

Let us not fool ourselves: Iran has not changed

written by Elie Klutstein | 08.07.2026

One of the loudest chants at the mass funeral for Iran's slain supreme leader, Ali Khamenei - echoed by both the public and the leadership in Tehran - was "Death to the US."

Even Mohammad Ghalibaf, the head of Iran's negotiating team, vowed to avenge the leader's death, as did state media and the government's main intelligence office. Most notable were the calls to assassinate US President Donald Trump, accompanied by offers of a huge reward for whoever succeeds in this mission.

These calls contradict the way Trump depicts his current relations with the Islamic Republic's leadership. Several weeks ago, he claimed that it includes "good people," who are not as radical as their former colleagues, and that "we get along with them." He repeated this claim several times, as if trying to convince not only us but also himself.

Trump isn't naïve. Like every good salesman, he is trying to sell his deal and portray it as the best thing he could have achieved, despite the obstacles and challenges. He probably knows that Iran and its leaders have not suddenly become enlightened or turned into peace-loving fans of the US.

Quite the opposite. They are bloodthirsty and will wait for the opportune moment to seek revenge. Moreover, Trump probably also knows about the growing calls within the Iranian regime to preserve components of the "nuclear option" in order to deter any future attacks on the Islamic Republic.

Tehran's message vs Washington's view

One of Tehran's main news outlets, Fars - which usually serves as a mouthpiece for the IRGC - published a lengthy article only a few days ago calling for the preservation of Iran's nuclear ambitions as a guarantee against any attempt to topple the regime.

The American president, for his own reasons, is sticking to diplomacy again despite all the Iranian defiance. The White House is willing to pay what might

seem like a reasonable price to calm global energy markets and to buy more time ahead of the midterm elections, while also getting through major events such as the 250th anniversary of the United States and the World Cup with relative ease.

Current polling in the United States, however, suggests that the deal with Iran doesn't improve the Republican position. The governing party usually suffers setbacks in the midterms, and there's no reason to believe it will be different this time.

This will only sharpen Trump's dilemma before the deal's 60-day deadline and will force the president to choose between increasingly narrow options that might not be to his liking. If the deadlock in the negotiations continues, his patience might end even sooner.

Given that the best Trump can hope for now with the Iranians is an Obama-style deal, he might realize soon that his legacy is on the line. He may not get what he wants from Tehran, and he may also be seen as the president who dared to fight Iran but couldn't finish the job. In this case, he could face even fewer options than he had hoped for.

Either way, we must not fool ourselves. The Iranian leadership has not changed its goals or ideology, and the chants to kill Americans and Israelis are still what the public hears from its government. Once we realize this and know who we are dealing with, we may assess the situation in a more sober and rational manner.

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