



Considerable effort by Iran to emphasize the continued support for the “resistance front” following the election of President Pezeshkian

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Highlights

► Following the election of Masoud Pezeshkian as president of Iran on July 5, 2024, there has been a marked effort by Iran to emphasize its commitment to continuing support for the “resistance front” it leads. This is apparently due to concerns among elements of the pro-Iranian axis in the region about the consequences of the election of the reformist-leaning president, especially in view of the ongoing Iranian-led regional campaign and the fear of a possible deterioration into an all-out confrontation between Israel and Hezbollah.



Iranian President-elect Masoud Pezeshkian (Tasnim, July 6, 2024)

► There have been several expressions of the effort to demonstrate continuity in the policy of support for the pro-Iranian axis in the region: messages of support from the president-elect to senior members of the “resistance front,” in which he expressed Iran’s commitment to its proxies and the campaign against Israel; Qods Force commander Esmail Qaani’s visit to the region in recent days and his meetings with senior members of the “resistance front”; Iranian officials’ comments about continuity of regional policy based on the perception that strengthening the “resistance” is one of the permanent pillars of the Islamic Republic; commentaries in the conservative Iranian media presenting Pezeshkian’s messages of support for the leaders of the pro-Iranian axis as an expression of his commitment to them.

►The overall extensive effort to emphasize Iran’s continued support for the “axis of resistance” is intended to allay possible concerns among its elements about the potential change in Iran’s policy of support under the new government headed by the president-elect. This is especially true given the current conditions of the ongoing regional campaign, in which the continuation of Iranian support is of particular importance. It cannot be ruled out that elements of the pro-Iranian axis in the region, as well as the IRGC, harbor suspicions about the president-elect due to his affiliation and ties with senior members of the reformist faction in Iran and his statements during the presidential election campaign, which expressed a pragmatic approach to foreign policy, such as emphasizing the need to resume nuclear negotiations with the West.

►Emphasizing Iran’s commitment to the “resistance front,” especially by the IRGC, may also serve as a means of compelling the new and inexperienced president to strictly adhere to a specific regional foreign policy as he takes office, to establish facts on the ground, to clarify to him the priority and centrality of the IRGC in leading this policy, and perhaps even to deter him from future actions that could lead to a possible clash between his government and the IRGC, especially the Qods Force.



The president-elect meets with IRGC commanders (Tasnim, July 14, 2024)

►For his part, Pezeshkian may view the messages of support for the “resistance front” not only as an expression of his genuine positions, but also as a means to soften the reservations and concerns about him among the various power centers in Iran controlled by the conservatives, including the Supreme Leader’s office, the Revolutionary Guards, and the Majles. In addition, these messages may indicate his willingness to cooperate with these centers of power, maintaining a certain degree of continuity with the policy of the previous government led by

Ebrahim Raisi.¹ This approach is likely to assist him in advancing his main goals, first and foremost improving the economic situation. **In any case, it is doubtful whether Pezeshkian wants or can deviate from the official line on regional issues, especially regarding Israel, and in the ITIC’s assessment, no real change is expected in Iran’s regional policy, including vis-à-vis its proxies.**

Iranian president and foreign policy in the Islamic Republic

- ▶The structure of the Iranian regime and the reciprocal relations between the president and the other significant centers of power, headed by the Supreme Leader and the Revolutionary Guards, limit from the outset the president’s ability to implement a policy that deviates from the basic principles of the regime and to promote significant changes in the policy of the Islamic Republic, especially in foreign policy, where decisions are traditionally considered the authority of the Supreme Leader.
- ▶The Supreme Leader serves as the head of state and concentrates most administrative powers in his hands. Nonetheless, the president is at the center of Iran’s decision-making processes. As head of the executive branch, according to Iran’s constitution, the president holds the second most important position in the regime’s hierarchy. He heads the government, shapes its policy, is responsible for its implementation, and oversees a series of senior executive bodies, the highest of which is the Supreme National Security Council.
- ▶Article 176 of the Iranian constitution of 1989 sets forth the powers of the Supreme National Security Council. These include determining defense and national security policy within the framework of the overall policy set by the Supreme Leader, coordinating activities in areas related to policy, intelligence, society, culture, and economy in relation to overall security policy, and employing state resources to deal with internal and external threats. In addition to the president, the Council officially includes the ministers of foreign affairs, interior, and intelligence, commanders of the Revolutionary Guards and the regular army, heads of the legislative and judicial branches, and two personal representatives on behalf of the Supreme Leader. The Council may also invite additional participants to its deliberations in accordance with the issues being discussed. Council decisions require the approval of the Supreme Leader. Since the ministers of intelligence, interior, and foreign affairs are usually appointed

