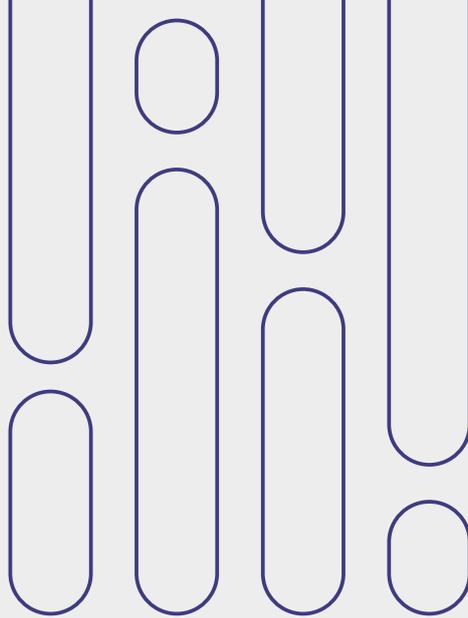


STUDY

The Future of Iran's Nuclear Program under Trump's Coercive Diplomacy

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The United States and Iran wrapped up a second round of indirect nuclear talks in Rome on April 19, 2025, with a sense of cautious optimism. The discussions, mediated by Oman, aim to pave the way for a comprehensive agreement that ensures Iran remains free of nuclear weapons, while lifting sanctions and safeguarding its right to pursue peaceful nuclear energy. According to the Omani foreign minister, the upcoming phase will focus on crafting a fair, durable, and binding deal. Both sides are expected to move into technical-level negotiations in an effort to ease ongoing tensions over Iran's nuclear activities.

Iran's nuclear file took a more complicated turn following Donald Trump's return to the White House on January 20, 2025. His administration brought back a hardline stance toward Tehran, reinforced by close ties with Israel, a more aggressive regional outlook, and a renewed policy of sweeping sanctions. These moves added significant pressure on the Iranian leadership. During his first term, Trump had withdrawn from the 2015 nuclear deal in 2018, labeling it "the worst agreement the United States had ever signed," and launched a campaign of maximum pressure aimed at forcing Iran into a new accord. However, that strategy did not yield a replacement deal before his term ended. His successor, President Joe Biden, also failed to revive the agreement or negotiate a new one through diplomatic means. Now, with Trump back in office, he appears determined to pick up where he left off. One of his first actions in his second term was to reinstate the maximum pressure pol-

icy. He reportedly sent a letter to Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, demanding a new agreement within two months, or face a potential military escalation described as unprecedented. Confronted with mounting internal pressures and strategic advice, Khamenei—despite previously rejecting talks under threat—chose to respond positively to the new diplomatic overture.

Compounding Iran's difficulties, the recent round of nuclear talks took place amid a period of mounting internal and external pressure on Tehran. The country had just experienced its first direct, large-scale military confrontation with Israel since October 7, 2024—a confrontation that ended in a heavy defeat for Iran. The repercussions extended beyond military losses, significantly weakening the influence of Iran's regional allies, undermining its sovereignty, threatening national security, and targeting key strategic assets. The severity of the situation was underscored by Iran's muted response to Israeli strikes on its territory in October 2024, signaling a weakened position. At the same time, the country continues to grapple with a deepening economic crisis and widespread domestic challenges fueled by harsh international sanctions.

In light of the current circumstances, several critical questions arise about the future of Iran's nuclear program. Will it be dismantled? Will the ongoing nuclear negotiations collapse? Is military action against Iran a possibility, or will both sides agree to a new deal? This paper aims to explore potential scenarios for the Iranian nuclear program, taking into account

various factors influencing the ongoing talks.

One significant factor is the Trump administration's firm stance, alongside the powerful leverage the United States holds, which enables Washington to exert considerable influence over Iran's decisions at this juncture. On the other hand, Iran faces internal pressures that require it to respond strategically in order to avoid severe consequences that could threaten the regime's survival. This must be balanced with Iran's determination to protect its nuclear program, a key element of its national security and regional influence.

