

ISSUE 3

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# Strategic Thinking

## The U.S., Israel, and Iran



- **Business and Trade Stories**

The Dynamics of the U.S. Trade Policies and Measures

# Words from the Editor...

The Iranian nuclear issue from April to June had drawn a lot of regional and international attention, as some dramatic changes regarding this matter had occurred through this period.

The articles collected in ISSUE 3, having a relevance to the Iranian nuclear issue, ranged from observing the developments of the U.S.-Iran nuclear negotiations, exploring the stories behind the exchange of strikes between Iran and Israel, analysing the positions held and messages delivered by the U.S. government, to assessing the role played by the U.S. in bringing the exchange of hostilities between Israel and Iran to an end.

So, ISSUE 3 of the *Strategic Thinking* magazine can almost be a special coverage to the Iranian nuclear issue.

In addition to that, in the business and trade field over the same period, though some twists and turns in relation to the Trump government's trade policies and measures toward the U.S. trading partners had taken place from occasion to occasion, the U.S. and China, by overcoming some of their differences through three rounds of negotiations, had managed to make some progress in improving their economic and trade relations and cooperation.

Wish the readers a good Summer time !

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## 1. POLITICS AND DIPLOMACY

## Developments in the Iran Nuclear Negotiations

### Editor's Note

Before the U.S. and Israel carried out strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities in June, the U.S. and Iran had been seeking diplomatic means to engage each other toward finding a solution on the Iranian nuclear issue.

This article written by Ted Snider was published a few weeks before Israel's preemptive attack on Iran. It reflected some developments in the talks between the U.S. and Iran in relation to the evolving mood of both sides alongside the diplomatic engagement process, from which, we can see that, there were different voices within the U.S. government on dealing with Iran's nuclear programme, which were assumed to have significantly contributed to the U.S. government's decision in attempting to use a quick and heavy strike targeting Iran's nuclear facilities to find a solution.

As a result of the strikes conducted by Israel and the U.S., the diplomatic engagement between the U.S. and Iran, at the moment, appears to be stalled. To restore the diplomatic process toward addressing the Iranian nuclear issue, The parties concerned need to re-take each other's critical concerns into serious consideration.

This article reflected some solutions/ideas which may have already been proposed or considered by the Iranian side. For the interests of the U.S., Iran, and other countries in the Middle East, there should also be a need for the U.S. side to take into account the solutions or ideas suggested by relevant parties including Iran to see whether they could help make a breakthrough toward resolving the Iranian nuclear issue.

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### By Ted Snider

Recently, there have been some developments in the negotiations between Washington and Tehran over Iran's civilian nuclear program.

U.S. President Donald Trump has frequently, but not always, defined the goal of the negotiations as being limited to preventing Iran from getting a nuclear weapon. He repeated that definition as recently as May 15, saying Iran must "permanently and verifiably cease pursuit of nuclear weapons.... They cannot have a nuclear weapon."



US President Donald Trump seen over an Iranian flag (illustrative).

(SHUTTERSTOCK / REUTERS / The Jerusalem Post).

But the message from his team has been contradictory. Then National Security Advisor Mike Waltz said that the U.S. is demanding “full dismantlement,” and Trump’s special envoy Steve Witkoff said that “a Trump deal” means “Iran must stop and eliminate its nuclear enrichment and weaponization program.” Rubio said that Iran can have a civilian nuclear program, but by importing uranium enriched up to 3.67 percent, and no longer by enriching their own. On May 9, Witkoff told Breitbart News that “An enrichment program can never exist in the state of Iran ever again. That’s our red line. No enrichment.”

But Iran has drawn the mirror image red line. Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has placed a firm limit that Iran will not negotiate “the full dismantling of Iran’s nuclear infrastructure.” Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian repeated that red line ahead of the talks, insisting that “Iran has never sought, is not seeking, and will never seek nuclear weapons” but that “Iran will not give up its peaceful nuclear rights.”

U.S. insistence on ending Iran’s civilian enrichment program could put a quick end to the talks. Widening the negotiations to Iran’s missile program or to Iran’s relationship with its regional proxy groups could also jeopardize the talks.

But Trump raised that possibility on May 14 when he suggested that breaking off relations with proxy groups in the region must be part of any deal. Iran “must stop sponsoring terror,” he said, and “halt its bloody proxy wars.”

The contradictory statements emanating from the Trump administration appear to have been “because of a lack of decision on key strategic points,” Trita Parsi, Executive Vice President of Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft and an expert on Iran, told me. And, indeed, on May 7, Trump said, “We haven’t made that decision yet.” “As a result,” Parsi said, “the debate on these points is now, rather unhelpfully, taking place out in public.”

That the talks have progressed to a fourth meeting suggests, at this point, that the public crossing of these Iranian red lines may not be being repeated in the private meetings. Iran’s Foreign Minister hinted at that possibility when he identified one of the difficulties in the negotiations as being “contradictions both inside and outside the negotiating room.” Supporting this possibility, when Trump introduced Iran’s support of regional proxies into the discussion, Araghchi called the remark, not unproductive or unhelpful, but “deceitful.”

And Araghchi may know. Because Barak Ravid of *Axios* has now reported that, during the fourth round of talks, the U.S. presented Iran with a written proposal. The report says that, during the third round, Araghchi gave Trump’s special envoy Steve Witkoff a document with Iran’s proposals for a deal. The U.S. studied it and returned it to Iran with “questions and requests for clarifications.” Iran replied, the U.S. prepared a new proposal and then presented it to Araghchi who has now brought it back to Tehran for consultations with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and President Masoud Pezeshkian.

How far down the path to a settlement the proposal is is unknown. Araghchi said future negotiations now become more difficult. But he said that “despite the difficulty and frankness of the talks, very useful discussions were held.” He then said, “We can now say that both sides have a better understanding of each other’s positions.”

This major breakthrough may have been facilitated by another recent development: a subtle change in tone by Trump. Following a flurry of American threats, the fourth round of talks was postponed. Iranian officials said that [d]epending on the U.S. approach, the date of the next round of talks will be announced.”

