

Iran-US differences will not be resolved by renaming negotiations: **Expert**

Employing 'diplomatic dexterity' imperative



US President Donald Trump (L) and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu
● THE TIMES



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.

INTERVIEW

The West Asia region has not yet been emancipated from the repercussions of the Gaza war, the border tensions between Lebanon and Israel, and the sporadic hostilities in the Red Sea. However, in the meantime, the dissemination of news concerning the imminent meeting of Benjamin Netanyahu, the prime minister of the Zionist regime, with Donald Trump, the president of the United States, on December 29 has precipitated a renewed wave of conjecture, within the global media and political milieu, regarding novel scenarios of escalation and provocation. The principal axis of this meeting, according to numerous observers, is the endeavor of the Israeli prime minister to secure the favorable disposition of the US president for the purpose of smoothing the trajectory toward a renewed military confrontation with Iran; a confrontation which could subject the entirety of the region's security equations to profound transformation. These maneuvers are undertaken under circumstances in which Netanyahu is confronting intensifying domestic pressures, a crisis of political legitimacy, and operational impasses across multiple fronts. It appears that the strategy of "externalizing the crisis" has once again been placed on Tel Aviv's agenda. The effort to draw Washington into a new war not only could culminate in a redefinition of America's role in the region but could also gravely amplify the risk of an expansion of hostilities and instability in the Middle East; a scenario against whose consequences numerous regional and international actors have issued warnings. For the examination of this issue, an interview has been conducted with Rahman Ghahremanpour, an analyst of international affairs, the translation of which you read below.

Rahman Ghahremanpour



Israel, by raising the issue of Iran's missile capabilities, seeks to once again obtain the green light for a military attack on Iran from Donald Trump, and this effort is undertaken while it appears that the priority of the American president, at present, is the preservation of the fragile cease-fire in Gaza — of which he himself was the initiator. Under such circumstances, Netanyahu, for the purpose of sustaining the crisis, which some consider the locus of his political survival, seeks to rekindle from beneath the ashes the flames of war with Tehran. What is your analysis of the emergent atmosphere and Israel's program regarding Iran? To what extent do you consider the renewed alignment of Trump with Netanyahu on this matter probable?

GHAHREMANPOUR: It appears that Netanyahu, after a brief hiatus, is once again trying to return the Iran issue to the priorities of the White House. This occurs while the Trump administration, based on what is articulated in its National Security Strategy document, implicitly subscribes to the belief that Middle Eastern files have been closed and that there is no longer a necessity for the United States to reopen these dossiers, among which one can specifically reference the Gaza issue. Trump has repeatedly emphasized that "we have obliterated Iran's nuclear program" and that nothing remains of it. The aggregate of these positions indicates that Trump does not desire for the United States to become re-entangled in a long-term and expansive manner in the Middle East, and this approach constitutes the definitive policy of the United States. Nevertheless, given the influence that the pro-Israel lobby wields in the United States, deviation by Washington from this overarching policy cannot be considered entirely impossible. Put more simply, Netanyahu, with the understanding that he possesses of

Trump's personality and with awareness that he is a temperamental individual, who is susceptible to the influence of his entourage and requires affirmation, attempts to utilize all instruments at Israel's disposal, in order to enlist him for another attack on Iran. On the other side, Trump and his administration endeavor to the greatest extent possible to avoid undertaking such an action. By way of illustration, the recently disseminated report, asserting that the United States intercepted a vessel carrying military equipment destined for Iran in the Indian Ocean, can be analyzed within this framework; an action that could convey this message to Israel that the White House is likewise attempting to prevent Iran from reconstructing its missile capabilities and thereby persuade Israel to refrain from advancing toward a renewed large-scale confrontation with Iran.

Regarding Iran, some analysts believe that despite the significant convergence of the positions of the United States and Israel on the issue of maximum pressure, Trump and Netanyahu are not aligned with respect to the objective of this pressure; more precisely, Washington is not pursuing regime change in Iran. On this basis, to what extent can the recent statements of Marco Rubio concerning the distinction between the Iranian people and the Iranian government be interpreted as stepping toward Israel's idea?

In my view, Trump's behavioral framework is no longer "maximum pressure" in its classical sense because, within the policy of maximum pressure, there is fundamentally no place for the direct use of force, military power, or recourse to war. This is while Trump, on June 13, resorted to war against Iran. Therefore, the more precise formulation is to ask whether Trump continues to operate within the framework of "coercive diplomacy" or whether, after June 13, he has returned to the policy of maximum pressure and war has become for him a red line. The reality is that I still believe Trump

operates within the framework of coercive diplomacy, meaning that war is not necessarily a red line for him. As he himself has explicitly stated: if Iran were to revive its nuclear program, the United States would attack. Therefore, the principal framework of Trump's behavior is coercive diplomacy. However, given what is stated in the National Security Strategy document, given Trump's own claims regarding the success of the attack on Iran's nuclear program, and given that he has explicitly declared his intention to focus on Latin America and perceives the Venezuela crisis as close ahead, and also by taking into consideration the Ukraine war and the implementation of what can be termed an "inverse Nixon Doctrine," it can be stated that Trump will endeavor to the greatest extent possible to avoid entering a broad confrontation with Iran.

In this context, as you also indicated, there exists a divergence of views between the United States and Israel; a divergence that, of course, is not a novel phenomenon. Let us not forget that during the Biden administration as well, when the Israeli security delegation traveled to Washington, the US government declared in an official statement that there existed differences of opinion between the United States and Israel regarding Iran. This divergence has existed in the Trump administration and also in the Biden administration.

The important point, however, is that Trump's distinctive personality and the mutability of his positions have furnished Israel, and particularly Netanyahu, with the opportunity to be more hopeful of the US president's alignment than during the Biden era. For this reason, Israeli think tanks and inner circles explicitly state that Trump represents a strategic and historical opportunity for Israel to be able to neutralize the Iran threat with his assistance. Accordingly, despite the existing divergences, Israel will not squander this opportunity and will deploy all of its efforts to capitalize upon it.

Meanwhile, one must not forget that Iran, unlike Israel and certain other