

West Asia reacts to Trump's dalliance with Zionism

by M. K. Bhadrakumar,* India



M. K. Bhadrakumar
(Photo ma)

The election victory of Donald Trump in the November 5 election is being perceived in the West Asian region with growing anxiety as presaging the US aligning one hundred percent with the Zionist project for Greater Israel.

Although *Donald Trump* has kept out vociferous neocons from his government positions, the same cannot be said for pro-Zionist figures. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claims *he has spoken three times with Trump already*¹ since the election and they “see eye-to-eye regarding the Iranian threat and all of its components”.

The “components” implies that Netanyahu hopes to get a blank cheque from Trump to accelerate the ethnic cleansing in Gaza, for annexation of West Bank, violent reprisals against Palestinians and, most important, to carry the war right into Iranian territory.

Three events in as many days this week show the first signs of a backlash building up. On Monday [11 November], Iran’s Foreign ministry spokesman *Esmail Baqaei* gave Tehran’s first official reaction to Trump’s election victory. Baqaei took a nuanced line saying, “What matters to us in this region is the United States’ actual behaviour and policies regarding Iran and the broader West Asia.”

Notably, Baqaei expressed “cautious optimism that the new [Trump] administration might adopt a more peace-oriented approach, reduce regional hostilities, and uphold its commitments.” (“Tehran Times”) Baqaei also refuted the recent allegation by Washington that Iran was in-

involved in plots to assassinate Trump. He called the *Biden* Administration’s allegation as “nothing more than an attempt to sabotage relations” between Tehran and Washington by “laying traps to complicate the path for the next administration”.

Baqaei also held out an assurance to the incoming US administration that Tehran firmly adheres to a nuclear programme for peaceful purposes. He announced that *Rafael Grossi*, head of *International Atomic Energy Agency* (IAEA) was due to arrive in Tehran on Wednesday night [13 November].

Taken together, Baqaei’s remarks suggest that Iran hopes there’s still daylight possible between Trump and Netanyahu. The clincher here would have been the remark that Trump slipped into his *victory speech*² with great deliberation on 6 November that “I’m not going to start a war. I’m going to stop wars.”

Trump was on record during his election campaign that “I don’t want to do damage to Iran but they cannot have nuclear weapons.” Tehran’s consultations with Grossi responds to Trump’s concern. This is smart thinking. Iran’s non-provocative stance would mean there is no alibi for attacking Iran.

That said, however, the “known unknown” still remains – namely, Iran’s retaliation to the Israeli attack on 26 October. On 2 November, Supreme Leader *Ayatollah Ali Khamenei*, in a video released by Iranian state media, promised “a crushing response” to Israeli attack. Conceivably, the period till 20 January when Trump is sworn in, is going to be critical.

Meanwhile, this week witnessed that Iran and Saudi Arabia have given verve to their detente, which is now manifesting as Riyadh’s solidarity and open support for Iran in its growing confrontation with Israel.

Amidst the growing tensions in the region, the chief of staff of Saudi Arabia’s armed forces, *Fayyad al-Ruwaili*, visited Tehran on 10 November and met with his Iranian counterpart General *Mohammad Bagheri*. Iranian President *Masoud Pezeshkian* spoke on the phone³ with Saudi Crown Prince *Mohammed bin Salman* (MbS) in

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the context of a summit of the *Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) – Arab League* in Riyadh on 11-12 November. Iran has extended an invitation to MbS to visit Tehran!

Two hugely significant highlights of the Riyadh summit have been, first, the Saudi prince's inaugural address where he warned Israel against hitting Iran. This marked a historic turn by Riyadh toward Tehran-Israeli conflict, and away from US-supported normalisation with Jerusalem.

MbS *told the summit*⁴ that the international community should oblige Israel "to respect the sovereignty of the sisterly Islamic Republic of Iran and not to violate its lands".

Again, Saudi Arabia accused Israel for the first time of *committing "genocide" in Gaza*.⁵ MbS told the leaders who gathered in Riyadh, that the kingdom renewed "its condemnation and categorical rejection of the genocide committed by Israel against the brotherly Palestinian people ..."

Trump has been put on notice that he's meeting a radically different geopolitical landscape in West Asia compared to his first term as president. The Trump transition team is keeping its cards close, offering "NatSec Daily" a boilerplate statement that Trump will take "necessary action" to "lead our country" and "restore peace through strength." But warning bells are ringing.

The key pillars of Trump's "maximum pressure" strategy against Tehran – isolating Iran and ramping up economic pressure while maintaining a credible threat of military force as deterrent – have become wobbly.

On the other hand, the massive Iranian ballistic missile attack on Israel on October 1 and the colossal failure of the Israeli air strike on Iran twenty-six days later convey a loud message all across West Asia that Israel is no longer the dominant military power it used to be – and there is a new sheriff in town. Trump will have to navigate the fallout of both sides of this issue with diminished US diplomatic and geopolitical capital at his disposal.

Meanwhile, Tehran is also deepening its cooperation with Russia, which adds a giant new Ukraine-sized complexity to Trump's Iran policy. While in Eurasia, the US has allies, Trump is navigating in West Asia pretty much alone.

The US' stark isolation comes home dramatically by President *Recep Tayyip Erdogan's announcement on Wednesday*⁶ that Turkey, a NATO



Saudi Royal Palace. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (R) receiving Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (L) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 9 October 2024. (Picture EPA/BANDAR ALJALOUD/Keystone)

member country, has severed all ties with Israel. Erdogan disclosed this to journalists aboard his plane after visiting Saudi Arabia. A regional trend to ostracise Israel is visible now and it is destined to expand and deepen.

The summit in Riyadh witnessed the *African Union* joining hands with the Arab League and OIC to sign a tripartite agreement on Tuesday to establish a mechanism to support the Palestinian cause, which will be coordinated through the three organisations' secretariats as a game changer to strengthen their influence in international forums. Saudi Foreign Minister Prince *Faisal bin Farhan* noted that the three organisations will now onward speak with one voice internationally.

Even as the summit concluded in Riyadh, Crown Prince Salman had a call on Wednesday with Russian President *Vladimir Putin*. The *Kremlin readout stated*⁷ that the two leaders "re-affirmed their commitment to continue the consistent expansion" of Russian-Saudi ties and specifically "stressed the importance of continuing close coordination within OPEC Plus and stated the effectiveness and timeliness of the steps being taken in this format to ensure balance on the global energy market".

On the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Kremlin readout noted with satisfaction that "the principled approaches of Russia and Saudi Arabia with regard to the Middle East settlement are essentially identical."

MbS' initiative to re-invigorate his conversation with Putin can only be seen against the backdrop of the profound misgivings in Riyadh regarding the Trump-Netanyahu bromance and the specter of a possible regional war haunting

the region stemming out of Israel drawing encouragement from the seamless US support expected through the coming 4-year period for the Zionist cause.

Source: <https://www.indianpunchline.com/west-asia-reacts-to-trumps-dalliance-with-zionism/>, 14 November 2024

¹ <https://fortune.com/2024/11/10/netanyahu-donald-trump-calls-election-israel-iran-lebanon-gaza/>

² <https://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-victory-speech-full-transcript-1981234>

³ <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/saudi-armed-forces-general-chief-staff-hold-talks-iran-2024-11-10/>

⁴ https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/saudi-crown-prince-calls-on-international-community-to-stop-israel-from-attacking-iran/

⁵ https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/at-arab-summit-saudi-arabias-crown-prince-demands-immediate-gaza-lebanon-ceasefire/

⁶ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-severs-all-relations-israel-says-erdogan>

⁷ <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/75563>