Recently, that approach subtly changed. Previously, Trump had formulated Iran’s choice as “If they don’t make a deal, there will be bombing. It will be bombing the likes of which they have never seen before.” But in his most recent remarks, which went largely unnoticed, Trump softened the consequence, saying only “If Iran’s leadership rejects this olive branch … we will have no choice but to inflict massive maximum pressure, drive Iranian oil exports to zero.” Notably, bombing was replaced with sanctions.

On May 15, Trump again seemed to reject the risk of war: “Because things like that get started and they get out of control. I’ve seen it over and over again. They go to war and things get out of control, and we’re not going to let that happen.”

In another surprise development, Iran may have facilitated negotiations with a creative and unexpected proposal.

There are now reports that Iran has suggested for consideration that they could join with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in a nuclear enrichment consortium. Iran would continue to enrich uranium but accept a cap at the 3.67% enrichment required by a nuclear energy program. Saudi Arabia and UAE, who would gain access to Iran's nuclear technology, would be shareholders and funders.

If true, the proposal would be based on a consortium idea first proposed by Princeton physicist Frank von Hippel and former Iranian nuclear negotiator Seyed Hossein Mousavian.

Von Hippel told me that the idea was inspired by the URENCO enrichment consortium of Germany, the Netherlands and Britain and by the ABAAAC consortium of Brazil and Argentina.

The consortiums, he said, allow nuclear experts from each country to "visit each other's facilities to assure themselves that the activities are peaceful." He added that "decisions that might have proliferation implications are made by the [partner] governments." Saudi Arabia's, the Emirates' and Iran's watchful eyes would all help the International Atomic Energy Agency ensure that the program is peaceful.

Aside from the implications for the nuclear negotiations, this level of trust between Iran, Saudi Arabia and UAE was unthinkable only a very short time ago and testifies to the changes going on in the region and in the evolving Iran-Saudi Arabia relationship. That Iran would trust Saudi Arabia with access to its nuclear technology indicates that a region changing shift in the relationship is underway.

As Annelle Sheline, research fellow in the Middle East program at the Quincy Institute, told me, "The Iranians' willingness to join a consortium with Saudi Arabia and the UAE to develop civilian nuclear energy demonstrates significantly improved relations between these countries. This sends a strong signal that Tehran as well as Riyadh and Abu Dhabi would prefer to prioritize cooperation over conflict."

She said that all three countries have growing motivation for peace in the region. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman needs to avoid violent conflict to encourage the foreign investment and tourism needed to fuel his planned economic diversification. Mohammed bin Zayed needs economic security in the face of competition from Saudi Arabia to be a regional hub. Iran needs to encourage peace in the region because of the recent weakening of its own strategic position in the region. Saudi Arabia and Iran have recently been moving towards enhanced friendship both bilaterally and through multinational organizations.

Sheline expressed the hope to me that “Trump should take advantage of these circumstances to sign a nuclear deal with Iran and avoid unnecessary war.”

All of these developments, from the contradictory American messaging, to the until now unreported existence of a written proposal, to the subtle and little noticed change in Trump’s tone to the Iranian idea of a nuclear consortium with Saudi Arabia and UAE are shocking and new. They may present an opportunity to return to a nuclear agreement with Iran and to usher in a new hope for peace and friendly relations both between the U.S. and Iran and in the region. Hopefully, the two sides will seize this opportunity.

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## Exchange of Hostilities between Israel and Iran Following Israel's Preemptive Strikes on Iran: **Reasons and Solutions**

### Key Points

- Israel's preemptive strikes on Iran on early 13 June, and after that, the tit-for-tat hostilities between these two had ever drawn a lot of attention of a significant part of the international community to the already fragile situation in the Middle East region.
- Israel's preemptive operation against Iran has undermined the efforts of relevant parties in helping facilitate the Iranian nuclear talks and also disrupted the U.S.-Iran nuclear negotiation process.
- To restore the diplomatic process of the Iranian nuclear issue, trust building between the U.S. and Iran will be very critical. Apart from that, for achieving a new deal, it is important for the parties concerned, especially the United States, to allow for certain flexibility to take place.

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By Jin Ran



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (L) and Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (R). (Gulf News).

On 13 June, Israel made the first move in conducting a surprise strike on Iran. This happened just two days before the 6th round of Iran-U.S. nuclear negotiations. In retaliation, Iran shortly launched a number of drones and ballistic missiles into Israel. After then, Israel and Iran had traded strikes against each other for 12 days before a ceasefire, mediated by the U.S. President Donald Trump, was reached between these two.

Iran's nuclear facilities, military sites, and oil depots etc. had been attacked by Israel, while Iran had hit Israel's defence headquarters and intelligence buildings and so on. Besides that, a number of Iranian military commanders and nuclear scientists with high profiles had been killed in Israel's strikes.



US President Donald Trump speaks. (Suzanne Plunkett-Pool / Getty Images / RT).

The U.S. President Donald Trump, on 15 June, after the initial exchange of strikes between Israel and Iran, distanced the U.S. from Israel's operations against Iran, and claimed that Israel's strikes on Iran had nothing to do with the United States, yet in the meantime also warned the consequences for Iran, if Iran attacks the U.S. bases in the Middle East.

Likewise, the U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated that there was no involvement of the U.S. in Israel's strikes against Iran, and that the priority of the United States is to protect American forces and interests in the region.



U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio. (Getty Images / RT).

Besides that, U.S. President, on 14 June, held a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin, lasting about an hour and mainly discussing ending the fighting between Israel and Iran as well as the Ukraine crisis.

In addition, Russian President Putin, in response to the hostilities taken by Israel and Iran, had spoken on the phone with both the Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to discuss deescalating the tense situation in the Middle East; while in the phone call with U.S. President Trump on 14 June, and with Chinese President Xi on 19 June, Russian President had offered Moscow's readiness to act as a mediator between Israel and Iran to help end the fighting between these two countries.

Furthermore, the international community including many countries in the Middle East region such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Oman etc., and major powers like China and Russia, as well as a large number of others from across various regions of the world had reacted promptly to either condemn or express concerns on the initial strikes launched by Israel against Iran, and also urged both Israel and Iran to exercise restraints in order to avoid further escalation of the tense situation in the region.