Israel's stance remains a crucial element, given its close ties with the Trump administration and the unwavering support it receives from the U.S. The position of the Gulf states has also evolved since 2015, when the nuclear deal was initially signed, now reflecting different regional dynamics. Additionally, the broader international and regional context, shaped by various players with their own interests, continues to impact the trajectory of the negotiations, with both sides navigating a landscape of external pressure, allies, and adversaries.

Scenario one: The Iranian nuclear program dismantled

This scenario presents the possibility that Iran could agree to dismantle its nuclear program, either through diplomatic negotiations or under maximum pressure, potentially escalating to military intervention. In this case, Iran would forfeit its nuclear capabilities, with the United States taking the lead in

overseeing the process under international supervision, similar to the approach taken with Libya. In 2003, Libya's late leader Muammar Gaddafi completely dismantled the country's nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of sanctions. Such an outcome would effectively eliminate the threat of Iran completing its nuclear project, thereby preventing any disruption in the regional balance of power or the acquisition of an unconventional deterrent against the United States and Israel.

Although this specific scenario has not been explicitly proposed before, it remains one of the potential outcomes for Iran's nuclear program, grounded in the following key factors:

1- Inclinations of some Trump administration officials

Some members of the Trump administration and Congress are advocating for the total dismantling of Iran's nuclear program. National Security Advisor Mike Waltz, for instance, has called for the complete "dismantlement" of Iran's nuclear capabilities. The Republican majority in Congress, which is largely aligned with the most hardline factions on Iran, supports Trump's push to eliminate Iran's nuclear program⁽¹⁾. While Trump is surrounded by a significant number of anti-Iran hawks, these figures may use any setbacks in the negotiations as an opportunity to urge the president toward military action aimed at forcibly dismantling Iran's nuclear infrastructure. Given Trump's unpredictable behavior and his frequent threats toward Iran, his statements and actions on the matter should not be overlooked.

2- Israel insisting on dismantling the Iranian nuclear program

Israel is strongly in favor of dismantling Iran's nuclear program and is opposed to any agreement, even one that would impose stricter conditions. It is actively pressuring Washington to adopt this approach in the negotiations with Tehran. During his final visit to the White House before the start of the Muscat talks between the U.S. and Iran, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that he and President Trump "agree that Iran should not possess nuclear weapons." While this goal could potentially be achieved through a deal, Netanyahu emphasized that it would only be acceptable if the terms mirrored the Libyan model—where nuclear sites were entered, facilities bombed, and all nuclear equipment dismantled, under American supervision. After meeting with Trump, Netanyahu reiterated that he would accept nothing less than the complete elimination of Iran's nuclear capabilities and would only agree to a process similar to what occurred in Libya⁽²⁾. Netanyahu's rejection of the Gaza truce agreement, coupled with Trump's support for his stance, could pave the way for a similar approach in the current nuclear negotiations with Iran. This alignment might lead both sides to adopt a strategy that intentionally sets up the talks to fail, thereby opening the door to a potential military strike.

3-Preparedness for military action

The United States and Israel have both expressed a willingness to take decisive military action to eliminate Iran's nuclear pro-

gram, a move that could have far-reaching consequences, potentially threatening the survival of the Iranian regime. This is reflected in the significant military buildup by the U.S. in the Middle East, highlighted by the delivery of bunker-busting bombs to Israel. In addition, the U.S. and Israel are conducting joint air exercises, which can be seen as preparation for a possible strike if Iran refuses to engage in negotiations. Furthermore, the U.S. has deployed B-2 strategic bombers to the remote island of Diego Garcia in the southern Indian Ocean. These bombers are capable of launching bombs believed to be essential for destroying Iran's underground nuclear facilities. Recently, these bombers were also used in operations targeting the Houthis, Iran's allies in Yemen, signaling a direct threat to Iran.⁽³⁾

