront new developments, the integration and unity have not been as effective as they should have been. While Europe has

achieved monetary union and border integration, the pursuit of strategic autonomy remains politically and institutionally challenging.

One of the challenges the Union has failed to address effectively is the management of the COVID-19 pandemic. Europe's financial unity during the pandemic did not play its expected role; the participation of all countries was not achieved, and the strategic unity that was anticipated in such an important issue as health showed its absence, with the issue of a unified vaccine being a key symbol of this failure. Another major challenge worth mentioning is Europe's technological capabilities, which are increasingly falling behind both the U.S. and China. In this context, we are witnessing Europe's lag in important areas such as digital economy and artificial intelligence. Another fundamental challenges for Europe, particularly for countries with right-wing ruling parties, is the external borders of the Union and the influx of refugees and migrants through these borders.

In security and defense matters, the European Union also faces significant challenges in funding defense expenses, an issue that Trump also criticized. As a result, the issue of an independent European defense force seems to be an unsolved problem without a definitive solution.

France's Perspective on the Strategic Autonomy Debate: A French Europe or a European France

Through careful design and policies, Macron effectively sidelined traditional political parties in France and, by creating a new image of a centrist model of governance, managed to rise to the presidency and challenge the dominant radical right. This led to an ambitious vision for Macron that he could lead Europe, yet this ambition did not align with reality. Merkel had considerable influence in European relations, and the competition between these two figures hindered the emergence of a unified European leader. While Macron believed that his actions could position him as Europe's leader, the challenges outlined earlier prevented him from filling the leadership vacuum in Europe. Consequently, despite the reasonable capacities he had established for managing France, Macron was unsuccessful on the European stage. This shortcoming not only failed to advance European unity but also sparked significant opposition, particularly in countries with governments formed by far-right or traditional left-wing parties. This led to a lack of support for Macron's actions in the context of Ukraine. The concept of a European strategic autonomy that emerged was, for the most part, more French than European, and Macron's team promoted

this idea in various instances. However, it has not yielded results so far, and with Trump's potential return to power, it seems unlikely that this initiative will become a concrete solution.

Radical Right-Wing Parties and the Strategic Autonomy

The electoral gains of far-right parties in Italy, Austria, Poland, and their growing coalition for various social and economic reasons reflect growing anti-establishment sentiment across the EU. However, if the underlying conditions weaken, the radical right will be diminished, as it is not a phenomenon that has a coherent model of governance but rather capitalizes on the weaknesses of existing governing parties. To counter the radical right, leaders must be able to address the migration issue effectively. In the current European Parliament, the position of the radical right has improved compared to previous sessions, and we are witnessing the expansion of its influence, which contradicts the strategic autonomy. If this initiative can address social issues, it may succeed in overcoming the far-right. The recent French elections serve as an example, showing that, through the coalition of other political currents, it is possible to control the far-right.

The United States and the European Strategic Autonomy Initiative

U.S. partisan divisions yield divergent approaches to transatlantic relations: whereas Trump's tenure prioritized transactional disengagement, Biden has sought to revitalize multilateral frameworks." However, on a broader scale, they share common views on some issues. The question of how the future global system will be polarized affects Europe's position. If the European strategic autonomy is materialized, and Europe returns to its pre-Brexit, pre-COVID, and pre-Ukraine war status, it could at least become a credible economic pole in the world, altering its relationship with the United States. If the Ukraine crisis reaches a resolution that Europe expects, the European Union will gain a new member, leading to Russia's weakening and the erosion of its primacy, which is a threat to European security. In such a scenario, Europe, with or without a plan for strategic autonomy, could redefine its position within the upcoming international order.

Consequences of European Strategic Autonomy for Iran

The relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Europe should not be entirely dependent on the quality of transatlantic partnership or, more broadly, on issues related to strategic autonomy and Europe's relations with other international actors. However, Iran can benefit from the various conditions that affect these relations. What is certain is that the prevailing atmosphere in Iran-Europe relations must change, regardless of the direction Europe takes and whether it achieves greater autonomy or not. One important option that can be pursued to expand Iran's international relations is to reassess its relations with Europe. This means that Iran shares certain challenges with Europe, particularly in those areas in which it has tensions with the United States. In areas where Iran is in conflict with the U.S., it could align with Europe, and wherever it finds common ground with the U.S., Europe could also support Iran. Ultimately, despite past bitterness, Europe constitutes both a potential diplomatic avenue and a latent risk for Iran, contingent on Tehran's willingness to recalibrate relations."