Among others, according to RT, American journalist Tucker Carlson criticized the U.S. government and a number of others supporting the hostilities conducted by Israel, and in the meantime indicated that "the real divide' is not between supporters of Israel and Iran, but 'between warmongers and peacemakers'".



File photo: Journalist Tucker Carlson speaks. (Anna Moneymaker / Getty Images / RT).

### **The Timing of Israel's Preemptive Strikes on Iran**

According to the information gathered by the U.S. intelligence, the Israeli regime has been pushing for a military option to address the Iranian nuclear issue, though over the past months, the Trump administration has been seeking a diplomatic solution to deal with this matter.

More recently, days before Israel launched a preemptive attack on Iran, the Israeli officials claimed that, if the talks between the U.S. and Iran fail, Israel would move on its plan in striking Iran. Yet, two days before the 6th round of U.S.-Iran nuclear negotiations to take place in Oman, Israel had taken a preemptive move against Iran, reflecting that the decision of attacking Iran was already made, regardless of the outcomes of further diplomatic engagements between the U.S. and Iran in the coming steps.

Prior to Israel's strikes on Iran, there was a disagreement within the U.S. government regarding whether an attack on Iran should take place. Choosing to strike Iran at this particular timing might carry a purpose of pushing Iran to agree to a U.S.-Iran nuclear deal, even though there has been no evidence so far to convince that using force could do any help for addressing the Iranian nuclear issue.

Anyway, this might just be part of the purposes for attacking Iran, behind the scene, the reasons should be more complicated than that - meeting the needs of the Israeli domestic political situation and helping sustain the survival of the current Israeli regime could also be

part of the reasons motivating the Israeli government to rush to carry out strikes on Iran.



More than 100,000 Israelis joined anti-government protests across the country on 22 March to protest against the war in Gaza and the Israeli government's inability to bring the Israeli hostages back home. (Getty Images / The Jewish Chronicle).

Alongside the war in the Gaza strip, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been facing a growing pressure domestically and internationally. Internationally, voices of opposing Israel's military operations in Gaza have never ceased. Domestically, according to [CNN's report](#), opposition to a new military conscription bill has led to a domestic political deadlock. Polls showed that, if an early election takes place, Netanyahu would lose. Members of the parliament had already discussed the possibility of dissolving the parliament, which would result in an early election. On Wednesday 11 June, the Israeli lawmakers decided to give Netanyahu more time to deal with the matters related to Iran.

Moreover, seeking regime change of Iran, according to the [information exposed by CNN](#), could also be a reason to explain the hostilities of Israel toward Iran. Nonetheless, it is not certain what makes the Israeli government believe that replacing the current Iranian regime could make a difference in terms of altering Iran's policies toward Israel, as far as Israel refuses to adjust its own policies in dealing with Iran.

Furthermore, against the ongoing domestic, regional, and international situation facing the current Israeli regime, Israel just doesn't want the U.S.-Israel alliance relationship being challenged by any possible external factors. Reaching a deal between the U.S. and Iran does not serve Israel's interests at the moment after all, from Israel's perspective.

### **What Impacts of Israel's Preemptive Strikes Have Generated on the U.S.-Iran Nuclear Talks?**

The U.S. officials claimed that the U.S. was not involved in Israel's strikes on Iran, yet the U.S. had knowledge of this before Israel's preemptive operations, as on 11 June, the U.S. had notified the non-essential staff of the country's diplomatic missions in some locations across the Middle East and their family members to leave the region. Then, on Thursday 12 June, as previously proposed by the U.S., Britain, France, and Germany, the UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), passed a resolution on the Iranian nuclear issue, which was the first time in almost 20 years for the UN nuclear agency to pass such a resolution, declaring Iran in violation of its nuclear non-proliferation obligations.

These apparently can be taken as preparations serving a purpose of facilitating a precondition for Israel's Friday strikes on Iran.

So, under this circumstance, regardless of whether or not the U.S. had actually been involved in Israel's initial hostilities against Iran. They have already caused an impact on the U.S. and the negotiation process between the U.S. and Iran. They have also undermined the diplomatic efforts of relevant parties in helping facilitate the talks on the Iranian nuclear issue.

The repercussions generated are detrimental to the building of confidence and trust between Iran and the U.S. on the nuclear negotiations in the coming steps. It is not sure what the U.S. government would plan to do next for restoring the nuclear negotiation process, and how likely Iran would agree to the terms set by the U.S., against the current context.

### **Possibility of Restoring U.S.-Iran Nuclear Talks and Jointly Making A Major Breakthrough toward Reaching A New Iranian Nuclear Deal**

The Trump administration insists that Iran cannot have a nuclear weapon. Iran also claims that it has no plan to produce a nuclear bomb, and that maintaining a low level of capacity in enriching uranium is just for a purpose of civilian use.

So, in this case, Iran and the U.S. actually have had a consensus already on the fundamentals concerning Iran's nuclear programme. The big difference between these two is related to whether Iran can maintain its own capacity in enriching uranium and to what level its enrichment can be allowed to reach.

Therefore, a very important work in the negotiations should focus on solving the issue of enrichment. It is assumed that, for reaching a new deal, there is a need for the U.S. and Iran to respect each other's red lines (the U.S. President has been very firm that Iran cannot

produce a nuclear weapon. So, this is assumed to be the red line of the United States, even though other officials of the Trump government may have made different claims). Generally, it would be helpful for the parties concerned, especially the United States, to allow for certain flexibility in the negotiations to take place.

Besides that, the two sides also need to take the feasibility of implementing the new deal as a priority in the meantime. Under the previously signed Iranian nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the IAEA had played a major role in inspecting Iran's nuclear programme.

In order to guarantee transparency and impartiality of the inspections, a parallel inspection model, apart from the IAEA system, can be adopted. It basically means that the nuclear experts from third party countries mainly those based in the Middle East can be regularly invited to inspect Iran's nuclear facilities, and the findings would be independently produced by the nuclear experts from the partner countries.

