

Trump must carry out his threats

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 05.04.2026

“The region will become hell for our enemies if the attacks on Iranian infrastructure expand,” Ebrahim Zolfaqari, spokesman for the supreme operational headquarters of Iran’s armed forces, said Sunday. He issued that threat even before President Donald Trump’s angry warning that “Tuesday will be Power Plant Day, and Bridge Day, all wrapped up in one” if the Strait of Hormuz is not reopened.

Less than 24 hours before the expiration of the ultimatum set by the US president, the chances of an agreement between Washington and Tehran appear slim. Public rhetoric does not always reflect what is happening through back channels, but this time the anger appears genuine and the gap between the sides wide. Nothing is final, and last-minute changes are not uncommon. The exchange of threats and insults has, presumably, mainly led mediators to use what little time remains to try to prevent the expected escalation. For now, Tehran continues to project a combative, uncompromising line.

An indication of the mood there could be found in the harsh criticism directed at former Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif over the conciliatory approach he presented. In an article published over the weekend in *Foreign Affairs*, he proposed striving for a comprehensive peace agreement with the US and laid out a formula for ending the war that included limits on the nuclear program and reopening the Strait of Hormuz, in exchange for relief from economic sanctions. The response to his proposal was swift: At several rallies in Tehran, pictures of him were burned and regime associates called for him to be put on trial for treason.

The regime’s leaders in Tehran are aware of the heavy price Iran has paid and may continue to pay for its obstinacy. At the same time, they believe that the passage of time is increasing the pressure on Trump far more than it is wearing down the regime. In their view, the war of attrition they are waging will force Washington to bend and will eventually bring concessions from the US that will not only ensure the regime’s survival, but also free it from the economic stranglehold around its neck. To guarantee that, or at least preserve the chances of it, they are willing to keep paying in cash.

Iran's strategy is to continue wearing down the US and its partners through a combination of control over the Strait of Hormuz, influence over the global energy market and continued missile launches toward Israel and the Gulf states. At the same time, it is trying to achieve tactical gains against the forces operating against it, capitalize on their mishaps and entanglements, raise the cost and deepen divisions over the war through information campaigns and psychological warfare.

At the same time, regime officials are closely attuned to developments on the home front. They continue to invest in reinforcing a "consciousness of victory," restricting the flow of information and tightening internal oversight in order to thwart any effort to organize against the regime and topple it.

What does Trump want? The messages coming from his spokespeople, as well as from Trump himself, are fairly clear. He is seeking a deal that will complete what the impressive military achievements have not been able to deliver, while also framing a victory.

Trump is aware that any agreement with representatives of the regime would not only mean giving up on the aspiration of toppling it, but would also provide the regime with legitimacy and resources and pave the way for its renewed strengthening. He presumably also assumes that as long as this regime remains in place, regardless of who its representatives are, it will not change its ambitions or abandon its path. On the contrary, the current war will provide it with a clear justification for the view that only military nuclear capability can guarantee its survival, and as a result it will spare no effort to achieve that.

Where are things headed? It would not be a risky bet to assume that in the coming 24 hours, various "mediating parties" will place before Trump or his advisers a request to extend the ultimatum yet again. To that end, they may present additional "gifts" in the form of temporary and limited easing in the Strait of Hormuz that Tehran would be willing to offer in order to buy time. This is, of course, another step in trapping Trump in a war of attrition, and one can only hope he does not accept it.

The second possibility is that they present a willingness by the Iranians for a short ceasefire, but on Iran's terms, with the Strait of Hormuz under its control, and not on the terms Trump set. The ceasefire would be presented as a window for talks

on a permanent arrangement. In such a situation, negotiations would take place with Iran freed from military pressure and holding a bargaining chip, while pressure would be exerted on the other side. Trump, it is reasonable to assume, will not accept such an offer.

The third possibility is an escalation in military pressure: a shift away from a policy of selective strikes toward attacks on national infrastructure. Signals in that direction were evident in the latest Israeli and US strikes, and that is what Trump's remarks appear to point to. It may be assumed that the use of this course would be measured and controlled and would be accompanied by keeping the door open to diplomatic negotiations. It could, of course, unfold in a multi-stage process, with shorter intervals between phases and varying levels of intensity.

This scenario could have contradictory effects on public behavior in Iran. On one hand, it could accelerate civil unrest. On the other, it could rally the public around the regime as the focus shifts from damage to the regime to the destruction of state infrastructure. In such a reality, the US and Israel would have to invest special effort in channeling local energies toward bringing down the regime.

Do not give up on toppling the regime

From Israel's point of view, its strategic position today is vastly better than it was on the eve of the war: Iran's strategic capabilities have suffered a severe, even if not irreversible, blow; the regime's stability has been shaken, even though it is still standing; Israel has once again demonstrated to the countries of the region and the world its security strength; and it has also positioned itself as a leading strategic partner of the US, not as a dependent or a client state.

And yet, the truth must be told: The fundamental change we hope to see in Iran will occur only when the ayatollahs' regime reaches the end of its road. Without that, everything that has been achieved could prove temporary.

Therefore, that aspiration must not be abandoned under any circumstances. Whatever course President Trump chooses, Israel's interest is to preserve sanctions on the regime, because that is what will bring the masses out against it. That is how we will ensure that the current campaign becomes another milestone in the regime's decline on the way to its fall, which, even if delayed, will come.

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