

Why Iran's Top Strategists Think Peace Now Means a Bigger War Later

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Note: the original article is provided as a separate file (attached to the email or downloadable from the website).

1. Reading Passage

President Donald Trump wants to end the war with Iran and reopen the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow Persian Gulf waterway through which roughly one-fifth of the world's oil normally flows. A growing chorus of US politicians is denouncing the emerging terms, arguing the deal hands Iran billions while leaving it in control of the strait and a nuclear programme. Inside Iran, however, the mood is very different. Tehran is in no hurry to accept. American officials blame Iranian stubbornness, but the truth is that Iran's leaders simply do not trust Washington – and they have specific reasons for that distrust.

Iran has already had what one Iranian-American analyst calls a 'sordid' experience with Trump-era dealmaking: he withdrew from the 2015 nuclear agreement in his first term, and the US has twice launched strikes on Iran during the current round of negotiations. For Tehran, the lesson is that even signed agreements with Washington do not hold. The dominant view in Iran's political establishment is that the offer on the table is too good to be true. The aim, officials argue, is to lull Iran into lowering its guard while America prepares to finish the job.

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its allies go further. They believe the credible threat of war is Iran's only real deterrent against future attack, so any deal that trades away that threat is a strategic loss, not a gain. So far, the war has cost the United States roughly \$29 billion and 143 American lives, and the global economic damage has been far greater. Trump has dismissed this as 'short-term pain' that is 'OK' if it means denying Iran nuclear weapons. From Tehran's perspective, changing his mind by inflicting more pain on the US and the world economy is the only way to ensure the president is ready for serious talks.

Not every Iranian agrees with this confrontational logic, but Iran itself is playing a heavy price. Other Iranian leaders talk of controlling the Strait of Hormuz and keeping a stockpile of highly enriched uranium as the key to deterrence. They believe any durable deal must include economic compensation for war damage and lasting sanctions relief – without those, lifting US secondary sanctions (penalties on third countries that do business with Iran) is essentially impossible, since Washington cannot politically compel European or Asian countries to ignore them. That is what makes a lasting deal so unlikely.

Here's the catch. Tehran might agree to open the strait, freeze part of its nuclear programme, and accept a ceasefire – but it will not give up the deeper sources of its leverage. Iran is now convinced that the ability to shut down Hormuz is a major deterrent, especially if Yemen's Houthis join in a future conflict and squeeze trade through the Red Sea too. Control of the strait would also let Iran collect fees on commercial traffic, providing welcome economic relief and pressuring countries worldwide to push the US to ease secondary sanctions. The more the US insists on Iran giving up enrichment and handing over its uranium stockpile, the more Tehran becomes convinced that America's real aim is to remove Iran's deterrence through diplomacy so that the next war can be fought against a weaker adversary.

A short-term ceasefire would be welcome news for the global economy. But it should not be confused with peace. By keeping control over a diluted enrichment programme, Iran would be only

weeks away from nuclear breakout. A larger, lasting deal that addresses Hormuz and Iran's nuclear programme – the structural issues, not just the symptoms – will be far more difficult to attain.

2. Explanation

Imagine being offered a ceasefire after three months of war – and concluding that signing it would actually make the next war worse. That's Tehran's bet right now.

What's Going On?

After roughly three months of open war between the United States and Iran, President Trump has been pushing a deal that would reopen the Strait of Hormuz, freeze Iran's nuclear programme, and pause hostilities. On paper, it looks generous: billions in potential sanctions relief, a lifted naval blockade, and an off-ramp from a conflict that has spiked global oil prices.

But Vali Nasr – a Johns Hopkins professor and longtime Iran analyst – argues in the Financial Times that Tehran sees the offer as a trap. Iranian officials read the 'generous' terms as a Trojan horse designed to disarm them cheaply, so Washington can hit them harder later from a position of greater weakness.

How To Think About It

The disagreement isn't really about the price tag of peace – it's about what each side thinks the deal is FOR. Two parallels help:

- Think of a chess player offered a queen trade when they're already down material. Taking it looks like relief, but it just accelerates the losing endgame. Iran fears the deal removes its last pieces – enriched uranium, missile leverage, control of Hormuz – before the real fight.
- Or think of a labour union signing a contract right after a failed strike. The boss isn't done; he's just resting. Sign now and you've ratified your own weakness, making the next round of cuts easier to impose.

Key Things To Know

- The war has reportedly cost the US around \$29 billion and 143 American lives, plus a much larger global economic hit from the Hormuz closure.
- Roughly one-fifth of the world's oil supply normally moves through the Strait of Hormuz – Iran shut it as a first retaliatory act, scrambling energy and fertiliser markets.
- Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is the loudest internal voice against any deal, arguing the threat of war is Tehran's only real deterrent.
- Nasr's core claim: even a 'lasting' deal can't really hold unless the US accepts economic compensation for war damage AND lifts secondary sanctions – both politically unthinkable in Washington.
- What most people miss: Iran isn't refusing because it wants war. It's refusing because it thinks accepting now guarantees a worse war later.