To this, according to relevant reports, Iran may have taken into consideration establishing a nuclear enrichment consortium together with Iran's Middle East neighbours including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Under the consortium, Iran would accept regular inspections to its enrichment programme by experts from the participating countries of the consortium, and the decisions of whether or not Iran's nuclear programme has proliferation risks would be made by these countries.

The implementation of the just mentioned model would not only help ensure the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme, but also contribute to the building of trust between Iran and its Middle East neighbours, and to further extent, a long-term peace and stability in the Middle East region.

Under the previous Iranian nuclear deal, the development of Iran's nuclear programme had been under strict inspection and supervision. According to the media coverage, only after the U.S. unilaterally withdrew from the formerly signed Iranian nuclear deal, Iran had started to develop the country's uranium enrichment.

From Iran's perspective apparently, given that the U.S. breached the deal in the first place, before a new deal being reached, it is reasonable and legitimate for Iran not to abide by its obligations signed in the previously reached Iranian nuclear deal anymore.

For achieving and implementing a new Iranian nuclear deal, which would prove to be a major success of the U.S. Middle East policy under the Trump government, restoring and sustaining trust and confidence between Iran and the U.S. will be very critical. Apart from that, the U.S. will need to properly consult and manage the possible differences raised between the U.S.

and Israel concerning this matter from time to time.

President Trump depicted himself as a deal-maker and a peacemaker. It is assumed that a majority of Americans and numerous others from across the globe also think so. That was also one of most important reasons for him to get elected. Americans believed that President Trump more likely has the willingness as well as capacity to end the wars in the Middle East and Europe. Apparently, for achieving peace in the Middle East and Europe, the Trump government still has a lot of work to do.

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The views expressed in the article are those of the author.

## **Another Iraq? Military Expert Warns U.S.**

### **Has No Real Plan If It Joins Israel's War on Iran**

#### **Editor's Note**

This video interview by Amy Goodman, host of [democracynow.org](http://democracynow.org), to William Hartung, senior research fellow at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, was made on 20 June, one day before the U.S. strike on three of Iran's nuclear sites, Fordo, Natanz, and Isfahan. By then, there was no idea whether or not the U.S. could possibly join a war with Iran.

The discussions in this interview warned the devastating consequences of a war with Iran, which can be compared to that of the U.S.-led war in Iraq years ago.

The content of the video recording also reflected that the voices calling for a diplomatic solution and opposing the U.S. involvement in another Middle East war from across a wide range of sectors including the scholarly field, the media sector, and the support base of the Trump government etc. were growing higher, alongside the exchange of strikes between Israel and Iran.

The U.S. government had finally made a decision of not getting into a war with Iran and also of managing to bring the hostilities between Israel and Iran to an end. So, we can say that this decision has reflected the will of a broad range of the American society and beyond.

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**By Amy Goodman and William Hartung**

#### *Content of the Video Recording*

As Israeli warplanes continue to pummel Tehran and other parts of the country, President Trump has given mixed messages on whether the U.S. will join Israel's war on Iran. Trump's press secretary, Karoline Leavitt, delivered a message on Thursday that Trump will decide on direct U.S. involvement in the next two weeks. Leavitt delivered the message shortly after Trump met with his former adviser Steve Bannon, who has publicly warned against war with Iran. The U.S. is reportedly considering dropping "bunker buster" bombs on underground Iranian nuclear facilities. "It's reminiscent of the beginning of the Iraq War, when they said it's

going to be a cakewalk," says William Hartung, senior research fellow at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft.

A U.S.-based Iranian human rights group reports that the Israeli attacks have killed at least 639 people in Iran, while Iran's retaliatory strikes in Israel have killed an estimated two dozen.



Watch this video recording, follow the link [Here...](#)

**AMY GOODMAN:** Iran's foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, is set to hold talks with France, Germany and the United Kingdom today in Geneva as Israel's attacks on Iran enter a second week. A U.S.-based Iranian human rights group reports the Israeli attacks have killed at least 639 people. Israeli warplanes have repeatedly pummeled Tehran and other parts of Iran. Iran has responded by continuing to launch missile strikes into Israel. Hundreds of thousands of Iranians protested today in Iran against Israel.

Meanwhile, President Trump continues to give mixed messages on whether the U.S. will join Israel's attack on Iran. On Wednesday, Trump told reporters, quote, "I may do it, I may not do it," unquote. On Thursday, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt delivered a new statement from the president.

**PRESS SECRETARY KAROLINE LEAVITT:** Regarding the ongoing situation in Iran, I know there has been a lot of speculation amongst all of you in the media regarding the president's decision-making and whether or not the United States will be directly

involved. In light of that news, I have a message directly from the president. And I quote: "Based on the fact that there's a substantial chance of negotiations that may or may not take place with Iran in the near future, I will make my decision whether or not to go within the next two weeks."

**AMY GOODMAN:** President Trump has repeatedly used that term, "two weeks," when being questioned about decisions in this term and his first term as president. Leavitt delivered the message shortly after President Trump met with his former adviser Steve Bannon, who's publicly warned against war with Iran. Bannon recently said, quote, "We can't do this again. We'll tear the country apart. We can't have another Iraq," Bannon said.

This comes as Trump has reportedly sidelined National Intelligence Director Tulsi Gabbard from key discussions on Iran. In March, Gabbard told lawmakers the intelligence community, quote, "continues to assess that Iran is not building a nuclear weapon," unquote. But on Tuesday, Trump dismissed her statement, saying, "I don't care what she said."

Earlier Thursday, an Iranian missile hit the main hospital in southern Israel in Beersheba. After the strike, Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz threatened to assassinate Ayatollah Ali Khamenei Thursday, saying Iran's supreme leader, quote, "cannot continue to exist," unquote. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited the hospital and likened Iran's attack to the London Blitz. Netanyahu stunned many in Israel by saying, quote, "Each of us bears a personal cost. My family has not been exempt. This is the second time my son Avner has canceled a wedding due to missile threats," unquote.

We're joined now by William Hartung, senior research fellow at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. His new piece for The National Interest is headlined "Don't Get Dragged into a War with Iran."

Can you talk about what's going on right now, Bill, the whole question of whether the U.S. is going to use a bunker-buster bomb that has to be delivered by a B-2 bomber, which only the U.S. has?

