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Some in Arab World Look Forward to Trump's Presidency



U.S. President-elect Donald Trump
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After sharing in the world's shock at the election of Donald Trump, some Arab commentators have started to put a positive spin on his impending ascendance to the most powerful position on the planet. They even seem to be willing to forgive or forget his anti-Muslim stance taken during the campaign, according to the *Jerusalem Post*, November 16.

"He did indeed make controversial and radical statements, but probably that was more of a case of showmanship than conviction. He may not be perfect, but who is?" wrote Hassan Abu Nimah in *The Jordan Times*.

In Damascus and Cairo, leaders are positioning themselves to benefit from Trump's victory. Syria could be a major winner from the US election if Trump follows through on campaign statements indicating he would focus on defeating ISIS while not viewing the Assad regime as an enemy.

President Bashar Assad, in an interview with Portugal's RTP state television Tuesday, raised the possibility that Syria and the US could ally against ISIS, though he said it was too early to say if Trump's campaign statements would translate into US policy.

"We cannot tell anything about what he's going to do, but if he is going to fight the terrorists, of course we are going to be an ally, natural ally along with the Russians, with the Iranians, with many other countries," he said, according to a transcript of the interview provided by Syria's official SANA news agency.

In an article whose main thesis was that Trump could improve what he considered failed policies of the Obama administration, Abu Nimah went so far as to recast Trump's xenophobic and divisive conduct during the campaign, writing instead that the billionaire "conducted a vigorous campaign, constantly propelled by his own dynamism, charisma and relentlessness."

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who was warmly praised by Trump after the two met on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in September, has pinned high hopes on the president-elect, after relations with the US were cool under the Obama administration.

Egypt faults the US for supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, and it bristled at American criticism of Sisi's human rights record. The Egyptian regime is also looking forward to Trump's pro-Sisi Middle East adviser, Walid Phares, taking on a policy-making role.

Like the regime, Phares has depicted the 2013 military coup that brought Sisi to power as a popular revolution against the Muslim Brotherhood.

“The chance has come, we have to take advantage of it,” wrote *Al-Ahram* editor Mohammed Abdul-Hadi Alam, about Trump’s victory and the defeat of Clinton, whom the regime accuses of empowering the Muslim Brotherhood after the 2011 Arab Spring revolts.

Alam wrote that already at the Trump-Sisi meeting, the Egyptian leadership “felt the sincerity in the speech of the candidate and his team. They talked of Egypt as a pillar in Arab-American relations and the main center of weight in the region. Therefore the two countries should increase understanding and profound cooperation on issues that neither Cairo nor Washington have the luxury to dispute...”

Alam maintained that the Obama administration had continued backing the Muslim Brotherhood even after Sisi took power. “Egypt has endured the burden of [American] hostility toward the revolution against the forces of darkness and terror.”

But now things are changing, he said. “Trump and his team in the last few months were very positive about building understandings to confront the terrorism toward which the current Democratic administration has had a strangely benign attitude.”

Under Trump, Egypt can restore its leadership position in the Arab world, Alam wrote. “The victory of Trump and the defeat of Clinton means a new position for Egypt, a strengthening of its role, and a return to its normal role as the center of weight in the Arab world. It is important to open a new page in bilateral relations on the basis of equality between politicians, diplomats and security experts under the leadership of Trump,” Alam concluded.

No less enthusiastic about Trump was Amer Taheri, a columnist for the London-based, Saudi-owned *Asharq al-Awsat*.

He accused the Obama administration of making “one way concessions” to enemies, the most glaring example of which was the Iranian nuclear deal. Taheri called the nuclear deal “the biggest swindle in recent history, which helped the mullahs out of a tight corner without forcing them to give up anything tangible in return.”

“At the very least, under Trump, the US is unlikely to stab its allies in the back in order to please its enemies,” Taheri wrote. “The return of the US as a leading power capable and willing to defend its legitimate interests could be good news for the world.”

Let’s hope and pray that the ascendancy of the Trump leadership would bring about a whole new alignment of Middle Eastern nations, with a new attitude toward Israel.

“The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, ‘Blessed be Egypt my people, Syria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance’” (Isaiah 19:25).

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