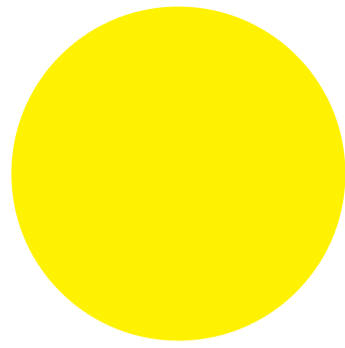


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Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (center) greets a participant during a meeting at the Ministry of Science Research and Technology in Tehran on April 19, 2026. president.ir



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Trump's failure to deliver war gains fuels Iran-US narrative divide

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

During the brief ceasefire that took hold, Iran and the United States set out to bring the war to an end through negotiations. As time passed, however, deep gaps opened up in the narratives put forward by the two sides, leaving observers confused. In an interview with Omid Khazani, an international affairs expert, Iran Daily examines the roots of this divide. He believes the gap is largely due to the US president's attempt to construct a storyline through media hype, but his inability to sell victory narratives.

IRAN DAILY: What explains the deep gap between Iranian and American narratives regarding the course of the negotiations?

KHAZANI: Part of this divergence comes down to [US President Donald] Trump's distinctive personality, which is built around constructing narratives through media hype. He relies on several specific tactics—one being the "madman" approach and another "brinkmanship". Over four to five decades as a businessman, he achieved successes using these

methods. Now, he carries them forward largely through narrative-building, often driven by a handful of tweets.

Any conflict—whether short-term or prolonged—requires an exit plan. This is typically achieved through narrative construction and what can be described as achievement-selling or victory-selling.

In the case of Iran, the United States, and Israel, selling success and constructing achievements is particularly important for Trump, but has become more complex and difficult to sustain, which explains the unusually erratic accounts emerging from Trump regarding Iran. While part of this is deliberate, another part reflects his unhinged state, as he is unable to easily sell these achievements. Trump represents a deep state that, for years, had been able to enter countries militarily and, within a short time, destroy their armies through conventional, symmetrical warfare. However, this marks the first time that a country like the United States has entered a military conflict and failed to defeat the official army of its adversary. As a result, the narrative has become highly disordered. On the Iranian side, narratives are also at times contradictory and unsettled due to the diversity of audience. Selling a comprehensive and broadly accepted notion of success to Iranian society is not an easy task, although it is easier than it is for the US and Israeli officials,

since none of the initial objectives pursued by the US-Israeli axis in entering the war against Iran have been achieved.

Why did the announcement of the re-opening of the Strait of Hormuz trigger mixed reactions within Iran?

The Strait of Hormuz has gained importance for Iranians across all social strata for several reasons, both short-term and long-term.

In the short term, it relates to national pride. For ordinary citizens, the core power base, and the elite alike, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz—following the destruction caused by US and Israeli bombardments—provided a sense of relief and psychological comfort for wounded national pride. Iran closed the strait decisively, and for the first time, the hardships Iranians had endured for decades under sanctions were felt in the farthest corners of the globe.

At the same time, it led many to argue that even if Iran cannot secure compensation from hostile governments at the end of the war, it could offset those losses through tolls collected from the Strait of Hormuz.

In the long term, the issue takes on a strategic dimension. For years, the Strait of Hormuz had been considered as a long-term strategic deterrent—at least on paper—and formed part of Iran's defense doctrine, though it had never been implemented. This time, however, when

it was put into action, both the elite and senior political and security officials recognized it as a powerful deterrent—potentially even a game changer alongside conventional military deterrence. As a result, sensitivity surrounding news related to the Strait of Hormuz increased significantly. This is why narratives—whether from Trump or Iranian officials—are only partially accepted by society, leading to confusion.

What are the most serious structural and political obstacles currently preventing a sustainable agreement between Iran and the United States?

This is a highly complex question, but in brief, the most significant issue between Iran and the United States—regardless of which president takes office—is the powerful Israeli AIPAC lobby in the United States. This lobby is highly capable and influential, employing various methods such as exerting influence over Congress and the Senate, which makes the situation considerably more difficult. Another factor is the presence of Arab lobbies, whose long-term interests are not aligned with Iran. While not as powerful as AIPAC, they still play a role. A further issue is the absence of soft deterrence on Iran's part—meaning the failure to tie US interests, shaped by various lobbies, to Iran's internal economy. For instance, if major American automotive, technology, and energy companies

were to invest in Iran, this could create a form of soft deterrence and help smooth over many political challenges later on. Another challenge is identity-related, particularly the entrenched anti-American sentiment within Iran. Additionally, the US deep state consistently requires an opposing power to advance its interests, enabling it to sustain its hegemony through arms sales and energy exports globally.

Does Islamabad currently possess the capacity and influence necessary to align the positions of the two sides?

Islamabad differs from other mediators in several ways. It maintains good relations with Iran, while there exists a degree of public sympathy toward Iran as a significant portion of the global Shiite population resides in Pakistan. At the same time, individuals in positions of power in Pakistan have good personal relations with Trump. But what makes Pakistan particularly unique is its strong relationship with China, which also plays an important role in this crisis. A country like Pakistan, which maintains good personal ties with Trump, strong relations with China, and solid connections with Iran, can act as a mediator in ways that Turkey—despite being a NATO member—cannot, or Oman cannot due to its limited leverage and lack of necessarily strong ties with Trump personally.