**WILLIAM HARTUNG:** Yeah. I mean, this is a case of undue trust in technology. The U.S. is always getting in trouble when they think there's this miracle solution. A lot of experts aren't sure this would even work, or if it did, it would take multiple bombings. And, of course, Iran's not going to sit on its hands. They'll respond possibly by killing U.S. troops in the region. Then we'll have escalation from there. It's reminiscent of the beginning of the Iraq War, when they said, "It's going to be a cakewalk. It's not going to cost anything." Couple trillion dollars, hundreds of thousands of casualties, many U.S. veterans coming home with PTSD, a regime that was

sectarian that paved the way for ISIS — it couldn't have gone worse. And so, you know, this is a different beginning, but the end is uncertain, and I don't think we want to go there.

**AMY GOODMAN:** So, can you talk about the GBU-57, the bunker-buster bomb? And how is it that this discussion going on within the White House about the use of the bomb — and, of course, the U.S. has gone back and forth — I should say President Trump has gone back and forth whether he's fully involved with this war, at first saying they knew about it, but Israel was doing it, then saying, "We have total control of the skies over Tehran," saying "we," not "Israel," and what exactly it would mean if the U.S. dropped this bomb and the fleet that the U.S. is moving in?

**WILLIAM HARTUNG:** Yes, well, the notion is, you know, it's heavy steel, it's more explosive power than any conventional bomb. But it only goes so deep, and they don't actually know how deep this facility is buried. And if it's going in a straight line, and it's to one side, it's just not clear that it's going to work. And, of course, if it does, Iran is going to rebuild. They're going to go straight for a nuclear weapon. They're not going to trust negotiations anymore.

So, apparently, the two weeks is partly because Trump's getting conflicting reports from his own people about this. Now, if he had actual independent military folks, like Mark Milley in the first term, I think we'd be less likely to go in. But they made sure to have loyalists. I mean, Pete Hegseth is not a profile in courage. He's not going to stand up to Trump on this. He might not even know the consequences. So, a lot of the press coverage is about this bomb, not about the consequences of an act of war.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Right, about using it. In your recent piece, you wrote, "Israeli officials ... suggested ... their attacks may result in regime change in Iran despite the devastating ... destabilizing impact ... such efforts in the region" would have. Can you talk about the significance of Israel putting forward and then Trump going back and forth on whether or not Ali Khamenei will be targeted?

**WILLIAM HARTUNG:** Yeah, I think my colleague Trita Parsi put it well. There's been no example of regime change in the region that has come out with a better result. They don't know what kind of regime will come in. Could be to the right of the current one. Could just be chaos that would fuel terrorism, and who knows what else. So, you know, they're just taking — they're winging it. They have no idea what they're getting into. And I think Trump, he doesn't want to seem like Netanyahu's pulling him by the nose, so when he gets out in front of Trump, Trump then says, "Oh, that was my idea." But it's almost as if Benjamin Netanyahu is running U.S. foreign policy, and Trump is kind of following along.

**AMY GOODMAN:** I mean, you have Netanyahu back in 2002 saying, "Iran is imminently going to have a nuclear bomb." That was more than two decades ago.

**WILLIAM HARTUNG:** Exactly. That's just a cover for wanting to take out the regime. And he's come, and he spoke to the U.S. Congress. He's made presentations all over the world. And his intelligence has been proven wrong over and over and over. And when we had the Iran deal, he had European allies, he had China, he had Russia. There hadn't been a deal like that where all these countries were on the same page in living memory, and it was working. And Trump trashed it and now has to start over.

**AMY GOODMAN:** So, talk about the War Powers Act. The Virginia Senator Kaine has said that — has just put forward a bill around saying it must be — Congress must vote on this. Where is Schumer? Where is Jeffries on this, the Democratic House and Senate leaders?

**WILLIAM HARTUNG:** Well, a lot of the so-called leaders are not leading. I mean, when is the moment that you shouldn't step forward if we're possibly going to get into another disastrous war? But I think they're concerned about being viewed as critical of Israel. They don't want to go out on a limb. So, you've got a progressive group that's saying, you know, "This has to be authorized by Congress." You've got Republicans who are doubtful, but don't want to stand up to Trump because they don't want to lose their jobs. Risk your job. I mean, this is a huge thing. You know, don't just sort of be a time-server.

**AMY GOODMAN:** So, according to a report from IAEA, the International Atomic Energy Agency, released in May, Iran has accumulated roughly 120 kilograms of uranium enriched to 60%, which is 30% away from weapons-grade level of 90%. You have Rafael Grossi, the head of the IAEA, saying this week that they do not have evidence that Iran has the system for a nuclear bomb.

**WILLIAM HARTUNG:** Yes, well, a lot of the discussion points out — they don't talk about, when you've got the uranium, you have to build the weapon, you have to make it work on a missile. It's not you get the uranium, you have a weapon overnight. So, there's time to deal with that, should they go forward through negotiations. And we had a deal that was working, which Trump threw aside in his first term.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Talk about the foreign minister of Iran, Araghchi, in Geneva right now speaking with his counterparts from Britain, France, the EU.

**WILLIAM HARTUNG:** Well, I don't think U.S. allies in Europe want to go along with this, and I think he's looking for some leverage over Trump. And, of course, Trump is very hard to read, but even his own base, majority of Trump supporters, don't want to go to war. You've got

people like Tucker Carlson, Steve Bannon saying it would be a disaster. But ultimately, it comes down to Trump. He's unpredictable. He's transactional. He'll calculate what he thinks it'll mean for him.

**AMY GOODMAN:** And what impact does protest have around the country, as we wrap up?

**WILLIAM HARTUNG:** Well, I think taking a stand is infectious. So many institutions were caving to Trump. And the more people stand up, 2,000 demonstrations around the country, the more the folks sitting on the fence, the millions of people who, they're against Trump, but they don't know what to do, the more of us that get involved, the better chance we have of turning this thing around. So, we should not let them discourage us. We need to build power to push back against all these horrible things.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Finally, if the U.S. were to bomb the nuclear site that it would require the bunker-buster bomb to hit below ground, underground, are we talking about nuclear fallout here?