Why It Matters

If you've noticed gas prices, grocery costs, or airline tickets jumping this spring, the Strait of Hormuz is a big reason why. And if you're thinking about college, careers, or where the next decade of US foreign

policy is headed – whether toward de-escalation or a wider Middle East war – this negotiation is the hinge. The outcome shapes everything from military recruiting to oil-state economies to whether your generation inherits another forever-war.

The Bigger Picture

Nasr's warning echoes a familiar pattern: the 2015 nuclear deal (JCPOA) was signed, then torn up by Trump in his first term – a precedent Tehran has not forgotten. The second-order effects to watch: whether Iran builds toward nuclear 'breakout' as insurance, whether Yemen's Houthis stay in the fight, and whether Gulf states like Oman get squeezed between Washington and Tehran over Hormuz tolls. A short-term ceasefire is possible. A durable peace looks much further away.

3. Key Terms Glossary

Strait of Hormuz

A narrow sea passage between Iran and Oman through which about one-fifth of the world's oil shipments travel. Closing it can spike global energy prices within days.

Deterrence

The strategy of preventing an enemy attack by making them believe retaliation would be too costly. Nuclear weapons are the classic example.

Secondary sanctions

US penalties not on the targeted country directly, but on any third-country company or bank that does business with it – effectively cutting the target off from the global economy.

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)

An elite branch of Iran's armed forces, separate from the regular army, that controls much of Iran's missile programme, foreign proxies, and hardline foreign policy.

Nuclear breakout

The point at which a country has enough enriched uranium and technical capability to build a working bomb quickly – usually measured in weeks or months.

JCPOA (2015 nuclear deal)

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, an agreement in which Iran limited its nuclear programme in exchange for sanctions relief. Trump withdrew the US from it in 2018.

Mowing the lawn

Military slang for periodic limited strikes meant to weaken an enemy's capabilities without fully defeating them – a maintenance strategy, not a victory strategy.

Ceasefire

A temporary halt to fighting agreed by combatants. It is not the same as a peace treaty – fighting can resume when conditions or politics shift.

4. Reading Comprehension Quiz

Circle the best answer for each question.

Q1. The passage most directly argues that:

- A) Iran is refusing a deal because hardliners want a wider regional war
- B) Tehran believes accepting current terms would leave it more vulnerable to future attack
- C) The United States has already won the war and Iran must now surrender
- D) Sanctions relief alone would be enough to end the conflict permanently

Q2. Which choice best states the central idea of the passage?

- A) Economic costs of the war will force both sides into an immediate settlement
- B) Iranian decision-makers view generous-looking concessions as strategically dangerous
- C) The Strait of Hormuz is the single most important waterway in global trade
- D) American politicians have unanimously rejected any future deal with Tehran

Q3. According to the passage, Iran has previously experienced 'sordid dealmaking' with Trump in connection with:

- A) The 2015 nuclear agreement and strikes during negotiations
- B) A failed ceasefire in the Strait of Hormuz in 2020
- C) Secret talks mediated by Oman over oil tolls
- D) A trade pact involving fertiliser and crude exports

Q4. As used in the passage, the word "generous" most nearly means:

- A) Charitable and kind-hearted
- B) Apparently favourable but suspect
- C) Excessively large in quantity
- D) Open-minded and tolerant

Q5. As used in the passage, the phrase "mowing the lawn" most nearly refers to:

- A) Routine landscaping near military bases
- B) Periodic limited strikes to keep an adversary weakened
- C) A formal peace-building strategy used by diplomats
- D) The cultivation of long-term political alliances

Q6. Which statement about the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) can most reasonably be inferred from the passage?

- A) It believes military threat is Iran's most reliable form of deterrence
- B) It is preparing to overthrow Iran's civilian government
- C) It supports the deal more strongly than Iran's foreign ministry does
- D) It has publicly endorsed cooperation with the United States Navy

Q7. The passage suggests that a durable US–Iran deal is unlikely primarily because:

- A) Iran lacks the technical ability to maintain its nuclear programme
- B) Any lasting agreement would require concessions Washington cannot politically deliver
- C) Oil prices have already returned to pre-war levels
- D) European allies refuse to participate in further negotiations

Q8. The author's tone throughout the passage is best described as:

- A)** Cautiously sceptical of optimistic readings of the proposed deal
- B)** Triumphant about an imminent American diplomatic victory
- C)** Detached and indifferent to the war's human costs
- D)** Outraged at Iranian leadership's refusal to negotiate

Q9. It can most reasonably be inferred that the author believes Trump's hope to 'end the war and open the Strait of Hormuz' is:

- A)** Likely to succeed within weeks given current momentum
- B)** Achievable only through a structurally deeper agreement than is being offered
- C)** Already fulfilled by the existing ceasefire framework
- D)** Impossible because Iran has destroyed all of its uranium stockpile

Q10. Which choice provides the BEST evidence for the answer to the previous question?

