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EU-Iran Relations in Trump Era

By Seyed Hossein Mousavian

Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran's relations with the major European states has been fragile and subject to the whims of sanctions regimes. The Iran nuclear deal was a watershed; removing sanctions and opening the door to broader economic cooperation and more sustainable, comprehensive ties. With Donald Trump in the White House, however, the issue is whether a durable, far-reaching Iran-EU relationship can emerge.

Most likely Trump will not "tear up" the nuclear deal. It is of course possible that Congress will pass new sanctions under terrorism or human rights pretexts and that Trump may sign some of these into law. The reality is, however, that Trump is the most business-oriented U.S. president in modern history and is likely to favor securing contracts for American firms in Iran. Nonetheless, the circumstances of Trump's election require a new road map for Iran and the EU that would safekeep Obama's engagement policy, ensure an EU-Iran relationship that is sustainable, and prevent escalation in U.S.-Iran relations.

Many in Washington wish to sabotage increased global trade with Iran and many insist on maintaining the deal. Presently, U.S. companies that obtain licenses from the Treasury Department can work with Iran in the aerospace, medicinal, food, and environmental sectors. Europeans can spur them through their contacts with U.S. companies, to consider greater economic cooperation with Iran.

The new situation in the Middle East requires EU and Iran to cooperate on the traditional disputes, ie, terrorism, weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and human rights. On the issue of terrorism, it is now clear that the real terrorist threat facing the world comes from Wahhabi-Salafist groups like ISIS, Al Qaeda, Jabhat Al Nusra, and Boko Haram. The support for these groups has in large part come from U.S. allies in the Persian Gulf. Iran, for its part, is on the frontlines of combatting these organizations. The time has come for the EU and Iran to cooperate in the fight against terrorism through an institutionalized joint committee. Such cooperation would take an excuse away from American hardliners, improve global security, and lower differences on terrorism between Iran and the West.

The proliferation of WMDs is another historic source of tension between Iran and the West. With the JCPOA, world powers received all necessary guarantees to verifiably certify that Iran would not develop nuclear weapons. The JCPOA has created a template that Iran and the EU can work to regionalize to ensure a Middle East free of nuclear weapons and through the same model, all WMDs.

The divergence between the EU and Iran on human rights will continue. There is no doubt, however, that Iran's human rights record is leagues ahead of American and

European allies in the Middle East. Nonetheless, constructive dialogue on human rights that bridges Islamic and Christian philosophies will help reduce tensions.

With the resolution of the Iranian nuclear crisis, the focus of the global powers has turned to new crises raging in the region, which threaten global peace and security. This has created new rifts between Iran and the West. The aggressions of Saddam Hussein against Iran and Kuwait, of America against Afghanistan and Iraq, of Saudi Arabia against Yemen, and of NATO and several Arab countries against Libya, are a main cause of the instability gripping the Middle East today and the spread of terrorism. Unfortunately, European states have played a role in all these transgressions. Tens of millions have been either displaced, made immigrants, killed, or injured as a result of these conflicts. It is a situation that threatens the security of Europe and Iran and necessitates their cooperation.

Iran and the EU can form a “Committee on Managing Middle Eastern Crises” that is based on five foundational principles: majority will; power-sharing; free elections; minority rights; reconstruction of war-ridden areas. Such a framework will allow Europe and Iran to deepen their ties and allow the EU to facilitate continued U.S. engagement with Iran during the Trump presidency.

Iran needs hundreds of billions in economic projects and investments in the next five years. Iran is now the center of a U.S.-EU economic rivalry, but this can be ended if Europe and Iran successfully finalize the numerous economic and investment agreements they have reached since the JCPOA.

Trump’s cabinet is poised to be the most anti-Iran, pro-regime change since the Iranian revolution. It is vital for the EU to take actions that emphasize to the Trump administration the importance of not repeating past mistakes. The school of thought that Obama initiated that it is possible to work with Iran can be outshined by Trump. In his first post-election rally in Cincinnati, Trump again indicated that his personal thinking was in the right direction, [stating](#): “We will pursue a new foreign policy that finally learns from the mistakes of the past. We will stop looking to topple regimes and overthrow governments.” The EU can help him bolster such a policy. END

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