**WILLIAM HARTUNG:** I think there would certainly be radiation that would, of course, affect the Iranian people. They've already had many civilian deaths. It's not this kind of precise thing that's only hitting military targets. And that, too, has to affect Iran's view of this. I mean, they were shortly away from another negotiation. You know, now their country's being devastated. So, can they trust us?

**AMY GOODMAN:** Bill Hartung is senior research fellow at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. His new piece for The National Interest is headlined "Don't Get Dragged into a War with Iran." Go to [democracynow.org](http://democracynow.org); we'll provide the link.

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The interviewer and interviewee:

The interviewer, **Amy Goodman** is an American journalist, columnist, and co-founder and host of [democracynow.org](http://democracynow.org); the Interviewee, **William Hartung** is a senior research fellow at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft.

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## **2. BUSINESS AND TRADE**

## The Dynamics of the U.S. Trade Policies and Measures

### Key Points

1. The second Trump government has been taking steps, including announcing and twisting a series of measures on tariffs and export restrictions, to re-shape the U.S. economic and trade relationship with a significant number of countries, with the purpose of seeking a more balanced trade with these countries on the one hand, and more crucially of enhancing the U.S. position in the global economic and trade system on the other hand.
2. Since the U.S. government announced its “reciprocal” tariff measure in early April, some big changes have taken place in relation to the trade measures respectively taken by the U.S. and China in dealing with each other. Out of three rounds of negotiations, the two major economies had managed to subsequently overcome some of their differences over tariffs and export control measures, and by 27 June, agreed to further deescalate their tension in trade, for the interests of these two countries and beyond.

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By Jin Ran

### Twists and Turns of the U.S. Trade Measures So Far under the Trump Government

Over the past months, the U.S. government has adopted a series of measures in managing the country’s economic and trade relationship with other countries, ranging from the tariffs imposed in February and March on the U.S. close trading partners such as China, Mexico, and Canada, to the “reciprocal” duties announced in early April targeting nearly all countries from across the globe, and then to the China-related new export restrictions introduced in May.

Meanwhile, there have been some twists and turns over the U.S. trade measures taking place through the same period - for instance, following the U.S. president signing an executive order of imposing 25% tariffs on Mexican and Canadian goods on 1 February 2025, the U.S. government on 3 February put a 30-day pause on the 25% levies on these two countries, and then the 25% duties on these two with some exceptions returned on 4 March; then again, after announcing the “reciprocal” tariff measure toward a significant number of countries on 2 April, the U.S. government on 9 April paused the implementation of this measure toward these countries, excluding China, for 90 days.

Among all the dynamics happened in recent months in relation to the U.S. trade policies and measures, some dramatic changes had taken place between the two largest economies, the United States and China. Following the announcement of the U.S. “reciprocal” tariffs in early April, China had responded by adopting a series of countermeasures including imposing additional 34% tariffs on all U.S. goods and adding a number of U.S. companies into China’s export control list and unreliable entity list. After that, a range of tit-for-tat measures taken by the two countries had been followed through, driving the tariffs imposed by China and the U.S. on each other to 125% on U.S. goods and 145% on Chinese products, respectively.



U.S. President Donald Trump softens his tone on China-related tariffs when speaking to reporters in a question-and-answer session in the Oval Office of the White House on 22 April 2025 in Washington, DC. (Chip Somodevilla / Getty Images / CNN).

Then, on 22 April, the U.S. position on China-related tariffs had a big U-turn, with both the U.S. president Donald Trump and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent signaling the unsustainable nature of the high tariffs imposed by China and the United States on each other - Treasury Secretary Bessent expecting the tension over tariffs between these two countries to deescalate in the very near term, while the U.S. president in a White House news event saying that “the high tariffs on Chinese goods will ‘come down substantially, but it won’t be zero’”.

Shortly after that, on 24 April, according to the media release, China reduced tariffs on some U.S.-made semiconductors. Further, a series of back-and-forth engagements between the two countries led to a meeting held in Geneva on 11-12 May, out of which, the U.S. and Chinese

officials reached a consensus on rolling back the high tariffs imposed on each other for 90 days, with the U.S. lowering the tariff rate on Chinese goods from 145% to 30%, and China reducing the rate on U.S. imports from 125% to 10%. Apart from this, the two countries also agreed to establish a mechanism, through which, to continue discussing and consulting economic and trade issues between the two nations.



US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, China's Vice Minister of Finance Liao Min, US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer and China's International Trade Representative and Vice Minister of Commerce Li Chenggang, met in Switzerland in May to discuss trade relations.

(Keystone / EDA / Martial Trezzini / Handout / Reuters / CNN).

Further to the above, from mid-May to late June, some new developments on the trade measures respectively taken by China and the U.S. in managing their economic and trade relations had occurred.

More specifically, following the consensus reached between the U.S. and China in Geneva, the U.S. introduced a new measure in limiting exports of chips software, ethane, and jet engines to China, citing the reason that China had not lifted export controls on rare earth minerals. Besides that, the U.S. threatened to revoke the U.S. visas issued to Chinese students. Meanwhile, China stated that it had been complying with the Geneva consensus, and accused

the U.S. of breaking its promises.

Then, the new dispute led to another two rounds of negotiations between China and the U.S. taken place in London. At their meeting on 11 June, the two countries agreed on a framework “in principle” for implementing the Geneva consensus, with a focus on loosening export controls on rare earths and magnets by China, in exchange, the U.S. would lift some China-related export restrictions. Then, on 27 June, the two sides agreed that they would start to take tangible actions to implement the principled framework reached on 11 June. In addition, the U.S. would stop seeking to revoke Chinese students’ U.S. visas.



U.S. and Chinese officials pose for a photo during trade discussions at Lancaster House in London on 9 June. (U.S. Treasury Department / Handout / AFP / Getty Images / CNN).

From the above, we can see that the U.S. trade measures toward various trading partners have been evolving. Then, so far, how to understand the dynamics of the U.S. trade policies and measures? And compared to the first Trump government and the former Biden government, what have been changed in terms of the U.S. trade policies and measures so far?