4-The regime survival as a priority

Although a complete ban on nuclear enrichment, even for peaceful purposes, is a fundamental red line for Tehran, the pressure from Washington and Israel might force Iran into a difficult decision: the survival of the regime or the continuation of its nuclear program. In such a scenario, the regime would likely prioritize preserving the Islamic Republic model, even if it means dismantling its nuclear program, as this is seen as a vital interest. The ruling elite and the Revolutionary Guards, focused on defending their power and interests, would likely accept such a proposal, especially given the significant imbalance of power on the ground and the new American approach under Trump, which emphasizes force over diplomacy

and disregards the norms that previously allowed Iran to manage its nuclear crisis with the international community. Additionally, the United States and Israel hold substantial leverage over Iran to compel it to accept such a choice. Trump's maximum-impact sanctions are beginning to take their toll, with the national currency collapsing at an unprecedented rate, further exacerbating the already dire economic situation in the country.

The scenario of dismantling Iran's nuclear program seems unlikely for several reasons. First, it represents a red line for Tehran that is unlikely to be crossed. Second, ongoing negotiations suggest that this option is not a priority for Washington at the moment. Lastly, while the military option to strike nuclear facilities and dismantle the program remains a possibility, it appears to be a last resort for the United States, primarily used as leverage to extract maximum concessions at the negotiating table. A military strike would likely provoke an immediate response from Iran in the form of regional attacks, escalating tensions across the Middle East. Moreover, the success of such military action is not guaranteed and could even backfire, accelerating Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons. This could trigger a nuclear arms race in the region, as other major powers would seek to follow suit to avoid vulnerability, further destabilizing an already volatile region. Additionally, the military option lacks strong European backing, and countries like China, Russia, and several regional states, including some Gulf countries, oppose it.

Scenario two: Iran possessing nuclear weapons

If the current negotiations fail to yield a satisfactory settlement that controls Iran's nuclear program, and if Washington resorts to further sanctions threatening the regime's survival or if the U.S. or Israel opts for military action, targeting military facilities or even aiming to overthrow the regime, one possible scenario is that Iran could decide to cross the nuclear threshold. This would involve pursuing nuclear weapons as a deterrent against existential threats. Several factors could drive Iran toward this option, with the most significant being:

1- The calls at home and the possibility of revoking Khamenei's fatwa

Given the unprecedented pressures and existential threats Iran faces, particularly from the United States and Israel, it is possible that Iran may turn to nuclear weapons as a deterrent. These external pressures threaten Iran's security, regional influence, and national interests. The imbalance of power compels Iran to consider concessions that could endanger the regime's survival, weaken its legitimacy, and conflict with its ideological principles. This shift has been echoed by influential figures within the regime, such as the Supreme Leader's advisor, Ali Larijani, who suggested that while the Supreme Leader's fatwa currently prohibits nuclear weapons, Iran might be forced to pursue them if the United States makes a critical mistake⁽⁴⁾. Despite Iran's efforts to distance itself from nuclear ambitions with Khamenei's fatwa, its ideological flexibility makes it fea-

sible for the Supreme Leader to change his stance. This change is likely, especially as he increasingly sees nuclear weapons as essential to preserving the “Islamic Republic.”

2- The know-how and Iran getting closer to the nuclear threshold

Iran’s technical expertise in uranium enrichment positions it to rapidly advance toward acquiring a nuclear weapon, should it choose to do so. The latest report from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), dated February 2025, reveals that Iran’s stockpile of 60% enriched uranium had risen to 92.5 kilograms by February 2025, up from 182.2 kilograms in November 2024. This demonstrates a clear acceleration in Iran’s enrichment activities. A confidential IAEA report further noted that Iran had installed new centrifuges at the Fordow facility, a move that significantly boosts its ability to produce highly enriched uranium. As a result, Tehran is capable of producing the fissile material required for a nuclear warhead in a relatively short time frame.⁽⁵⁾

3- The disrupted balance of power and Iran’s need to achieve deterrence

Iran’s regional axis has been severely weakened by aggressive actions from Israel and the United States, leading to the collapse of its forward defense doctrine. Tehran is facing unprecedented security threats, with its sovereignty under attack and defensive capabilities targeted. Key allies such as Hezbollah, Syria, and Palestinian factions have been pushed out of Iran’s regional influence, while the Houthis are suffering significant

setbacks due to large-scale American attacks. These shifts have diminished Iran's deterrent power, prompting hardliners in Tehran to increasingly argue that acquiring nuclear weapons is necessary to ensure the nation's security and sovereignty.