- A)** The reference to the 2015 nuclear deal being scuttled by Trump
- B)** The claim that any durable deal must include economic compensation and sanctions relief
- C)** The description of the IRGC firing on commercial vessels near Hormuz
- D)** The mention of 143 American lives lost during the war

My Score: _____ / 10

5. Answer Key with Explanations

Q1. The passage most directly argues that:

Answer: B

The passage's central claim is that Iranian leaders see the proposed deal as a setup that strips their deterrence and invites a future strike from a weaker position. A is wrong because the passage says Iran doesn't want war – it fears one (Trap C: real-world plausible, but not the passage's argument). SAT Tip: For 'primarily argues' questions, find the sentence the whole passage keeps returning to, not just a claim made once in passing.

Q2. Which choice best states the central idea of the passage?

Answer: B

The passage repeatedly frames Tehran's logic: what looks generous is read as a trap because it removes Iran's leverage. D is the main distractor but the passage describes 'a growing chorus' of critics, not unanimous rejection (Trap B: passage vocabulary, wrong combination). SAT Tip: 'Central idea' answers must cover the whole passage, not just one paragraph – eliminate options that only describe a single section.

Q3. According to the passage, Iran has previously experienced 'sordid dealmaking' with Trump in connection with:

Answer: A

The passage specifically references the scuttled 2015 nuclear deal and US strikes launched during negotiations as the basis for Iran's distrust. B uses passage vocabulary (Hormuz, ceasefire) but invents a date and event (Trap B). SAT Tip: When a question asks 'according to the passage,' the right answer should be something you can point to in a specific sentence, not something that merely sounds reasonable.

Q4. As used in the passage, the word "generous" most nearly means:

Answer: B

The passage uses 'generous' in quote-marks-of-doubt: Tehran reads the supposedly generous terms as a trap. The word carries an ironic, suspicious meaning here, not its usual warm one. A is the everyday meaning – the classic vocab-in-context trap (Trap B). SAT Tip: On vocab-in-context, plug each option back into the sentence; the right answer keeps the sentence's original meaning intact.

Q5. As used in the passage, the phrase "mowing the lawn" most nearly refers to:

Answer: B

The passage uses the phrase to describe the US strategy of periodically attacking Iran to suppress its nuclear and missile capabilities – not garden work. A is the literal meaning and the obvious trap (Trap B). SAT Tip: Idioms and metaphors in SAT passages almost never mean what they literally say – always read the surrounding sentence for the figurative meaning.

Q6. Which statement about the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) can most reasonably be inferred from the passage?

Answer: A

The passage states that the IRGC and its allies see the threat of war as the only true deterrent against future US attack. C reverses the IRGC's position (Trap A: right scope, wrong direction). SAT Tip: Inference questions reward staying close to the passage – pick the option that requires the smallest logical leap from what's actually written.

Q7. The passage suggests that a durable US–Iran deal is unlikely primarily because:

Answer: B

The passage argues a durable deal would require economic compensation for war damage and lifting of secondary sanctions – both politically impossible in Washington. C is unsupported and contradicts the passage's emphasis on continuing economic damage (Trap C: not in passage). SAT Tip: 'Primarily because' answers should match the passage's stated mechanism, not introduce outside-world reasons the passage never raises.

Q8. The author's tone throughout the passage is best described as:

Answer: A

The author methodically lays out why the deal is fragile and why Iran's pessimism has logic to it – a sceptical but measured stance, not celebratory or angry. D misreads the author as anti-Iran (Trap A: wrong direction). SAT Tip: Tone is set by the author's adjective and verb choices, not by who the passage is about – a passage critical of someone can still be calm in tone.

Q9. It can most reasonably be inferred that the author believes Trump's hope to 'end the war and open the Strait of Hormuz' is:

Answer: B

The author argues the current 'short-term ceasefire' won't deliver lasting peace – that would require embedding compensation, sanctions relief, and structural concessions. A contradicts the passage's overall scepticism (Trap A: wrong direction). SAT Tip: When inference options range from optimistic to pessimistic, match the option's emotional register to the author's tone identified earlier.

Q10. Which choice provides the BEST evidence for the answer to the previous question?

Answer: B

Q9's answer rests on the author's argument that real peace requires structurally deeper terms – exactly what option B points to. A is supporting context, not the load-bearing evidence (Trap C: true claim, not best evidence). SAT Tip: On evidence-pairing questions, lock in the previous answer first, then pick the option whose words most directly justify THAT specific claim – not the option that's merely interesting.