### **What Have Been Changed in the U.S. Trade Policies and Measures under the Second Trump Government?**

Since the U.S. president Trump’s second term began, the U.S. has been taking steps to adjust

the country's policies in a number of areas including the political, economic, and security fields. On the economic and trade front, the U.S. has been seeking to reshape the country's economic and trade relations with a variety of trading partners by launching, implementing, and twisting a series of tariff and export control measures, as having just mentioned in the previous paragraphs.

In the meantime, there is also a need to see that, compared to the "decoupling" policy ever adopted and implemented by the first Trump government, under Trump's second term, the "decoupling" policy is obviously not a focus of the U.S. government anymore. The U.S. main goal at the current stage appears to be focusing on re-balancing the country's trade relations with a wide variety of partners, with the purpose of maintaining the U.S. status in the global economic and trade arena.

Somehow, instead of aiming to stop trade and other kinds of economic exchanges, the Trump administration has actually been seeking alternative means to economically benefit the country. For instance, by lifting the Biden-era restrictions on exports of AI chips to the Middle East, the U.S. chip giant Nvidia has been able to secure a big deal with a Saudi startup Humain - the two companies formed a strategic partnership and agreed to jointly build AI factories in Saudi Arabia.

Rescinding the Biden-era curbs on exporting AI chips can be one of the major policy shifts from the former U.S. government, as a result of which, the U.S. chip giant Nvidia has quickly expanded the company's business in the Middle East region.

Besides that, compared to the "decoupling" policy of the first Trump government and the "de-risking" policy of the former Biden government, which had mainly sought to generate an impact on China-U.S. economic and trade ties, under the second Trump government, the U.S. "reciprocal" tariffs have touched on nearly all countries and regions from across the globe, reflecting that the U.S. government tends to pursue a more balanced trade not only with the U.S. key trading partners, but also with as more countries and regions as possible.

It is not certain, to what degree, the U.S. government could manage to secure a more balanced trade with all these countries and regions being targeted by the U.S. tariffs. Nonetheless, regardless of the final outcomes, from the U.S. government's perspective, setting the stakes in the first place could be a means to help make the U.S. remain active in regional and global economic and trade affairs and further enhance the U.S. position in the global economic and trade system. It could also serve as a catalyst to help facilitate further discussion and consultation and expand collaboration between the U.S. and its important trading partners.

According to CNN's report, instead of seeking to negotiate with all the countries and regions

being affected by the U.S. tariffs, the Trump government would focus on negotiating deals with probably 18 important trading partners; for all others, the U.S. may send letters to them by setting a rate being fair to both the U.S. and these countries; for the smaller trading partners, the U.S. may also consider doing a number of regional deals by setting different rates for various regions - for instance, as the U.S. Treasury Secretary Bessent said, "this is the rate for Central America, this is the rate for this part of Africa."

### **What Could Happen Next in the Short and Long Run over Tariffs and non-Tariffs Issues in the Economic and Trade Area?**

It is not certain how likely new twists and turns over tariffs and other kinds of measures from occasion to occasion might take place, as being uncertain is one of the negotiating tactics of the Trump government. Yet, there is also a need to realize that, should a serious agreement be reached between the U.S. and its trading partner(s), for the interests of both the U.S. and other parties concerned, they would try to maintain a certain level of stability on their commitments.

Apart from tariffs, non-tariffs issues in trade and other subject areas in the meantime might appear as well from a short- and long-term perspective. For example, alongside China and the U.S. managing to reach a consensus on mutually rolling back the high tariffs imposed on each other for 90 days through negotiations in Geneva, as having just mentioned in the previous part of this piece, a new export control measure on limiting the U.S. export of chips software, ethane, and jet engines to China had been introduced and implemented in May and June, before the two countries reached a settlement deal on 27 June to mutually loosen the export restrictions toward each other.

Besides that, around the same time, another issue related to China's dispute of the U.S. attempt to interfere in the use of Chinese tech company Huawei-made advanced chips by foreign companies had also been raised.

The U.S. Commerce Department initially issued a guidance warning that "using Huawei Ascend chips anywhere in the world would violate U.S. export control," though shortly the U.S. adjusted the wording of this warning by removing "anywhere in the world". In response, China's Ministry of Commerce stated that "any organization or individual that implements or assists in implementing these U.S. measures [on globally banning the use of China-made advanced chips] may be in violation of China's Anti-Foreign Sanctions Law and other relevant laws and regulations, and must bear corresponding legal responsibilities."

In the technology filed, one of the main objectives for exercising the U.S. export control measures was to limit the export of the U.S. advanced technology products such as chips to

foreign countries including China. Nonetheless, the practice of these measures so far hasn't prevented China and maybe other countries as well from developing their own high-end products including AI chips.



AI chip giant Nvidia spoke out against the AI chips-related export control measures adopted by the Biden government. (Justin Sullivan / Getty Images / CNN).

As a result of the execution of the relevant export control measures, the business activities of some U.S. and foreign companies in the foreign markets have been affected. Various sectors including the Washington-based Semiconductor Industry Association and the U.S. tech companies Nvidia and Oracle under the former U.S. government had already expressed concerns to the AI chips-related export control measures. More recently, CEO of the U.S. tech company Nvidia, Jensen Huang, in response to the U.S. export controls to China, indicated that they would only "give Chinese AI companies 'the spirit, the energy, and the government support' to accelerate their own development."

According to a CNN report cited from CNBC in June, the U.S. may consider further easing restrictions on exports of microchips to China. Nonetheless, restrictions on "very high-end Nvidia chips that are capable of powering artificial intelligence systems" will still likely remain in place.

Just like what the U.S. and China have done in managing their disputes over tariffs and export controls through negotiation and consultation over the past months, it is believed that the two countries will be able to deal with their differences over other areas of issues as well.

Ideally, by being able to overcome the frictions between these two countries raised from time to time, they would more closely approach to the point of peaceful coexistence, even under the circumstance that the U.S. would likely continue maintaining an advantage in a number of areas for the years to come.

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The views expressed in this article are those of the author.