4- The Libyan experience? No, circumstances are different

When Washington succeeded in dismantling Libya's nuclear program in 2003, it was primarily due to the US-led war on terror after the September 11, 2001 attacks. The US regarded Libya and its leader Muammar Gaddafi as a state sponsor of terrorism, particularly due to its involvement in attacks like the 1988 Lockerbie bombing. The Iraq invasion and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein also influenced regional perceptions. However, Iran is not in the same position as Libya. The Iranian regime has extensive experience in navigating its differences with the West, and Tehran retains substantial leverage, particularly in the form of its nuclear expertise, which was developed indigenously, unlike Libya's externally acquired program. Furthermore, unlike Libya in 2003, Iran is not under the same direct threat. Additionally, there is a notable difference between President George W. Bush and Donald Trump, as Trump has expressed more interest in reaching a diplomatic resolution with Iran on its nuclear program rather than resorting to military action.

However, this scenario remains distant in the foreseeable future, as Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapon carries significant

risks. Such a move would provoke a military buildup against Iran, particularly from the United States and Israel. Iran lacks the capacity to fight on multiple fronts, and the resulting pressures could destabilize the regime. The ruling elite's priority is the preservation of the regime, rather than the potential benefits of possessing a nuclear deterrent. A broad international consensus would likely form against Iran, which could include its allies, China and Russia, who are also opposed to the rise of a nuclear power in the Middle East. This would not only threaten regional security and stability but could also lead to military action, creating chaos in the region. Moreover, Iran would face substantial burdens—ranging from international isolation and sanctions to the possibility of external attacks. Producing a nuclear weapon would entail significant costs, both financially and in terms of the capabilities Iran currently lacks.

Scenario three: A temporary deal that leads to suspending nuclear enrichment

The interim agreement suggests that both sides have agreed to take reciprocal steps. It hinges on Iran reversing its nuclear escalation, which began in late 2019. This includes actions such as freezing or reducing its stockpile of low-enriched uranium, dismantling its advanced centrifuge cascades, allowing international inspectors back in, restoring surveillance cameras at nuclear facilities, and permitting access to suspected sites. In exchange, the United States would allow Iran access to

some of its frozen funds and issue waivers to a limited number of countries for purchasing Iranian oil. The snapback mechanism could potentially be extended during the agreement's implementation period. In essence, this sets up the possibility of a short-term agreement that ensures reliable verification in exchange for some sanctions relief⁽⁶⁾, resembling the 2013 Geneva agreement signed by the P5+1 and Iran. Under that deal, Iran's nuclear program was frozen in return for a reduction in economic sanctions, while both sides worked toward a more comprehensive, long-term agreement. This scenario is supported by the following factors:

1- The small window of time and the need for mutual confidence-building measures

Given the limited timeframe and Trump's desire to reach an agreement within two months, which is insufficient for a final deal, an interim agreement could be a practical option. Such an agreement would allow both sides to bridge existing gaps, explore solutions to ongoing challenges, demonstrate goodwill, and build trust. A step-by-step agreement would offer mutual benefits that could encourage further progress. On one side, there is a clear need for an interim agreement that would involve Iran freezing uranium enrichment, along with other commitments such as reintroducing oversight, disposing of accumulated uranium, and transferring new uranium abroad. On the other side, Washington is expected to take steps towards lifting some sanctions, which will require time and a possibly complex institutional process. Iran had previ-

ously signed a similar interim agreement with the P5+1 group, and negotiations in 2021 followed a similar framework. Iran tied the rollback of its nuclear measures to a corresponding rollback of sanctions imposed by Trump after 2018, which prolonged negotiations. This extended timeline meant that Biden's entire term passed without a final agreement, a scenario that Iran may aim to repeat in order to buy more time.⁽⁷⁾

