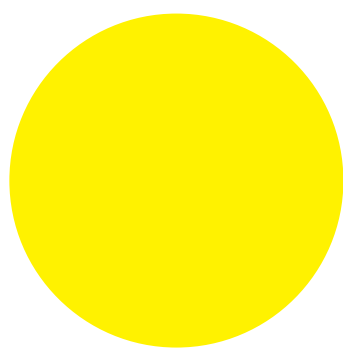


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Hormuz will shape next phase of Iran-US confrontation

By Delaram Ahmadi
Staff writer

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

Military exchanges between Iran and the United States have continued over the past several nights, while mediators, unlike in previous escalations, have yet to take meaningful steps to ease tensions. Iran and Oman have also failed to reach an agreement on managing the Strait of Hormuz. After reinstating oil sanctions, Washington has reimposed its naval blockade, while Tehran has declared the Strait closed. Together, these developments point to a return to the pre-Islamabad understanding and could be seen as a slide back toward full-scale war. However, Reza Ghoobeishavi, an international affairs analyst, told Iran Daily that the confrontation is unlikely, for now, to escalate beyond sporadic military strikes. He added, however, that the fate of the Strait of Hormuz will determine the future trajectory of tensions and conflict



Reza Ghoobeishavi

between Iran and the US.

between Iran and the US.

IRAN DAILY: Do you see the current Iran-US confrontation as the beginning of a new phase of large-scale conflict, or does it still remain within the bounds of a controlled and temporary escalation?

GHOBEISHAVI: Iran and the US have entered a new phase of confrontation. Similar dynamics existed before, but they have now intensified. Tehran and Washington have reached what is effectively a deadlock in negotiations, while they have also arrived at conflicting interpretations of Article 5 of the memorandum of understanding regarding the status of the Strait of Hormuz.

The US is trying to step up military strikes to increase pressure on Tehran in hopes of extracting concessions at the negotiating table, particularly over the Strait of Hormuz, which is currently at the center of the dispute, as well as other issues, foremost among them the nuclear file. Iran, however, is unwilling to make concessions to Washington or accept its demands regarding the Strait of Hormuz. At the same time, it insists on implementing its own framework and decisions concerning both the Strait and its nuclear program.

Alongside negotiations, Washington is also trying to pressure Iran through military action. Will this strategy succeed? Most likely not. The prevailing assessment in Tehran is that the US neither has the capability nor the intention to return to full-scale war and will instead continue carrying out sporadic strikes. Although these attacks inflict human and material losses, they are unlikely to exert sufficient pressure on Iran to force it to abandon its positions or accept US demands on either the Strait of Hormuz or the nuclear issue.

Why have efforts by Iran and Oman to reach an understanding on security arrangements and shipping in the Strait of Hormuz failed?

Because what Iran and Oman seek is fundamentally at odds. Iran wants full sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz and insists on implementing its own framework for managing the waterway. Oman, however, is not fully aligned with Iran's position. Instead, it has sided with US and European plans to reopen the southern shipping lane through its territorial waters. That move triggered a forceful military response from Iran. Tehran attacked vessels using the Omani route and, for the

first time, targeted the southern coast of the Strait of Hormuz—Oman's Musandam Governorate—as well as one of Oman's ports, Duqm. It also officially claimed responsibility for those strikes for the first time.

The disagreements between Iran and Oman over the Strait stem from fundamentally different perspectives, relationships and geopolitical positions.

Iran insists on collecting transit fees from vessels passing through the Strait, whereas Oman has committed itself to the opposite approach. Iran maintains that it alone should manage the Strait of Hormuz, while Oman favors keeping maritime traffic flowing freely as it did previously.

Iran is in a state of military confrontation with the United States, whereas Washington is one of Oman's closest allies.

Oman has sought to mediate and maintain a balance in its relations with both Iran and the US, as well as between Iran and the Arab states of the southern Persian Gulf. However, when it comes to the Strait of Hormuz, Oman is itself a direct stakeholder, and Muscat's position on the issue is neither aligned with nor particularly close to Tehran's.

Why have mediating countries failed to

play a more active and effective role in containing the crisis so far?

First, the two principal mediators—Qatar and Oman—have themselves come under Iranian attack. That has placed them in a contradictory position, both morally and politically, because it is difficult to act as a mediator while simultaneously being a target of military action.

Second, the demands put forward by Iran and the United States are absolute. Neither side is willing to back down or compromise in order to reach an understanding. Instead, each expects the other to retreat from its position.

Third, Iran is not prepared to surrender at the negotiating table what it did not surrender on the battlefield. That includes relinquishing control over the Strait of Hormuz or making the nuclear concessions sought by Washington.

Based on current trends, what scenarios do you see as the most likely in the coming weeks and months?

Several scenarios can be envisaged. The first is a new US war against Iran. While the likelihood remains low, it cannot be ruled out, especially if the objective is to establish full control over the Strait of Hormuz.

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