¹ For further information, see the ITIC’s study from June 9, 2024, [“Iran stresses the continued cohesion of the “resistance front” with its support following the deaths of the senior Iranian officials”](#)

by the president with the approval of the Supreme Leader, while the head of the judiciary and the heads of the military-security establishment are appointed directly by the Supreme Leader, only the president and the Majles speaker serve as Council members who are ostensibly independent of Khamenei, who also appoints the Council secretary and his two representatives. This gives him almost complete control of the Council.

►Moreover, the IRGC, especially the Qods Force, has a clear priority in conducting Iran’s regional foreign policy, especially in operating its network of proxies. This priority was reflected in an interview given by Mohammad Javad Zarif, former foreign minister in President Hassan Rouhani’s government, as part of a project to document the activities of the outgoing administration. In the interview, Zarif claimed that members of the Revolutionary Guards were the ones pulling the strings. According to him, the Islamic Republic prioritizes the battlefield over diplomacy, and he said he had to sacrifice diplomacy for the sake of the battlefield, that is, for the military activity of the Revolutionary Guards, instead of the battlefield serving diplomacy (The New York Times, April 25, 2021).



Former Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and former Qods Force commander Qassem Soleimani (Khabar Online, July 4, 2018)

Messages from the president-elect to senior members of the “resistance front”

►Since he was elected president, Pezeshkian has conveyed messages to senior members of the “resistance front,” headed by Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah; head of Hamas’ political bureau, Ismail Haniyeh; and Syrian President Bashar Assad. These messages are intended to emphasize Iran’s continued support for its regional proxies, especially in view of the ongoing regional campaign against Israel.

►On July 8, 2024, Pezeshkian sent a message to Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah, thanking him for the congratulations on his election. In a greeting sent by Nasrallah on July 6, 2024, he said Hezbollah and all the “resistance” movements in the region regarded Iran as a strong, permanent, and eternal supporter, and that Hezbollah would continue to march alongside the Iranian government toward “securing the final victory, of which powerful Iran is the axis” (Mehr, July 6, 2024). In his response to Nasrallah, Pezeshkian stressed that Iran would continue to support the “resistance” in the region against the “illegitimate Zionist regime” and that this support was a pillar of its fundamental policy. He said he was confident that the “resistance” in the region would not allow Israel to continue its “warlike and criminal” policy against the Palestinian people and the other peoples of the region (ISNA, July 8, 2024).



“Strategic depth:” Tasnim News Agency emphasizes the message of support from the president-elect to Hezbollah secretary-general (Tasnim, July 9, 2024)

►On July 9, 2024, President-elect Pezeshkian spoke with Syrian President Bashar Assad and stressed that Iran would continue to support Syria and the “resistance” and that it was striving to strengthen bilateral ties and implement the agreements signed between the two countries (Fars, July 9, 2024).

►On July 10, 2024, the president-elect sent a letter to the head of Hamas’ political bureau, Ismail Haniyeh, in response to a congratulatory letter Haniyeh sent to Pezeshkian following his election victory. In the letter, Haniyeh said the Palestinian people and the “resistance” were now in the midst of a historic war. He expressed confidence in Iran’s willingness to continue its approach to the unity of the Islamic nation and support for the Palestinians (Hamas Telegram channel, July 8, 2024). In his letter of reply, Pezeshkian wrote that the Islamic Republic was committed to the principle of support for the Palestinian people and its struggle against the “occupation and apartheid of the Zionist regime” and regarded that as its

human and Islamic duty. He added that Iran would continue to fully support the Palestinian people until all their rights were realized and Jerusalem was liberated and that he was certain that the fighters of the Palestinian resistance would win the current war (ISNA, July 10, 2024).