2- Iran's negotiating expertise and the need to avoid reaching a swift but unjust agreement

Iran possesses significant skill and experience in negotiations, and it likely believes that an interim agreement serves its best interests, allowing it to avoid the quicker, more stringent agreement that Trump desires. An interim agreement would prevent Iran from making concessions under pressure that might limit its nuclear ambitions. Araghchi's participation, with his extensive experience in previous nuclear negotiations, gives him a clear advantage over Trump's envoy, Witkoff, in achieving this goal. Iran can also steer the course of negotiations by engaging other key parties, directly or indirectly, such as Russia, to which Araghchi flew to update on the progress of the talks and garner support for Iran's position. China and the European parties, who do not object to Iran's right to maintain its peaceful nuclear program, also play a role. Additionally, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), under the leadership of Rafael Grossi, visited the IAEA on April 16, 2025, further strengthening Iran's position at the negotiating table. Despite the complexities and detailed issues involved, these

developments may push the American side towards reaching temporary mutual understandings.

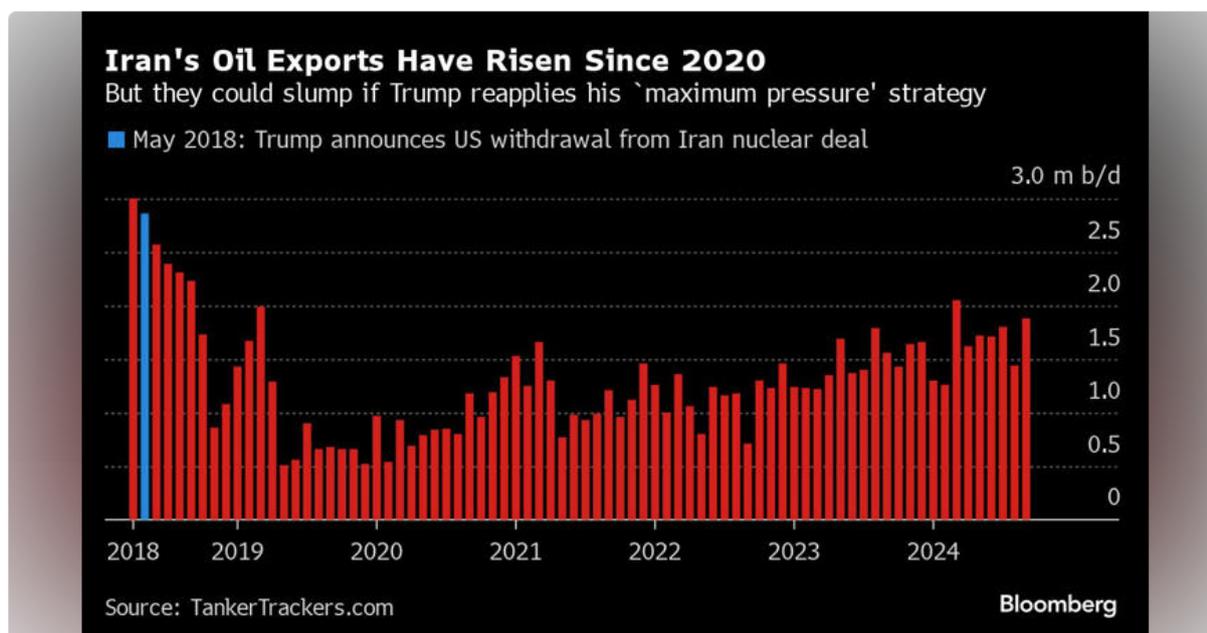
3- Enticing Trump by trade gains

Before the negotiations began, Iranian officials strategically appealed to Trump's instincts and his commercial mindset to influence both the negotiations and the American stance. This approach aimed to soften the U.S. position and make a final agreement more achievable. The strategy became apparent through the presentation of immense investment and trade opportunities with Iran. As President Pezeshkian noted, the Supreme Leader expressed approval of American investment in Iran, labeling Tehran as a "safe" economic partner. This overture seems to have been based on a deep understanding of Trump's personality and may have been a deliberate move by Tehran to mitigate Trump's frustrations.⁽⁸⁾ Additionally, this courtship was preceded by an article written by Foreign Minister Araghchi in the Washington Post, where he referred to the Iranian economy as a "trillion-dollar opportunity" for American companies.⁽⁹⁾

4- The minimal impact of the US sanctions and pressures

The interim agreement provides Iran with an opportunity to pause and reassess its position. Tehran stands to benefit from extending the negotiations, especially if the interim understandings and confidence-building measures lead to a reduction in tensions and pressures. The shifting international and regional dynamics may help Iran evade U.S. sanctions, pressures, and possibly military threats, particularly amidst the

ongoing trade war and the current conflicts between major powers. In this context, sanctions may lose their potency, especially if they are not tied to realistic objectives. This is evidenced by the fact that Iranian crude oil exports to independent refineries in China hit a record 1.91 million barrels per day in March 2025, marking a 19.5% increase from 1.6 million barrels per day in February 2025, despite the reimposition of maximum sanctions targeting normal trade cooperation between China and Iran, particularly in the energy sector.⁽¹⁰⁾



