

# Interaction or confrontation?

International Desk

## PERSPECTIVE

Since Tuesday last week, when Donald Trump signed the order to revive the maximum pressure campaign against Iran, and also after his administration's actions last Thursday to take practical steps in that direction, which was accompanied by the imposition of sanctions on part of Iran's oil sales to China, the question of whether Donald Trump is essentially seeking "interaction" with Iran or not is being reinforced. And if he is trying to reach an "agreement" with Tehran, we should ask what kind of agreement he has in mind.

In response to this question, Speaker of Iran's Parliament Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf stated on Saturday that "the issue is no longer the nuclear [program]. The [Trump's order] includes nuclear, missile, and asymmetric and conventional weapons issues; this means disarming the Islamic Republic of Iran."

Following the remarks by the speaker and according to some experts, Trump's actions, particularly over the past week, are in stark contrast to his previous positive stances on negotiating and reaching an agreement with Iran. Although this contradiction can be discussed and analyzed under the policy of carrot and stick or coercive diplomacy, some have rejected this scenario. The second group pessimistically considers the issue to be beyond negotiation and agreement and, instead, predicts that the US is pursuing brinkmanship, the military option, and a full-scale confrontation with Washington.

### Agreement with 'non-nuclear Iran'

Explaining and clarifying his administration's foreign policy towards Tehran, Donald Trump claimed in a recent interview with the New York Post, "I would like a deal done with Iran on non-nuclear [issues]." However, he continued in a threatening tone, "I would prefer that to bombing the hell out of it... They don't want to die. Nobody wants to die." According to Trump, "If we made the deal, Israel wouldn't bomb them."

The US president also announced that he would not reveal details of any potential negotiations with Tehran, saying, "I don't like telling you what I'm going to tell them. You know, it's not nice." He added, "I could tell what I have to tell them, and I hope they decide that they're not going to do what they're currently thinking of doing. And I think they'll really be happy."

### Change in tone or policy?

Analyzing Trump's latest remarks about Iran, Vahid Bayani, in an interview with Shargh Daily, approaches the New York Post interview from two perspectives and first points out "the change in Trump's tone and language compared to his previous stances". Bayani acknowledges that "Trump's sentences in the New York Post interview had a warning tone but were accompanied by measured and precise words."

Bayani then cites the US president's interview with Fox News, in which he expressed a great deal of respect for Iran, or quoting Donald Trump as stating that he intends to take the initiative to reach out to the president of Iran. With that in mind, the security expert believes that following the signing of the executive order to revive the maximum pressure campaign and the imposition of the first oil sanctions on Iran, Donald Trump's tone and language will gradually toughen up and become more hardline,



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as borne out by his statements in the New York Post interview. Another point that seems important to Bayani is Trump's threat of a military attack on Iran. The expert explains that "Donald Trump is pursuing the confrontation or military option indirectly and through the Israelis. This means that the US president is not inclined to have a military confrontation with Tehran, and if necessary, the responsibility for the attack will be assigned to Netanyahu and the Israelis in a division of tasks."

In a more important part of the conversation, Bayani refers to Trump's statement that "if we made the deal, Israel wouldn't bomb them" and connects it to Washington's new actions to send the GBU-43/B MOAB, also known as the Mother of All Bombs, to Israel, which he finds very "meaningful".

"Donald Trump, in the first layer of his policies towards Iran, is pursuing coercive diplomacy, interaction accompanied by maximum sanctions, negotiation from a position of strength, and ultimately reaching an agreement that contains the most benefits for Washington and the least benefits for Tehran." Building on this understanding, Bayani further suggests that in the event of failure, Trump will fall back on the

second layer of his policies towards Iran, which involves stepping up to a military attack and exercising the military option.

### Trump agrees to send MOAB to Israel

As Bayani stated and based on a report by Al Mayadeen, Donald Trump has agreed to deliver the GBU-43/B bomb to Israel. It is worth noting that the "Mother of All Bombs," made in the US and weighing 11 tons, is considered one of the most powerful non-nuclear bombs, designed to attack underground fortifications.

This bomb is carried by a C-130 Hercules aircraft instead of a fighter jet. However, some military analysts speculate that the Mother of All Bombs can also be operated by an F-15 fighter jet, and since Israel has both aircraft, "Trump's decision to send this weapon (the Mother of All Bombs) to Israel can be interpreted as sending a threat signal to Tehran." It implies that if Iran does not cooperate with Trump in holding talks and reaching the desired agreement, a military option is possible.

Building on his previous point, Vahid Bayani brings up the recent shipment of a new arms package by Donald Trump to Israel. The US State Department announced that it has approved the shipment of \$6.75 billion worth of ammunition, guidance kits, fuses, and other munitions, including 2,166 GBU-39/B Small Diameter Bombs, to Israel.

The US Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) stated in a press release that the US will also be shipping

3,000 Hellfire missiles and other equipment to Israel, at an estimated cost of \$660 million. The delivery of these missiles is set to commence in 2028. "The proposed sale will improve Israel's capability to meet current and future threats," the announcement reads.

The members of the US Congress have deemed this a circumvention of the law and Congress. Gregory Meeks, a member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, criticized the Trump administration for bypassing Congress and continuing to send arms to Israel. Previously, Congress had put a hold on a \$1 billion arms package to Israel, which reportedly included 4,700 1,000-pound bombs and Caterpillar armored bulldozers. This news comes as Benjamin Netanyahu, as the first foreign guest, met with Donald Trump in Washington.

### Trump, regime change in Iran?

A more critical issue revolves around the keyword "regime change". In this regard, some quote Trump's statements that "we can't totally interfere; Let's face it, we can't even govern ourselves" or "It would really be nice if that could be worked out without having to go that further step (Israel attacking Iran's military installations)". These experts believe in the flexibility of the second Trump administration's foreign policy towards Iran. As such, they reject any confrontational scenario.

For example, Sadegh Zibakalam, in a previous interview with Shargh Daily, thinks that

"Donald Trump is essentially not seeking war, conflict, and tension with Iran." Zibakalam refers to the "unspoken" aspects of Trump's meeting with Netanyahu last Wednesday and says: "The fact that the US President, both when signing the executive order to revive the maximum pressure campaign and during the press conference with Netanyahu, did not mention trying to overthrow and change the regime in Iran and did not support the opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran, indicates that at this juncture, Donald Trump does not intend to engage in an all-out confrontation with Tehran." According to this analyst, "the US president only referred to preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons," which, as Zibakalam says, "is acceptable to Tehran since Iranian officials have repeatedly stated that the Islamic Republic of Iran is not seeking to build nuclear weapons." Therefore, this political activist has an optimistic and positive assessment that the ground for negotiations will be prepared as soon as possible. Earlier, American officials claimed that some of Trump's close associates are opposed to the idea of attacking Iran's nuclear facilities, and Trump himself is also hesitant about this idea. The report says that Trump prefers to reach a very strict agreement that prevents Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons and believes he can reach an understanding with Iran.

The article first appeared in Farsi on Shargh Daily.



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Days after the US president reinstated his maximum pressure campaign, people gather in Tehran's Azadi Square to celebrate the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, on February 10, 2025.

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