Pezeshkian and Haniyeh (Fars, July 10, 2024)

Qods Force commander's visit to the region

►On July 11, 2024, Iranian media reported that Esmail Qaani, commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, met with commanders and senior members of the "resistance front" during a visit to "resistance front areas" (apparently referring to Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon). During his visit, Qaani stressed that Iran would continue to support the "resistance" and that this support, especially for "Palestine" and the residents of the Gaza Strip, was a strategic, permanent policy agreed upon by all parts of the Iranian regime and people (ISNA, July 11, 2024). Although the exact date of the visit was not disclosed, it can be assumed that it took place in recent days as part of an effort to allay concerns about the implications of Pezeshkian's election on Iran's regional policy. In addition, the visit may indicate an attempt by the Revolutionary Guards to establish facts on the ground and send a clear message, both to the president-elect and to senior members of the "resistance front," that the organization intends to continue leading the regional campaign at this time.

►Qaani's visit to the region comes amid growing criticism of his unusual involvement during Iran's presidential election campaign. This is contrary to the Iranian constitution, which prohibits the involvement of the armed forces, including the Revolutionary Guards, in political affairs. Ahead of the first round of the elections on June 28, 2024, there have been reports in Iran that Qaani blatantly interfered in the elections when he tried to persuade the hardline candidate, Saeed Jalili, to withdraw from the race to prevent further divisions in the conservative camp and reach an understanding between the two main conservative

contenders. That would have significantly improved the chances of Majles speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf (considered close to the Revolutionary Guards) to win in the first round. According to these reports, Qaani participated in a meeting attended by Qalibaf and Jalili, held in the city of Mashhad shortly before the elections, but failed in his efforts to persuade Jalili to step down (khabarfoori.com, June 26, 2024).



Esmail Qaani with Majles speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf (khabarfoori.com, June 26, 2024)

►Qaani’s involvement in the elections may indicate suspicion on the part of the Revolutionary Guards towards Pezeshkian, especially in light of the tense relations that prevailed between the organization and the government of President Rouhani, whom Pezeshkian is largely perceived as succeeding. In the background of the disagreements between the IRGC and Rouhani, one can note the president’s efforts to reduce the IRGC’s influence in politics and economy, as well as their reservations about the nuclear agreement between Iran and the West in the summer of 2015.

Iranian officials’ comments on the continuity of regional policy under Pezeshkian

►Since Pezeshkian’s victory, several Iranian administration officials have stressed that no change is expected in Iran’s regional policy, especially its support for the “resistance.” On July 5, 2024, Iranian Ambassador to Lebanon Mojtaba Amani said Iran would continue to support the “resistance” and Palestine under any circumstances, as it had done for the past 45 years. After voting in the Iranian presidential elections at the Iranian embassy in Beirut, Amani stressed that support for the “resistance” and “Palestine” was a basic principle of Iranian policy, enshrined in the constitution of the Islamic Republic, and that it was not influenced by anything (Mehr, July 5, 2024).



Iranian ambassador to Beirut (Mehr, July 5, 2024)

► Mohammad Ali Sobhani, Iran’s former ambassador to Lebanon and Jordan, said that strengthening the “axis of resistance” was a permanent position of the Islamic Republic, although the approach of the Pezeshkian government might be different compared to the hardline conservatives. Sobhani, who also served as director-general for Middle East Affairs at the Iranian Foreign Ministry, dismissed claims by some of Pezeshkian’s opponents that his election would harm relations between Iran and the “resistance axis.” To support his claim, Sobhani said that during the farewell meeting between Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah and former reformist President Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), Nasrallah noted that Khatami’s government’s support for Hezbollah far exceeded expectations. The former ambassador added that support for the “resistance” would be part of the president-elect’s foreign policy, but that support would be expressed not only in terms of military capabilities but also in the political sphere in the region and beyond, in a way that would enable the “resistance” groups to improve their political standing and strengthen their ties with Arab countries at Israel’s expense. According to him, the Pezeshkian government could adopt a prudent foreign policy that could isolate Israel and prevent it from driving a wedge between Iran and its Arab neighbors. In addition, he anticipated that the new government could introduce political initiatives aimed at achieving a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip (Jamaran, July 11, 2024).