Iran's Oil Exports Have Risen Since 2020 | But they could slump if Trump reapplies his 'maximum pressure' strategy
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5- The effectiveness of diplomacy compared to military action

Iran possesses substantial quantities of enriched uranium and has installed a significant number of advanced centrifuges across various sites, making it difficult for the United States and Israel to completely neutralize its nuclear program through a military strike. Iran also has a cadre of skilled nu-

clear scientists who could quickly revive the program if needed. U.S. intelligence suggests that any damage inflicted on Iran's nuclear infrastructure through military strikes would be temporary—lasting perhaps only a few months. To halt the program through force, the U.S. would either need to conduct repeated military strikes or launch a regime change operation, both of which carry devastating and highly uncertain consequences. Furthermore, Iran's technological expertise in nuclear weapons has grown substantially in recent years, with its scientists now possessing more knowledge than they did a decade ago⁽¹¹⁾. While the negotiation process has already begun at the expert level, each side holds different cards and demands. Despite a mutual willingness to make concessions, the challenges to reaching an agreement remain, especially the likelihood that Iran will insist on releasing its frozen assets, removing the Revolutionary Guard from the sanctions list, and securing assurances that the U.S. will not back out of any future agreement. Additionally, the U.S. may push for the negotiations to expand to include regional behavior and Iran's missile program.

Scenario four: A more robust agreement that preserves Iran's peaceful nuclear program

This scenario suggests that both sides could sign a new comprehensive agreement where Iran would continue to pursue a peaceful nuclear program, but the agreement would exclude

sunset clauses and include more robust and reliable monitoring mechanisms, particularly to verify the enrichment program. Under this arrangement, Iran may be required to join the 123 Agreement, which governs peaceful nuclear cooperation between the United States and other nations within the framework of the U.S. Atomic Energy Act.⁽¹²⁾

The motivation for this scenario is driven by several factors:

1- Trump's promise and stern approach

Trump appears to be in a stronger position, exerting significant leverage over Iran. His ego may not be satisfied with an interim agreement similar to the one signed during the Obama administration or the discussions held during the Biden administration, particularly since he has emphasized that he seeks a “stronger” Iranian nuclear deal than the one he withdrew from in 2018⁽¹³⁾. Trump's desire to reach a deal quickly is also driven by his need to bolster his popularity and satisfy his ego, especially since his approach to peace through force in the Ukraine and Gaza conflicts has not yet yielded favorable results. An agreement with Iran could serve as a much-needed boost for this faltering strategy.

