

Iran could restore its nuclear capabilities in medium term: *Expert*



INTERVIEW On Monday last week, President Donald Trump of the United States set out for the Occupied Territories and then Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, to sign the Gaza peace deal, even as the existing agreement has already run into many hurdles regarding the full execution of all 20 provisions — issues that the US president is turning a blind eye to. Brushing aside the reality and pushing through an imposed peace in the case of Gaza is now playing out on the Iran front as well. During this trip, and at every chance he got, the American president rolled out a mix of threats, repetitive claims, and calls for a deal with Iran: from claims of “neutralizing the threat of terrorism and Iran’s nuclear weapons” to leveling the usual allegations about Tehran’s regional activity, and in the end, extending an olive branch for talks and a deal. These contradictory remarks bring to mind the American president’s stances in the weeks leading up to Israel’s military offensive and his own subsequent strikes on Iran’s nuclear facilities in June. Parsing these comments and the motives behind them, the degree to which America means business about a deal, and what Trump actually has in mind when he speaks of an agreement with Iran — these are all key questions that beg answers for a clearer picture of what’s next. No doubt, how things play out will have a bearing on Iran’s ties with other countries, especially Russia and China, its two strategic partners. Alireza Soltani, a university professor and international relations expert, answered these questions and clarified the current state of affairs in an interview. The translation of the exchange is as follows:

In the days President Trump was making his way across the Middle East, he brought up Iran at virtually every forum, with threats, allegations, and claims on one hand, and invitations to talk on the other. How should we make sense of what Mr. Trump has been saying?

SOLTANI: The fact of the matter is, Iran is currently one of the top concerns shaping US foreign policy. Today’s global political and geopolitical landscape has driven both the US foreign policy machine and the president himself to the conclusion that the Iran issue must somehow be settled. Following the imposed 12-day war and the snapback of UN sanctions, both Washington and Trump have come to the view that now is the right time to take on the Iran file in earnest.

It would seem the current US administration’s approach is to tackle the Iran issue through negotiation and a deal — but a deal that serves the interests of the US and, by extension, Israel. Trump’s recent insistence on settling the Iran matter underscores this reality. His use of persuasive, even aggressive rhetoric is meant to signal he’s intent on resolving the Iran case during his time in office and wants the credit for it. That blend of threats and incentives points to a Trump administration out to settle this issue while the current circumstances still hold.

Some say the US president had reached out to Tehran with calls for negotiations and goodwill even before he resorted to force against Iran in June, and that this fresh invitation could be a precursor to another round of conflict. How accurate is this assessment, given developments on the ground?

In politics, anything can happen. Nothing is ever set in stone, and you can’t run every issue, fact, and experience through the same analytic filter. Just because Tehran and Washington talked before the imposed 12-day war and conflict broke out at the height of those talks doesn’t guarantee that the US pursuit of talks now will set the stage for war.

The current political and geopolitical climate is a far cry from the period before the imposed 12-day war. Back then,



Iran’s Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi looks around at the Astana Platform Foreign Ministers Meeting on the margins of the 79th UN General Assembly session in New York on September 28, 2024.

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US President Donald J. Trump (R) and Vice President JD Vance are pictured in The Situation Room on June 21, 2025, the day the US illegally launched air strikes against Iran’s nuclear facilities.

● THE WHITE HOUSE

Alireza Soltani

Iran had at its disposal key nuclear assets — like enriched uranium and nuclear facilities — and that gave it a strong leverage. Those circumstances just don’t hold up today.

So, while war may have once made sense for US policymakers to resort to war to wipe out Iran’s nuclear capacity, such a pretext doesn’t really stand up now. At present, negotiation and a possible deal seem far more pressing to Washington, and a breakthrough even more likely.

Both Iran and the US now want a dialogue, but it seems what’s needed to kickstart the process is a new initiative — especially given that Tehran is looking for a balanced proposal. What might that initiative look like?

The truth is, getting talks off the ground between Iran and the US will take a serious new initiative, naturally one that brings third-party mediators into play. Right now, the two sides aren’t in a position to go it alone directly; Even though countries like Oman and Qatar were critical brokers in previous rounds, their roles have faded substantially.

Still, if some countries, whether inside or outside the region, step up to mediate, it could make a difference. A mediation effort coupled with a peace or negotiation plan pushed by these intermediaries could break the impasse in Iran-US negotiations.

Counting on Europe for a special role doesn’t seem realistic. However, one of the major factors for reopening a pathway to talks and breaking the deadlock is the positions that the International Atomic Energy Agency take. If Iran matches the IAEA’s position with cooperation, this could pave the way for US-Iran negotiations.

Right now, one of the most debated topics in foreign policy circles is exactly what should be on the table in a potential deal with America — should it be confined to the nuclear issue or sweep in broader questions? Which approach better safeguards Iran’s national interest?

Even though the nuclear issue still sits at the heart of US-Iran tensions, with Iran seeking international recognition of its enrichment rights and the US demanding a full halt to that program,

the reality is that the recent US strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities may have taken some urgency out of the timeline. US officials may be confident that Iran could bounce back and restore its nuclear capabilities in a medium-term window, and concerns have allayed, but the nuts and bolts of the nuclear file remain the main sticking point for both Washington and Tehran. Iran wants to hold on to this right (even at a certain enrichment level), while the US is dead set on complete deactivation.

Even so, it’s clear the US-Iran problem can’t be pigeonholed into the nuclear file alone. If and when the two sides sit down at the table, it would be wise to seize the opportunity and hash out other outstanding disputes. Without resolving their political disagreements completely, both capitals will remain caught up in recurring challenges. Resolving just one issue won’t resolve all issues between the two. Given the current political, geopolitical, and domestic realities, it’s in both parties’ interests to go after comprehensive solutions.

The full interview first appeared in Persian on IRNA.

