**Headline:** Will Trump Return to the Iran–US Nuclear Deal?

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**[Article Body:]**

After a White House meeting between Trump and Netanyahu, Netanyahu said, ‘We’re both united in the goal that Iran does not get nuclear weapons’. [He added](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/netanyahu-if-iran-nukes-can-be-fully-stopped-diplomatically-that-would-be-a-good-thing/), ‘If it can be done diplomatically, in a full way, the way it was done in Libya, I think that would be a good thing’. The [Libyan model](https://iranwire.com/en/politics/140239-the-libya-model-disarmament-what-it-means-for-us-iran-talks/) is where President Gaddafi surrendered and disarmed, and was promptly overthrown and killed by the rebels who were militarily supported by the US, UK and the French. The same Gaddafi, who was the beating heart of the African Union and tried to make it a force against neo-colonialism in Africa. Even today, ten years after the murder of Gaddafi, Libya remains a state destroyed by the US and its allies, the country divided into warring groups. Netanyahu’s goal for Iran is obviously the same: repeat Libya in Iran. The problem for Israel is that Iran is a much bigger country and has not only a long civilisational history but has obviously learned from recent history, including Gaddafi’s fate.

The two rounds of indirect negotiations with Oman acting as the intermediary have led to an agenda on which the US and Iran can begin direct talks in Oman starting from 26 April. In the last two rounds of talks, the two sides were in separate rooms, with Oman acting as their common interlocutor and an agenda for talks was negotiated.

Why did the US, specifically [President Trump, walk away](https://peoplesdemocracy.in/2018/0513_pd/rogue-nation-us-breaks-iran-nuclear-deal) from the same Iran deal in 2018? And why does he want to have a deal now, having walked away from it earlier? Is it to achieve at the negotiating table what the last seven years of renewed sanctions have failed to achieve? Or is it because the window for armed action to denuclearise Iran is virtually over?

Before we get into how Trump views the world and Iran, let us take a quick look at the Iran–US nuclear deal or, more correctly, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreement. This was negotiated and signed between the five Security Council Permanent members (P5), plus Germany-European Union (P5+1), and Iran in 2015. The US President at that time was Obama. After Trump took over the US presidency in 2018, he walked out of the nuclear deal, claiming it was too soft on Iran.

Since only the US had pulled out of the JCPOA, the other European countries could have kept the JCPOA and the Iran deal alive. That did not happen, as the US used its control over the dollar and global financial flows and the threat of financial sanctions to ensure that most countries and companies stopped trading with Iran. The US control over the dollar allows it to impose unilateral sanctions and punish organisations that violate not just international law but also US laws or even US policies.

Contrary to what the US officials – [Stephen Miran](https://www.hudsonbaycapital.com/documents/FG/hudsonbay/research/638199_A_Users_Guide_to_Restructuring_the_Global_Trading_System.pdf) and [Peter Navarro](https://static.project2025.org/2025_MandateForLeadership_CHAPTER-26.pdf) – are arguing, the dollar as the world’s reserve currency is not only not a burden on the US but allows it to control trade and financial flows in the world in a way no other country can. Not surprisingly, [Trump has threatened](https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/trump-threatens-100-tariffs-against-brics-countries-if-they-try-replacing-us-dollar/article69126026.ece) any country with 100% tariffs if it tries to create an alternate global currency.

With the JCPOA in 2015, Iran reduced its number of gas centrifuges from 19,000 to about 5,000 and its inventory of Low Enriched Uranium (3.7% purity) from 10,000 kg to only 300 kg. Once Trump pulled the US out of the JCPOA, and the European signatories provided no relief from the US sanctions, Iran announced that it would no longer abide by the JCPOA terms. It started to enrich uranium beyond 5% and inducted advanced centrifuges in more significant numbers. Iran stepped up its enrichment first to 20% and then to 60% purity. It currently has about 13,000 centrifuges in two locations: Natanz and Fordow. The last step – moving from 60% purity to 90% purity, recognised as weapons grade – is even shorter, just a few weeks, and requires fewer centrifuges. According to [Western think tanks](https://www.iranwatch.org/our-publications/articles-reports/irans-nuclear-timetable-weapon-potential#:~:text=In%20total%20the%20cascades%20operating,enough%20for%20a%20single%20weapon).), Iran is only a few weeks away from breaking out as a nuclear weapons power and, after that, can enhance the number of nuclear warheads month by month.