Trump is keenly aware of the possibility that Tehran may seek to buy time. He has expressed concerns that lengthy negotiations could lead to Iran exploiting the situation, remarking that a week of talks might offer Iran a chance to take advantage of the U.S. position. To counter this, Trump has kept the threat of military action on the table, warning that he may resort to launching military strikes against Iranian nuclear sites

if a satisfactory agreement is not reached. This approach reflects his broader strategy of maintaining pressure on Iran, using both diplomacy and military threats as tools to achieve his desired outcome.⁽¹⁴⁾

2- Confining the negotiations to the nuclear issue

Iran's condition and red line for returning to the negotiating table were clear: it would not engage in direct dialogue with Washington, nor would it negotiate the dismantling of its nuclear program or limit its enrichment capabilities. Additionally, Iran was unwilling to discuss other contentious issues, such as its missile program or regional behavior. The United States' understanding of these conditions appears to have played a crucial role in the success of the recent negotiations, which focused on crafting a new agreement to address the nuclear disputes.⁽¹⁵⁾

This shift was confirmed by Trump's Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff, who is leading the negotiations with Iran. On March 21, 2025, Witkoff stated that the United States is seeking a "verification program" to ensure that Iran's nuclear energy program is not diverted for military purposes. Analysts suggest that under Trump's presidency, Iran has a unique opportunity to reach a lasting agreement with the United States and resolve longstanding differences. Trump's influence over Israel and the Republican Party, both of which have historically opposed the Iran deal, could lend greater weight to any potential agreement. For Iran, this might present an opportunity to emerge from its complex crises, which have persisted for over four decades.⁽¹⁶⁾

3- Indications of Iran accepting an amended agreement

While Tehran has firmly rejected the dismantling of its peaceful nuclear program, the regime's current priorities—namely, preserving its survival, avoiding military intervention, minimizing strategic exposure, and seeking to lift sanctions to rehabilitate both its economy and regional influence—may lead it to accept a modified agreement. Given the pressing circumstances, it may now seem logical for Iran to accept additional restrictions, especially since the country is grappling with a collapsing economy, a depreciating currency, and severe shortages in gas, electricity, and water. These shortages have disrupted production lines and even led to the closure of schools in some provinces. With the worsening crisis and tightening sanctions, Iran may be more inclined to accept an interim deal.

The benefits of such an agreement, which would allow Iran to maintain its right to a peaceful nuclear program while agreeing to more stringent measures, could be significant. In return, the lifting of sanctions would enable Iran to stabilize its internal legitimacy and improve its external positioning. This shift in the political environment has already yielded positive results for the regime, as evidenced by the 10% rise in the value of the Iranian rial against the US dollar on the open market and the increase in the shares of numerous companies. This signals that Iran is aware of the immediate economic benefits that could arise from engaging in negotiations and reaching a temporary agreement.⁽¹⁷⁾



4- Radicals backing down from hardline stances

The Supreme Leader’s decision to enter negotiations came under significant pressure, as reported by the New York Times on April 11, which highlighted that senior officials warned that without such talks, the Islamic Republic could face an existential threat.⁽¹⁸⁾ Faced with this possibility, the Supreme Leader may be willing to accept a new agreement with stricter terms. This potential shift may not meet significant opposition from hardline factions, including the Revolutionary Guard. In fact, these factions seem to be preparing the public for potential concessions during negotiations, with media outlets linked to the Guard and hardliners signaling that Iran could accept restrictions on uranium enrichment in exchange for sanctions relief.⁽¹⁹⁾

Recent statements from Iranian officials, including President

Masoud Pezeshkian, indicate a willingness to accept extensive verification measures, with Tehran offering to allow “a thousand verifications” of its nuclear program to demonstrate that it does not seek nuclear weapons. This stance suggests that Iran is prepared to accept more stringent inspections and limitations on its nuclear capabilities, which aligns with Araghchi’s assertion that returning to the 2015 nuclear agreement is no longer feasible⁽²⁰⁾. Given these developments, it appears likely that Iran could be open to a more restrictive agreement, especially if it results in sanctions relief and ensures the preservation of its peaceful nuclear program.

