

countries, lacks a powerful lobby in the United States, and its voice is not properly heard. The voice that is heard from Iran in the United States is predominantly that of regime-change opposition groups, which, in some instances, even share interests with Israel and support war at times. For this reason, this situation constitutes a serious danger for Iran. Mere opposition or episodic non-alignment by Trump with Israel regarding Netanyahu's Middle Eastern objectives cannot lead us to the conclusion that the possibility of Trump's alignment with Israel no longer exists or that Netanyahu will be incapable of aligning him. The structural and institutional penetration of the Jewish lobby, the personal characteristics and psychological traits of Trump, and the absence of a powerful pro-Iran lobby in the United States collectively raise, in a serious manner, the danger that Israel and Netanyahu personally could once again, by advancing certain claims, by engaging in media groundwork, and by utilizing instruments of influence, persuade Trump to align with them.

Iran-United States nuclear negotiations, since the imposed 12-day war, have entered a state of complete coma. Iran accuses the United States of advancing maximalist demands, and simultaneously, it appears that Washington's view is the inclusion of non-nuclear issues, particularly Iran's missile capabilities, in any new agreement. Where do you think the crux of the problem lies? Recently, proposals have been raised suggesting that Iran and the United States change the title of "negotiations" to "an agreement for Iran's non-acquisition of nuclear weapons" in order to break the existing deadlock. To what extent do you consider such ideas to be practical?

Regarding the change of the name of "negotiation," in any case, it does not appear that the principal disagreement concerns the name or the form; the issue is the substance. The complexity of politics is precisely embedded in this point that various variables are interlinked in a manner that creates reciprocal relationships among them. Therefore, the issue, as Mr. Salehi and some diplomats propose, is not merely a technical matter for which one could seek solely a technical solution. The issue is fundamentally political — that is, a conflict of interests. In such a situation, one must be capable of discovering a formula for this conflict of interests.

When we say that we should change the name of "negotiations" and, for example, speak of "negotiation for Iran's non-attainment of nuclear weapons," it is as though we intend to alter those divergences or to disregard them. While the reality is that a conflict of interests exists, and it is serious. The issue is not a matter of the past one or two days; for more than four decades, this conflict of interests has existed, and divergences of perspectives and approaches have taken shape. Therefore, from the outset, we have been confronting a complex issue, and if we seek to present a solution, we must accept the essence of this complexity and conflict of interests rather than deny it.

The denial of this conflict of interests means that the policymaker cannot regard our proposed solution as a realistic one. Reductionist solutions that essentially seek to say that "it is nothing" or that "take a deep breath, and it will fade away," at best and in the most optimistic scenario, generate the impression in the policymaker that the analyst or solution-provider lacks a realistic understanding of the existing situation. Therefore, we must find a solution for this conflict of interests, recognize it formally, and, on the other hand, institutionalize within the country the principle that international politics is an arena of conflicting interests and scarcity of power and that global powers are not equal to one another. At times, this perception, or at least this unwritten assumption, exists within our country that Iran's and America's positions in



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (3rd-L) visits an exhibition of the defense ministry's latest defense and space achievements, in Tehran on February 2, 2025.
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the hierarchy of power in international politics are identical, and prescriptions are issued on that basis, while the reality is otherwise. On this basis, in negotiations as well, we are not situated in an equal position. Inevitably, we must define and calibrate expectations from negotiations in proportion to this reality. Not only are we not in an equal position, but also after June 13, unfortunately the perception of the opposing side — namely the United States and even Europe and, perhaps, one could say, some of Iran's friends — is that Iran's position in international politics has been weakened. This perception complicates matters because, in negotiation, the party that considers itself stronger is unwilling to grant greater concessions in order to reach an agreement. This is precisely the situation we are confronting now; that is, the United States exhibits no inclination to grant concessions, while the discourse of "coercive diplomacy" and past experiences demonstrate that, usually, the possibility of agreement has increased when the stronger government, which here is the United States, has granted greater concessions. Therefore, the deadlock in the negotiations has formed across multiple layers. At the foundational and essential level, a conflict of interests exists, which has taken shape over the past four decades, and discovering a middle-ground solution for both sides is an exceedingly difficult task, given the aforementioned conflict. The fate of the JCPOA also demonstrated to what extent pro-agreement forces in the two countries are positioned unequally, or, more precisely, that an-

ti-agreement forces possess greater power. As a result, it appears that rather than rendering the issue technical in appearance and rather than reducing this conflict of interests to a merely technical matter, we must start by accepting the complexity and multidimensionality of the issue and then, present a solution that, at least, encompasses part of the concerns of the decision-makers in Iran; they should be able to defend this solution within the arena of domestic politics and should not perceive its implementation as tantamount to the loss of their positions in domestic politics or the loss of legitimacy.

What is the principal obstacle that you believe to be so complex and multidimensional?
In my view, if we wish to simplify the issue, the principal obstacle lies in the enrichment issue. In the enrichment debate, both countries, meaning the leaders on both sides, confront exceedingly serious domestic considerations. On one hand, Trump wishes to demonstrate to his electoral base that he is different from Obama, and if he reaches an agreement with Iran that agreement will be both "better" than Obama's agreement and of a different nature. This difference and "better quality," in Trump's view, is defined in the form of zero enrichment; meaning that, from his perspective, defending an agreement with Iran in American domestic politics is possible only if that agreement includes the suspension of enrichment. In Iran as well, the enrichment issue is equally intertwined with domestic

politics. The governing establishment has reached the conclusion that if it is to consent to an agreement with the United States, it must be able to justify it domestically. This justification is possible only if the United States recognizes, even implicitly and on paper, Iran's right to enrichment. Only in this case can Iran explain why, after the 12-day war, it has moved toward negotiations with the United States. We know that negotiations, both in Iran and in the United States, have serious opponents within decision-making structures and within the arena of domestic politics. Trump's rivals in the United States and the principlists (or whatever we label them) in Iran are poised to question any agreement if the government or the foreign policy apparatus moves toward it. Therefore, both Trump and Iran, by ill fortune, are faced with conflicting interests for the defense of an agreement in domestic politics; Trump seeks the suspension of enrichment, and Iran seeks the preservation of enrichment. This is the current obstacle to the negotiations. It appears that, given the understanding that has emerged in recent years of American behavior, Washington will not fully pressure Iran. Accordingly, regarding Iran, in my view, if this dilemma is resolved and Tehran can correctly employ diplomatic dexterity and if anti-agreement forces cannot take matters into their own hands, then the possibility of negotiation and the attainment of an agreement will exist.

The interview first appeared in Persian on IRNA.



The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (front-R) pledged its support for US President Donald Trump (C) by posting this AI image of him winning an oversized Nobel medal.
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