Mohammad Ali Sobhani (Jamaran, July 11, 2024)

Commentaries by conservative Iranian outlets

► This past week, Iranian media affiliated with the conservative camp emphasized the president-elect's messages of support for the heads of the "resistance front" and stressed Iran's continued support for the pro-Iranian axis in the region. The conservative newspaper Vatan Emrooz claimed that the letter of support Pezeshkian sent to Hezbollah's secretary-general showed that Iran's support for the "Islamic resistance" was given a special place in his foreign policy. According to the daily, Pezeshkian is aware of the need to strengthen the "resistance" in the region so that it can stand against the hostility of the "Zionist regime" and the plans of the United States in West Asia. The president-elect understands the critical importance of establishing strong connection with the "resistance," especially in Lebanon. The conservative daily stated that Nasrallah's letter to the president-elect demonstrated that the policy of the "resistance" towards Iran transcended specific governments and that the "resistance" in Lebanon was obligated to cooperate with any government in Tehran. According to the newspaper, the new government and its foreign policy team should adopt a realistic policy based on friendship and cooperation with the "resistance groups," especially in Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq, so that regional and diplomatic policies can be promoted in line with the regional balance. The newspaper concluded that the exchange of letters between Nasrallah and Pezeshkian made it clear to the United States and Israel that Iran's regional policy, especially regarding the "axis of resistance," would not change. Similar to President Raisi and his foreign minister, Amir-Hossein Abdollahian, maintaining good relations with Hezbollah and the other "resistance groups," the new government will continue to nurture this relationship. Furthermore, it suggested that Pezeshkian might visit Lebanon in the near future to meet with Nasrallah (Vatan Emrooz, July 9, 2024).

►The government news agency IRNA published an interview with international affairs commentator Mir Qassem Momeni, who claimed that Pezeshkian’s letter to Nasrallah was intended to send a clear message from Iran to all the “resistance groups” in the region. The commentator noted that support for these groups – both in “Palestine” and in other countries in the region – was one of the basic principles of Iranian foreign policy. Therefore, not only will there be no change in this matter, but the new government may act to strengthen the “axis of resistance” in the region. According to Momeni, the president-elect’s letter thwarted the intentions of Iran’s opponents to weaken the spirit of the “resistance groups.” He noted that Pezeshkian, who fought in the Iran-Iraq War, was well aware of the great importance of expanding and strengthening the “resistance groups” in the region to secure Iran’s interests and national security. He added that the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip required the new government to put support for the Palestinian “resistance” on its agenda (IRNA, July 8, 2024).



Pezeshkian and Nasrallah (IRNA, July 8, 2024)

►The government newspaper Iran claimed that the supportive messages conveyed by the president-elect to the heads of the “resistance axis” proved that support for the “resistance” was a pillar of Iranian foreign policy. These messages inject new vitality into the veins of the “axis of resistance” and increase the strength of the “resistance groups” in circumstances in which Israel seeks to initiate a new “adventure” in Lebanon. They also demonstrate to the West that, contrary to the opinion of some Western decision-makers, the new government will continue to support the “axis of resistance” even more vigorously. Moreover, through his message, Pezeshkian sought to dispel hopes of Western countries of linking regional issues to the negotiations between Iran and the West on the nuclear issue and the lifting of sanctions. The daily noted the importance of the president’s positions at a time when Iran enjoyed a special position in the region and the Muslim world, especially following the al-Aqsa Flood

and the Iranian attack on Israel on April 13, 2024. Iran is considered the only true supporter of the Palestinian people, which helps strengthen its soft power among the Muslim nations and positively affects its relations with countries in the region and with Muslim countries around the world (Iran, July 11, 2024).



The “resistance front” (IRNA, July 8, 2024)

►The conservative daily Jam-e Jam praised Pezeshkian’s messages of support for the leaders of the “resistance front.” A commentary article entitled “Standing in the Battlefield” claimed that the main question that preoccupied the foreign media, the peoples of the region, and the countries for which Iran was relevant after the death of President Raisi and the election of a president with reformist tendencies was whether there would be changes in Iranian foreign policy, especially the issue of the “resistance.” Pezeshkian’s positions before and after the elections and his messages of support for the leaders of the “resistance” removed the doubts on this matter and proved his adherence to Iran’s official and absolute strategy of supporting the “axis of resistance.” The article asserted that it was self-evident that global developments were moving in the direction of establishing a new world order. Therefore, it is clear that the elected president of a nation, which for at least half a century has seen itself as the standard-bearer of the battlefield despite all the pressures and hostility, will continue the same approach to achieve final victory and no change can be expected from him (Jam-e Jam, July 13, 2024).



“Standing in the Battlefield” (Jam-e Jam, July 13, 2024)