

# Trump must choose Israeli strike in Iran over weak nuclear deal

written by Dr. Raphael BenLevi | 14.05.2025

US President Donald Trump's stated Iran policy is the demand that the Islamic Republic completely dismantle its nuclear infrastructure, leaving it with no capacity to enrich uranium, a demand echoed by his top national security advisers and lead negotiator. This is a perfectly reasonable position – indeed, it was once the international consensus, enshrined in United Nations Security Council resolutions.

However, it is highly unlikely that such an outcome can be achieved through negotiations alone. While Iran has historically come to the table under credible threat of force, it is unrealistic to expect that the regime will surrender its nuclear facilities outright.

The only type of deal Iran might accept would essentially resemble the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – with all of its inherent flaws: the retention of enrichment capabilities, sunset clauses, weak inspection regimes, exclusion of ballistic missile and proxy warfare provisions, and broad sanctions relief.

Such a deal may offer short-term benefits – chief among them a temporary reduction in Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium, delaying its breakout time and easing immediate tensions.

Many hope it would allow the US to pivot more decisively toward East Asia. But the result of a JCPOA-redux would be the opposite. It would guarantee long-term US entanglement in the Middle East.

A deal of this nature would not resolve the fundamental threat posed by the Islamic Republic. On the contrary, it would strengthen Tehran by trading a temporary pause in its weapons development for economic relief and the opportunity to rebuild its regional proxy network and missile capabilities.

Within a few years, Iran could resume its nuclear ambitions – this time with a bolstered ballistic arsenal and possibly intercontinental capabilities, posing a

direct threat to the United States.

A minimalist deal would not enable a genuine US disengagement from the Middle East because it would fail to address Iran's ability to fund and coordinate proxy warfare against Arab monarchies and Israel. The result would be a repeat of the post-JCPOA landscape: a region increasingly dominated by Iran, culminating in open conflict with Israel and appeasement from neighboring states. In time, the US would be forced to return with greater force and expense.

The act of signing such a deal would itself undermine Trump's credibility and foreign policy goals. After having withdrawn from the JCPOA and denouncing it as a disastrous agreement, signing a similar deal would discredit his reputation and grant retroactive legitimacy to the approach of former presidents Barack Obama and Joe Biden.

The prospect of using force in the Middle East justifiably carries a negative connotation for many within the Trump administration. But no one is proposing a US invasion or occupation of Tehran. Quite the opposite.

By supporting Israel's resolve to confront existential threats on its own, Trump can showcase the strategic logic of his alternative to the Obama-Biden model – one in which capable regional allies take the lead, with American backing reinforcing their actions.

## **Three concerns of deal**

Opponents of this approach raise three key concerns: potential Iranian retaliation against US forces; the risk of broader escalation involving external powers; and disruptions to global oil supplies. While these risks are real, they have been greatly exaggerated.

First, Iranian retaliation: The Islamic Republic is currently in one of its weakest positions in years – economically crippled, internally unstable, and militarily diminished. Its proxies are depleted and its air defenses degraded. If Iran were to target US forces in response to an Israeli attack, it would invite devastating American retaliation – likely a regime-ending scenario. Tehran knows this.

More plausibly, it would target Israel, which is prepared to defend itself. A clear

and credible warning from Trump that any attack on US forces would result in severe consequences could deter such actions entirely.

Second, the specter of great power involvement: While Russia and China have grown closer to Iran, neither is likely to risk a direct confrontation with the US to defend it. Public condemnation aside, they would likely remain on the sidelines.

Third, the economic impact. If Israeli strikes are limited to nuclear infrastructure, energy flows from the Persian Gulf may remain unaffected. Even if Iran retaliates in a way that causes supply disruptions, this may cause a short-term price spike, but the US would not suffer significantly – and could even benefit as an oil exporter.

By contrast, China remains highly vulnerable to disruptions in Middle Eastern oil. Roughly 15% of its imported crude oil comes from Iran alone. A sudden loss of access would strain its limited strategic reserves and force a scramble for alternatives. Economic pressure on China may, in fact, align with US interests in the current geopolitical climate, where Washington no longer views Chinese prosperity as beneficial.

The costs of a strike are real. But the potential benefits are far greater. A successful strike on Iran's enrichment facilities would directly accomplish what diplomacy has not: eliminating Iran's ability to enrich uranium.

Yes, Iran could theoretically rebuild, but after investing decades and vast resources only to see its program destroyed, doing so would be politically and economically fraught – especially with the demonstrated willingness of Israel to act.

Such action would also reinforce Trump's credibility. Trump would be seen as a leader who set clear red lines, gave diplomacy a chance, and then acted decisively when those efforts failed. This would send a powerful message, not only to Tehran but to adversaries and allies around the world. Whether around Taiwan, Eastern Europe, or Greenland, American resolve would carry newfound weight.

Allowing Israel to carry out such a strike is not the opening of another "forever war" in the Middle East, which Trump rightly seeks to avoid, but a necessary and limited act that would serve US interests much more than the chimera of a new deal.

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