Interview: "Examining Developments in West Asia After the Operation al-Aqsa Flood"

The developments in West Asia following the October 7th operation last year are significant topics that, due to their scope, impact, consequences, and involvement of various regional and extra-regional actors, require careful consideration and analysis. In this regard, in an interview with Dr. Hamidreza Dehghani Pudeh, we have made an effort to provide a timely and somewhat comprehensive perspective on this issue. Dr. Dehghani Pudeh is a former diplomat and ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Qatar. He has held various roles, including Assistant to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Director General for the Middle East and North Africa since 2018, Head of the Middle East and North Africa Department, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Jeddah, Head of the Middle East and Persian Gulf research program at the Institute of Political and International Studies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Deputy Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Beirut, Deputy Director General for Training and Human Resource Development, and First Secretary at the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Damascus. Dr. Hamidreza Dehghani Pudeh holds a PhD in Private Law, is

a university lecturer, and has authored several academic works in the fields of International legal studies and Middle Eastern affairs.

Interviewer: It has been one year since the operation "Al-Aqsa Flood", and Hamas articulated specific objectives. How would you characterize the roots and aims of this operation? In your opinion, have these goals been achieved after one year?

Dehghani: "Israel's losses during the one-day operation constituted an irreparable defeat. From a security perspective, it put an end to the myth of Israel's invincibility. After more than a year, Israel has still not achieved its declared objectives. Israel announced three goals: the release of prisoners, the destruction of Hamas, and the elimination of the threat from Gaza. If we focus solely on these goals, Israel has failed not only in the first operation but also in the second one. If we consider Hamas' objectives from that operation, one might argue that Hamas has also failed to free its prisoners, it has failed to defend the people there, and it has significantly weakened its military capabilities. Therefore, it seems that neither side has achieved its goals. However, at first, Hamas has managed to keep the vast majority of Israeli prisoners, despite all the bombings, and these prisoners will contribute to the future prisoner swap with Israel. Second, Hamas was able to stop the normalization of relations between Arab countries and the Israeli regime. It also managed to remind the international community of the severity of the Palestinian issue. Hamas's operation put an end to the myths created by Zionists, such as the invincibility of Israel.

Interviewer: From symbolic and ideological perspectives, Hamas secured a victory; however, in material terms...such as prisoner exchanges or improving the situation, Hamas has not yet succeeded. On the other hand, Israel's credibility has been seriously questioned, and many countries are critically highlighting Israel's blatant human rights violations.

Dehghani: Furthermore, Israel has suffered a major defeat in global public opinion. This is significant because public opinion has been a source of legitimacy for the actions of this regime for the past seventy years. However, the global framework has been formed, and the outrage of public opinion around the world has not been able to prevent Israeli aggression.

Interviewer: The Al-Aqsa Flood operation and Israel's wars in Gaza and Lebanon have had both short- and long-term consequences for the region. What do you consider the most important consequences?

Dehghani: One of the most important consequences is that a deep sense of hopelessness has emerged among the countries of the region and the peoples of the world regarding those norms and values established by the victorious powers of World War II, which were supposed to prevent war and maintain international peace and security. These norms have been called into question, and the global community have realized that it cannot prevent a war when one of the veto-wielding powers is behind it, either directly or through support.

Another consequence is that although some resistance leaders in Palestine and Lebanon have been assassinated, and the resistance organizations and their military structures have suffered some setbacks, the theory of resistance has not been undermined and remains strong. Resistance is a result of occupation, and occupation guarantees the survival of resistance. Therefore, as long as occupation and aggression persist, resistance will continue.

Meanwhile, we have witnessed a kind of solidarity among the elements or axes of resistance. Perhaps it can be said that, despite everything, it was the resistance groups, rather than governmental bodies of the regional countries, that were able to stand up to this aggression. In other words, governments have shown that they remain incapable of doing so—either due to the dependencies of their officials or because of their focus on infrastructure development, which leads them to be more cautious and conservative. For example, the governments in Syria, Iraq, or Lebanon could not achieve what the resistance groups were able to do.

Interviewer: Given the recent ceasefire, how do you see the prospects for peace in Lebanon?

Dehghani: It seems that Netanyahu took full advantage of the opportunity presented by the weakness of the U.S. government. The weakness of President Biden and the fragility of the power structures in the U.S. during this period led to a situation that not only was disastrous for the people of the region, but also created a dark chapter in the record of U.S. complicity with the aggressor. Now that Trump has emerged victorious, I have no doubt that a ceasefire will be established.

Interviewer: What steps should the resistance take to maintain or shift the situation in Lebanon in its favor?