5- The shift in the Gulf States stance and the limits of the Israeli influence

The Gulf states’ current position on Iran significantly differs from their stance during the 2015 nuclear agreement. Reconciliation with Iran has reshaped regional dynamics, fostering important understandings regarding security and stability. The Gulf states are keen to avoid being dragged into a military conflict that could destabilize the region, making it in their interest to support a new agreement with Iran. Importantly, while the Gulf states do not oppose Iran’s use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, they themselves are interested in harnessing civilian nuclear technology.⁽²¹⁾

However, this scenario is problematic for Israel, which remains concerned that any agreement with Iran will not fully eliminate doubts about its future nuclear capabilities and could undermine Israel’s regional nuclear superiority. Despite

these concerns, Israel's ability to act unilaterally on the issue is limited. It cannot strike Iranian nuclear facilities or initiate action without U.S. involvement, nor can it bear the consequences of such an attack on its own. Should the U.S. and Iran reach a new agreement, Israel may find it difficult to oppose it, especially given the need for U.S. support on broader strategic issues, including Israeli plans for the occupied territories, movements in the region, and efforts toward normalization with more regional powers.

6-Global backing of the new deal

European perceptions of the 2015 nuclear deal as a successful framework for curbing nuclear proliferation have weakened. Nevertheless, the European Troika—comprising the United Kingdom, France, and Germany—still holds leverage in shaping the outcome of current negotiations. Until early 2026, they retain the authority to trigger the snapback mechanism, which would reinstate UN sanctions on Iran. In fact, the three countries have warned Tehran that if no new agreement is reached by June 2025, they may resort to this mechanism to intensify pressure.

On the other hand, China and Russia oppose dismantling Iran's nuclear program. Despite their broader disagreements with Trump, they share a strategic interest in controlling Iran's nuclear activities and preventing military escalation in the Middle East. This aligns with their objective of avoiding nuclear proliferation in the region. As such, they are unlikely to obstruct negotiations that could lead to a US-Iranian under-

standing, provided that Iran's nuclear program remains under control.

At the same time, both Beijing and Moscow support lifting sanctions on Iran and eliminating factors that threaten its stability, since Iran remains a valuable strategic partner for both countries. Maintaining a stable and cooperative relationship with Tehran is essential to preserving their influence in the Middle East.⁽²²⁾

Conclusion

In an atmosphere of mutual distrust, the United States and Iran have resumed negotiations to explore the possibility of understanding and engagement over one of the most complex and pivotal issues between them: the nuclear file. Despite facing enormous internal and external pressures, Iran still possesses a critical bargaining chip—its accumulated nuclear expertise, its proximity to the nuclear threshold, and its ability to unsettle the regional balance in response to any military strike.

On the other side, the United States enters the talks from a position of strength, with greater leverage to shape the negotiations and potentially secure meaningful concessions regarding Iran's nuclear activities. However, the extent of these gains remains limited by Tehran's unwavering insistence on its sovereign right to enrich uranium on Iranian soil.

This creates an opening for Washington to push for a longer-term and more robust agreement. While such a deal may fall short of fulfilling all of Trump's original promises follow-

ing his 2018 withdrawal from the JCPOA, it represents a safer and less costly path—one that could meet key U.S. objectives without resorting to coercive measures that might erode American leverage over time or trigger a regional war unlikely to garner Gulf support.

Though this approach might not entirely neutralize Iran's nuclear potential—and could even incentivize Tehran to pursue a nuclear deterrent in the long run—it remains the most plausible outcome. Still, in Trump's unpredictable political landscape, a sudden shift to a completely different scenario cannot be ruled out.

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