

US strategy combines military pressure, diplomacy

By Amir Ali Abolfath
Expert on US affairs

Regarding Trump's reaction, it should be noted that he recently told a reporter, "Forget the letters." He added that indirect negotiations are a time-consuming process and that he believes Iran is not leaning toward indirect talks anymore. Keep in mind he was not speaking on his own behalf there — he claimed such an inclination exists in Iran. All signs indicate that the US government is keen on direct talks, while Iran still prioritizes indirect dialogue. However, unofficial signals and reports from some Iranian officials suggest that if indirect negotiations move forward smoothly, Tehran would not rule out switching to direct talks. Perhaps these very remarks have led Trump to conclude that Iran is also warming up to direct negotiations. In any case, from my perspective, the debate over the format of negotiations — direct or indirect — is a distracting hurdle; What matters is the outcome, not the form. The method itself holds no inherent value, even though Tehran and Washington's preferences differ. Still, national interests should not be tied to this issue because ultimately, what will be decisive is the deal's substance, not how it is reached. If securing the country's interests requires it, direct talks should also be put on the table.



US President Donald Trump (standing) speaks to a crowd of top US officials in the Rose Garden of the White House in Washington on April 2, 2025.
● EYEPRESS/NEWSCOM

Getting bogged down in repetitive debates over the negotiation format, in my view, is unproductive. The focus should remain on both sides' conditions, Iran and America's demands, the room for maneuver, and possible scenarios. The key question is how much we can expect these talks to yield a favorable outcome aligned with national interests.

Right now, negotiations are stuck on determining the format. This phase includes issues like the timing and location of talks, the composition of negotiating teams, and delegation accommodations — matters that are ultimately secondary. Meanwhile, the issue of "guarantees" is directly tied to the substance of negotiations, though in practice, none exist. After all,

Donald Trump even scrapped an agreement he himself signed with Mexico and Canada — let alone one with Iran. Thus, the key issue is not guarantees but the balance between concessions given and received by Iran — in other words, the parity between what the US demands and what it offers in return. When this balance is struck, both sides will

be more satisfied, and adherence to commitments becomes likelier. Otherwise, no document, memo, or resolution — whether from the US Congress, Iran's National Security Council, or Iran's Parliament — can ensure the deal's implementation. The only effective factor is mutual satisfaction with the agreement's terms. We haven't reached that stage yet; the country

is still hung up on the negotiation format. Once we move past this, we must assess which issues are negotiable, where flexibility exists, what topics can form the core of talks, and which red lines Iran has drawn. That's why the "guarantee" discussion will arise in the final stages, not at the outset. In my view, the US government is keeping both military confrontation and negotiations on the table, and Washington's current military posture serves these dual objectives. If talks yield an outcome favorable to the US, the likelihood of military escalation will drop. But if America concludes no agreement with Iran is possible while assessing military action as low-cost, strikes against Iran may come into play. The US has entered the region prepared for both war and talks — hence the deployment of its bombers. What sets Trump apart from other US officials is his blunt declaration that he secures peace, negotiations, and deals through power and pressure. His trade tariffs follow the same logic; he claims they force other countries to the negotiating table. A similar approach is being taken with Iran. It would be wrong to say Washington is solely after military conflict or that its military buildup is purely for show. Both objectives must be analyzed together because America's current strategy is built on combining military pressure with diplomacy.

Washington seeking leverage, not war

By Hassan Beheshtipour
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The US doesn't oppose indirect negotiations. Trump, too, prefers reaching his goals through talks. However, Trump personally prefers taking center stage and exploiting opportunities for political gains. It's the Iranian side that must explain to the public why direct talks aren't smart, wise, or honorable while indirect negotiations are productive and sensible. We shouldn't forget that Iran chose this path of indirect negotiations during president Raisi's administration, and it led nowhere. A second issue, raised in US media, is that the US is combining threats with incentives for talks to both gain more concessions and tell the public, through its public diplomacy, that it favors dialogue and diplomatic solutions from a position of strength. In this context, Iran must also emphasize resolving issues through preliminary talks and articulate its "re-

sistance diplomacy" to the public. Iran's media approach toward the US has two major flaws: First, it amplifies American threats and excessive demands — as if to justify avoiding talks — when the media should instead explain resistance diplomacy and show how Iran can achieve its goals through it. Sending a clear message to the world — that Iran isn't seeking war and aims to end unjust sanctions through diplomacy — is crucial. Meanwhile, implementing fundamental economic reforms would complement resistance diplomacy's success. This term has a broad meaning and isn't limited to nuclear issues. Its primary goal is countering and neutralizing US maximum pressure, which is pursued through maximum sanctions. Resistance diplomacy is a multifaceted strategy with several dimensions:

1. Political/diplomatic: This includes strengthening ties with allies — particularly countries opposing US policies or not backing sanctions — to mitigate sanctions' impact. Leveraging international bodies like the UN to condemn sanctions and push for their removal is also vital.

2. Negotiations: Engaging with the US and others should be done



Iranian FM Abbas Araghchi (2nd-R) talks with the Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Mohammad Eslami (2nd-L) during an event to celebrate the Persian New Year, in Tehran, Iran, on April 5, 2025.
● MIZAN

to secure agreements serving Iran's interests.

3. Economic: This itself has other facets including:

- Building a resilient economy by reducing oil dependence and developing agriculture, industry, and technology
- Expanding trade with non-sanctioning countries
- Circumventing sanctions through legal/extra-legal means to meet economic needs

4. Military/security: From this perspective, the goal is to:

- Boost deterrence to prevent potential attacks
- Support regional resistance groups against US influence

5. Media/cultural: The objective here is, again, twofold:

- Articulating Iran's stance to domestic/global audiences and countering US propaganda
- Strengthening national unity to withstand external pressure

However, there will be challenges to resistance diplomacy, including:

- Resource constraints due to sanctions
 - Domestic disagreements over tactics, which weakens cohesion
 - Ongoing US pressure, which complicates implementation of strategies
- Resistance diplomacy is a complex, multidimensional strategy requiring a comprehensive, coordinated approach. Its success hinges on factors like maintaining domestic unity, cultivating alliances, and effective economic/military policies. The conditions for imposing war on Iran are riper than ever, but all these US moves are aimed at extracting more concessions at the negotiating table. They aren't after war — but if Iran doesn't engage with the international community, we may see strikes on its nuclear facilities.

The full article first appeared in the Persian-language newspaper Etemad.



The US is combining threats with incentives for talks to both gain more concessions and tell the public, through its public diplomacy, that it favors dialogue and diplomatic solutions from a position of strength. In this context, Iran must also emphasize resolving issues through preliminary talks and articulate its "resistance diplomacy" to the public.



Four US Air Force B-2 bombers are visible on the ramp (from center to lower right) in a satellite image of a joint US-British air base on Diego Garcia island in the Indian Ocean on March 29, 2025.
● PLANET LABS