Dehghani: I still believe that we must remain committed to the principles of resistance. The development of one aspect of resistance should not lead to the neglect of other aspects. Politically, culturally, socially, and economically, these aspects must evolve harmoniously with the military growth. If military growth surpasses other aspects, defeating the resistance becomes easier. In my view, Hezbollah had this kind of growth in its agenda and established numerous cultural, social, and economic organizations as part of this approach. As a country that supports resistance and has various tools at its disposal, we must pay more attention to some of these often-overlooked elements in this struggle.

Interviewer: Such as what elements?

Dehghani: For example, it is essential that we create a common language regarding the need to prevent Israeli aggression and preserve resistance. For example, in 1996, Syria was one of the supporters of the resistance, while U.S. and French foreign ministers used to hold meetings there. At that time, a committee was formed with representatives from the U.S., Syria, Lebanon, and Israel to oversee the ceasefire and monitor its implementation. But such an opportunity no longer exists. That's only one reason why Syria's influence has significantly diminished. We need such mediators. We had Russia as a mediator, but Russia is now caught in its own issues. Besides, Russia is engaged in the Ukraine war and has its own weaknesses regarding Israel, as part of the Israeli population is of Russian descent. Therefore, it cannot fully cooperate. Moreover, we do not share the same language with Russia on the issue of resistance. For instance, Lavrov compared Israel's actions to those of his own country against Ukraine. It seems that we need to find a form of understanding with the region on the issue of resistance. Right now, every country in the region is primarily concerned with avoiding harm to itself and is unwilling to take any practical steps to support the resistance.

Interviewer: How do you think Trump's return will affect U.S. policy toward Lebanon and Gaza?

Dehghani: The power of the U.S. president is very high. The president who is about to come is a strong individual, and both the presidency and Congress are controlled by Republicans, which makes them even stronger. However, Trump's unpredictability remains a key variable. Trump is still upset with Netanyahu for congratulating Biden too early in the last election.

Interviewer: What will be the consequences of this situation for the region?

Dehghani: Currently, Europe is at an impasse with us over a misunderstanding related to Ukraine. This situation did not exist during Trump's first term; on the contrary, they were more aligned with us back then. Right now, we are much further behind. Similarly, regarding the nuclear issue, we had a moment when there was an agreement, and the U.S. was part of it. Even Trump was on board with this agreement for about a year. The same goes for actions related to Palestine. For instance, the law passed in Congress in 1995, which required the U.S. government to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, was delayed every six months by U.S. presidents, who claimed it was not in the interest of the U.S. and would seek a waiver from Congress. Trump also sought a waiver twice. What I want to say is that the Trump who left the nuclear deal, the Trump who recognized Jerusalem as the Israeli capital, the Trump who implemented the "Deal of the Century," and the Trump who recognized the Golan Heights as Israeli territory, was a far cry from the Trump of the beginning of his first term. If Trump returns, he may even declare the West Bank as part of Israel.

Interviewer: My understanding is that, rather than waiting to see what Trump's America will do, we should take the necessary steps on our side.

Dehghani: I would say we should make efforts. We might not achieve a complete result, but what action ever guarantees a result? Let me mention something. There is a cliché that after we helped America in Afghanistan, we became the axis of evil; or after we agreed to the nuclear deal, they withdrew from it. We only analyze what has happened. We do not analyze what could have happened had we not taken action. After the 9/11 attacks, many believed that the U.S. would target Iran before Afghanistan and Iraq. We do not analyze how the

potential danger posed by the Taliban was eliminated. We do not analyze how the threat of Saddam and the Ba'ath Party was addressed. We do not analyze how the people of Iraq, both Shia and Sunni, were freed from a dictator. The Americans believed that their actions would benefit the U.S., but in the end, we benefitted. The Arab world always says that Iran gained from this, though this was not part of a mutual agreement. What I mean to say is that if you take action, you must be aware that these parties will betray agreements. But we are firm in our belief that they are traitors. Any agreement they make, if their interests are at stake, they will break it; but until they break it, you will have gained from it.

Interviewer: My final question is about Iran. What kind of assessment can be made regarding Iran's actions after the operation Al-Aqsa Flood?

Dehghani: Regarding Iran, I believe we should avoid falling into rhetorical isolation. We should not allow ourselves to be isolated in discourse—whether internally, regionally, or globally. If we have a just cause, we must present it in a way that generates support, because the art of politics and diplomacy is to present your case in a manner that gains the support of the people, the region, and the world. We are in a position, in terms of social, economic, and even military capital, where we need to pay attention to these elements. The important thing is that the new government, with its slogan of unity, should be able to engage in active diplomacy both domestically, regionally, and internationally to foster cooperation. The focus of diplomacy is not simply to justify military actions if they occur; diplomacy is broader—it can sometimes replace military action.