### **3. OPINION**

## **The Role Played by the United States in Ending the Recent Hostilities between Israel and Iran**

### **Highlights**

The strikes carried out by the U.S. and Israel have disrupted the diplomatic process of the U.S.-Iran nuclear negotiations. Yet, given that the U.S. had timely brought the situation back under the U.S. control and prevented the U.S., Israel, and Iran from together slipping into a widened regional conflict, there should still be a big space for the U.S. and Iran to strike a deal, as far as the two sides would allow for certain flexibility to take place in the coming steps.

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By Jin Ran

After 12 days of trading hostilities between Israel and Iran, under the mediation of the U.S. President Donald Trump, these two countries reached a ceasefire on Monday 23 June.



American President Donald Trump, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. (tv9hindi.com).

## The Role Played by the U.S. in Ending the Recent Hostilities between Israel and Iran

Though other countries also welcomed the ceasefire agreement, it should particularly be a good news for the U.S., Israel, Iran, and other countries in the Middle East region. At a critical moment, the U.S. government had made a timely and right decision of not letting the hostilities between Iran and Israel slip into a widened regional conflict.

Managing to bring the fighting between Israel and Iran to an end didn't appear to be an easy decision for the U.S. government, as prior to that, alongside the attacks between Israel and Iran toward each other, there had been some confusing and even conflicting messages coming out of the Trump administration.

It can be recalled that, following Israel's initial attack on Iran, both the U.S. President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio distanced the U.S. from Israel's preemptive move against Iran, yet in the meantime, the U.S. President also acknowledged the U.S. having knowledge of Israel's strikes on Iran.

Besides that, unlike what a large number of countries from across the globe had reacted - either condemned or expressed concerns on Israel's strikes on Iran, some in the U.S. had supported Israel's preemptive operation against Iran, citing the reason that the development of Iran's nuclear programme is an imminent threat, even though according to the assessments of both the U.S. intelligence and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), there is no evidence that Iran is close to being capable of producing a nuclear bomb.



Iran's major nuclear facilities on the map. (CBS News).

On 21 June, the U.S. joined Israel's attacks on Iran by striking three of Iran's nuclear sites,

Fordo, Natanz and Esfahan; and shortly after that, a statement made by the U.S. President reflected that the situation had been under the U.S. control, and that the U.S. and Israel had been in coordination of Israel's operation against Iran. Then, hours after Iran's retaliatory attack on the U.S. military base in Qatar, the U.S. had managed to broker a ceasefire between Iran and Israel.

So, how to view the confusing messages delivered by the U.S. government alongside the 12-day exchange of hostilities between the Israel and Iran?

Apparently, the U.S. top priority was and still is to get Iran to agree to a new Iranian nuclear deal. Nonetheless, there was no unified and definite position within the Trump government regarding how to achieve this goal - by using force or by applying diplomatic means.

If by using force, the Trump government expected to quickly get this matter done (in other words, to force Iran to agree to a deal), within a limited and calculated time frame, without costing the U.S. that much, and meanwhile, most crucially, without dragging the U.S. into a regional conflict.

Bearing this objective could explain why the U.S. had forced a maximum pressure by deploying the heavy bunker buster bombs to strike Iran's nuclear sites, as by doing so, the U.S. assumed that Iran should have agreed to the terms set by the United States. In addition, dropping the bunker buster bombs may also have performed a role of displaying the U.S. strength, through which, to stop Iran's strikes and further to end the hostilities between Iran and Israel.

However, executing a quick and maximum pressure tactic didn't work for Iran. So, the U.S. still needs to go back to diplomacy in managing the Iranian nuclear issue.

From the above, we can also see that, although both Israel and the U.S. carried out strikes on Iran, their strikes had borne different top priorities. Israel preferred using military means to deal with Iran's nuclear programme, while the U.S. was very much intended to use the maximum pressure to force Iran to make peace, and to strike a deal with Iran. The Trump government doesn't want a war with Iran. The U.S. foreign policy goal toward the Middle East, under the Trump administration, is assumed to preserve the U.S. interests as well as to maintain a broad peace in the region. Reaching a new deal with Iran, through which, to prevent Iran from having a nuclear weapon, could significantly contribute to the U.S. policy objective of protecting the U.S. interests as well as of maintaining peace in the region.

According to the statement made by the U.S. side, the U.S. bunker buster bomb strikes have completely obliterated Iran's key nuclear enrichment facilities. In other words, they have effectively eliminated Iran's nuclear threat.

## The Role Played by the U.S. in Ending the Recent Hostilities between Israel and Iran

Nonetheless, even if this claim is true, the outcomes of the strikes cannot fundamentally address the Iranian nuclear issue.

Besides that, the strikes conducted by Israel and the U.S. not only have disrupted the diplomatic process of the U.S.-Iran nuclear negotiations, but also could have further enhanced Iran's position on uranium enrichment - if, hopefully, not on making a nuclear weapon. So, diplomacy should still be the best path forward for addressing the concerns of the U.S. and Iran.

The U.S. shouldn't expect to use a quick and easy way to address the Iranian nuclear issue, while in the meantime refusing to solve problems and to listen to the concerns of and solutions proposed by the Iranian side.

At least, at a very critical time, based on the calculation of a number of factors such as the likely response of the American society to a U.S. war with Iran, the possible involvement of other powers and groups in this matter and so on, the Trump government had managed to get the situation back under the U.S. control, and prevented the U.S., Israel, and Iran together from falling into a worse war scenario.

So, under this circumstance, it is assumed that there should still be a big chance for the U.S. and Iran to make a new nuclear deal, before Iran is fully committed to pursuing a nuclear weapon.

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### The author:

Jin Ran is a Research Analyst & Director of Strategic Thinking, a research and advisory think tank.

The views expressed in this opinion piece are those of the author.

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# Intellectual Property Protection



# Intellectual Property Protection



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The magazine aims to catch some of the most pressing issues happening in the political, economic, and security landscapes and maybe other fields as well from across the globe.

It consists of four columns: Politics, Business, Opinion, and Brand Influence.

The readers of this publication could be policy-makers, diplomats, academics, students, and also those from the research institutes, think tanks, international organizations, transnational networks, corporations and groups, business entities, and media, as well as the general public who for various reasons would like to follow the developments of some critical issues drawing regional and international concern.

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