That the Biden administration ratcheted up the Trump sanctions on Iran did not help in either bending Iran to the US demands or reducing Iran’s influence in the region. Though the defeat of Assad in Syria has strengthened Israel’s and Turkey’s role in the region, and the assassination of its top leaders has weakened Hezbollah, Iran remains a viable pole of opposition to Israel. The Houthis in Yemen also continue as a force in the region that Israel and the US can damage but not defeat. That is why the need to bend Iran to the US will, and if that does not succeed, destroy it as a state, as the US has done in Libya, Iraq, and Somalia. The US and Israel also believe that if Iran is destroyed, then the Houthis and Hezbollah will either surrender or be much easier to deal with.

Netanyahu’s reference to the Libyan option was not simply about Iran giving up the nuclear option but also about destroying Iran, as the US and its allies did in Libya. This is also 21st-century imperialism: the ability to destroy countries is much greater than its ability to control the aftermath of such destruction. In imperialism’s earlier phase, the Western powers could build colonial empires.

The US and Israel have differing interests in Iran. Iran is not Lebanon or Syria. It has a more cohesive society and has historical memories of a nation, unlike entities that Western powers created out of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War, essentially lines on a map which decided which Sheikh would get how much land. The European powers – primarily the UK and France – also carved out the oil-rich areas of the Arabian Peninsula as small sheikhdoms that they could control more easily. These are Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait. Unlike the feudal sheikhdoms of West Asia, Iran has a rich history and is a much bigger player. [Iran is bigger](https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2025/03/26/irans-geopolitical-footprint-regional-power-or-global-contender/) than any country that the US has attacked in the region; e.g., it is four times the size of Iraq and three times its population. Iran has missile capabilities that can destroy a good part of the US military and naval bases as well as the oil infrastructure in the region. US CENTCOM’s headquarters are in Udeit Air Base, Qatar, and its 5th Fleet headquarters is in Manama, Bahrain. Qatar is among the largest exporters of liquefied natural gas in the world, and the Gulf states, along with Saudi Arabia, are among the largest exporters of petroleum. Iran has made clear that any attack on it using the US bases and military infrastructure in the region will lead to Iran destroying the oil infrastructure of the region and sinking the global economy. This is Iran’s version of the [Samson option](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Samson_Option:_Israel%27s_Nuclear_Arsenal_and_American_Foreign_Policy) that Israel has threatened in the past.

The US has failed to subjugate [the Houthis in Yemen](https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/07/01/houthi-red-sea-shipping-attacks-maritime-security-defense/) even after a year of bombings and missile attacks. Israel’s, or, to be more accurate, Netanyahu’s, interests are narrow: use the US to take out Iran’s nuclear facilities and destroy their offensive capabilities. That way, they ensure that no other power can compete or balance Israel in West Asia. The US has to live with the larger consequences of destroying another country in the region in a war, and also the possible destruction of its allies in such a war. The US has also invested heavily in its allies in West Asia and needs its vassals – the oil sheikhs – to back the dollar and buy [its very expensive arms](https://thetricontinental.org/asia/ticaa-issue-6-imperialism-arab-region-wars/).

Iran has made it very clear that certain issues are non-negotiable. They want to have the right to uranium enrichment not only for nuclear energy, which needs about 3.57-5% enriched fuel, but also for its research reactor, which requires up to 20% enriched uranium. Incidentally, the [Small Modular Reactors](https://world-nuclear.org/information-library/nuclear-fuel-cycle/nuclear-power-reactors/small-nuclear-power-reactors) under active discussion also require 20% enriched uranium, another reason Iran is unlikely to accept a 5% upper limit for its enrichment. Under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, countries have the right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and it is very unlikely that Iran will forego this right. Iran will also not give up its allies or link the nuclear issue with other issues, such as dismantling missile capacity or advances in technology and industry that are either dual-use or have nothing to do with nuclear weapons. We will have to wait and see how far apart the two sides are and whether a common meeting ground can indeed be found between the two sides.

Of course, if Trump agrees to a virtual repeat of the same, why did he pull out of the earlier JCPOA agreement? He and the US will find this question hard to answer. Trump will either have to agree to a climb down or go to a war that will destroy the region and possibly the global economy. It might help Israel to be left as the dominant military power in a region laid waste, as it believes it is a part of Europe and not West Asia. But for Trump, a destructive war in West Asia on a scale that takes out Iran the way Israel would like, on top of a global tariff war that he is waging, maybe a war too far! We will have to hold our collective breath and hope that sanity will prevail over the Trump administration. Or is that too much to hope for?