

The two-week ceasefire: A tactical pause or a strategic retreat?

written by Joseph Rozen | 11.04.2026

Iran's 10-point proposal contained nothing that met a single US demand. Yet one hour before President Donald Trump's deadline, a ceasefire was agreed. That gap between what Iran offered and what Trump accepted is the story.

Under the ceasefire, the US and Israel halted strikes against the Ayatollah regime's assets in exchange for the full reopening of the Hormuz Strait. Hezbollah in Lebanon is not yet covered, but pressure is building to include it.

What drove this sudden reversal? Iran had rejected US demands as delusional. Trump responded with escalating threats, promising "hell" and warning that power plants and civilian infrastructure were in his sights. Then, channelled through Pakistan, Tehran's 10-point proposal landed. Trump declared it a workable basis for talks. It gave him the ladder he needed to climb down.

The proposal itself was a maximalist wish list: full sanctions relief, the release of all frozen assets, continued nuclear enrichment, US military withdrawal from the Middle East, and UN Security Council guarantees for any future agreement. Far from narrowing the gap, it codified Iran's pre-war ambitions. The distance between the two sides had not closed by a single step.

This posture is consistent with Tehran's established playbook. Despite degraded capabilities and the loss of senior leadership figures, the regime's core objectives are unchanged. Iran has a documented record of using sanctions relief and unfrozen assets to accelerate its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, not to moderate its behaviour. A deal built on these terms would fund the next confrontation.

Why, then, did Trump agree? Several pressures converged: the economic shock of Hormuz disruptions; resistance from within his own inner circle; and, perhaps, impatience at a conflict that was not moving toward resolution quickly enough. None of these fully explains the decision. Ultimately, it was a political call, and the reasoning behind it will only become clear in what follows.

The central question now is whether Trump is buying time for the next phase of the war, or whether he genuinely believes diplomacy can achieve what the military pressure was designed to force. Both readings remain live. A pause to stabilise the global economy, manage domestic politics, and let Pakistan-brokered talks play out before potentially resuming military action is a coherent strategy. Less convincing, though still possible, is the belief that a chastened Iran might negotiate its way to a different future. The two scenarios require different things over the next few weeks.

The talks in Islamabad will be led by Vice President JD Vance, long seen as sceptical of military intervention. That choice is itself ambiguous: a negotiator perceived as reluctant to escalate may be more credible to Tehran as a pragmatist, or he may be precisely the signal Trump is sending that he is open to a real exit from the conflict while planning exactly the opposite. Vance's mandate will tell us which.

The venue is not incidental. Pakistan, a nuclear-armed state that recently signed a mutual defence pact with Saudi Arabia and publicly called for the destruction of Israel, has now positioned itself as the indispensable mediator in one of the most consequential conflicts of the post-Cold War era. Anchored in close personal and business ties to Trump's circles, Pakistan's role carries strategic weight far beyond these negotiations and is a reason for concern.

The ceasefire buys time. But time alone changes nothing if the fundamental premise is wrong. The history of negotiations with the Islamic Republic is a history of agreements made, violated, and exploited. Not only because some of the terms were poorly drafted but also because the regime's survival depends on confrontation, not coexistence. A government that funds proxy armies, pursues nuclear weapons in defiance of the world, and derives its legitimacy from hostility to the West and its neighbours cannot be negotiated into becoming something it is not.

The Pakistan talks may produce a document. They will not produce a different Iran. The only path to genuine peace for the region, and above all for the Iranian people who have lived under this regime's boot for four decades, runs not through an agreement with the Ayatollahs, but through their removal. Trump knows this. The question is whether he has the resolve to see it through.

Published in Firstpost, April 11, 2026.

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