

Trump finally faces reality of a failed war on Iran

The Grayzone's Max Blumenthal and Aaron Mate react to the Trump administration's moves toward a Memorandum of Understanding with Iran that could pave the way for a cessation of hostilities. Can the deal hold? And what forced Trump's hand? ||| The Grayzone ||| Find more reporting at <https://thegrayzone.com> Support our original journalism at Patreon: <https://patreon.com/grayzone> Facebook: <https://facebook.com/thegrayzone> Twitter: <https://twitter.com/thegrayzonenews> Instagram: <https://instagram.com/thegrayzonenews> Minds: <https://minds.com/thegrayzone> Mastodon: <https://mastodon.social/@thegrayzone> #TheGrayzone

#Max

Since you brought up the Iran deal—to the extent it's even a deal—right now it's a memorandum of understanding, which is a very odd way of striking a ceasefire or moving toward a ceasefire. We should talk about that. So what's your initial reaction, given that we know very little about the contents of the deal and are getting different narratives about its contents from the Iranian and U.S. sides?

#Aaron Mate

I think the only significance is that Trump is admitting that he lost his regime change war. This is him putting that in writing, essentially, because the war was launched in late February with Trump claiming that when we're done here, to the people of Iran, you know, you will take over. And so he was calling for regime change, and that failed. And when the kinetic part of the war failed, he then tried this oil blockade to prevent Iran from exporting any oil. And I think he was trying to wait out to see if Iran's economy would collapse under the combination of his blockade, the damage from his bombing, and, of course, his crippling sanctions. And that didn't work.

And Iran's leverage over the Strait of Hormuz proved to be just too strong, along with its striking of U.S. military assets in the region and the threat it posed to Trump's Gulf allies, because he basically put them on the front lines of his regime change war strategy, alongside Israel. So he failed, and this memorandum of understanding essentially restores the status quo from before he started bombing. So essentially he's admitting defeat in the regime change war. But is he opening a new chapter in U.S.-Iran relations? Is he going to lift these crippling sanctions that are designed to destabilize Iran? No, and I think that's pretty clear even from listening to J.D. Vance today, who is inside the cabinet, inside Trump's circle, and is widely considered to be the most anti-interventionist.

But the way he's talking is... the policy has not changed. While Iran has been willing to accept limits on its nuclear program for a long time, while Iran's been willing to accept limits on its nuclear program, the U.S. won't accept Iran's resistance to Israeli dominance. And because Iran refuses to capitulate on that front, Iran will continue to be targeted for regime change. And so I just don't think that aspect is changing. So it's a pause to Trump's war, Trump's regime change campaign, and it's an admission of defeat, but it's not peace.

#Max

Yeah, it kind of reminds me of the Korean War armistice, which was, what, '53, '54? Which didn't end the war. The war still—there has been no peace, no actual cessation of hostilities between the South and the North. Actually, Trump attempted to end that, and that was sabotaged as well by the same elements that will seek to sabotage an actual ceasefire with Iran and actual durable peace with Iran—many of the same elements at least—and they were less powerful than the Israel lobby and the Zionist movement is. So we're sort of in a frozen conflict, and it's very obvious who opposes this deal best in the West, and particularly in the United States. Sorry.

The same elements that brought Trump into this war. The same elements that sat Trump down in the Situation Room and told him how this war was going to begin and lied to him, this doddering, kind of bought-off figure, on how the war would be won instantly in a kind of Venezuela-style triumph through decapitation strikes, which within two to four days would end the so-called regime and bring about mass opposition and the Iranian public rising up, along with possibly the Kurdish proxies, in order to basically dissolve the Islamic Republic of Iran. That was Benjamin Netanyahu and his proxies. Benjamin Netanyahu came here to D.C. in February and told Trump how it was going to be.

Trump went along with it. No one within his cabinet or among his military intelligence principals actually stood up to him, other than, I think, General Dan Cain, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, who was leaking his opposition to the press, and knew that they would blow through interceptor stocks, THAADs—they'd have to reposition THAADs from South Korea, which South Korea got at great cost to its relations with China, which cost it economically. THAADs and Patriot batteries, PAC-3s, would have to go over from Ukraine to defend Israel. And it was all, I said it at the beginning, a Zionist war. And it was going to fail.

Everything that took place could have easily been predicted, and so this sort of consolidates the failure of Operation Epstein-Fury. And now it's very clear, once again, who was responsible for this war. When you see Mark Levin fulminating, when you see Marc Thiessen fulminating, when you see Mark Dubowitz fulminating, these Marks—what, I don't know, which Snoop Dogg might call mark-ass busters—are all out there actually trying to make marks of the American public, but we're not marks

anymore. Or rubes. Everyone can see that this was a failed and very economically destructive Zionist war, and there should be recriminations and repercussions and retribution against these characters. That's what we would like to see. Unfortunately, I don't think Trump is going to be able to do that.

If I were Trump and I were in the war room right now—I don't even know if he has an actual war room that's based around his own thinking—I would be using every element in the media to humiliate these characters, denounce them, and I would even be launching investigations into FDD, the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, which was the main Israeli think tank planted in Washington, which devised this entire war from start to finish, starting with the decapitation strikes and moving into the so-called naval siege. They even, through Jared Kushner, had one of their staff members, Nick—what's his name, I'll think of it in a second—Nick Stewart, placed on the negotiation team to oversee the naval siege, which was deepening this neo-Suez crisis.

So you really want to punish these elements if you're Trump, but I think these elements will eventually, along with figures in the Senate like Roger Wicker, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who had been pushing for a renewed Epstein-Fury 2.0 as late as June 9th, the Wall Street Journal's editorial board, even elements in Fox News, obviously Mark Levin—they're going to come for Trump along with the Democrats and call him, you know, the Democrats will be calling him a coward. You know, Trump always chickens out, trying to paint him as weak for making this deal. And I don't think Trump will be strong enough to stand up against that or to do anything about the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, which is ongoing and has been used as a lever to sabotage this deal.

#Aaron Mate

Well, I just wonder if we even get to a point where there'll be anything for neocons to push back on, because Trump says that this is a nuclear deal. But really, it's the same thing if you listen to J.D. Vance today. He made what I think is a contradictory statement, talking about the conditions under which the U.S. would lift sanctions on Iran, which for Iran is the biggest issue. For the U.S., the biggest issue is supposedly Iran's nuclear program. But we know Iran's already accepted constraints on that repeatedly under the JCPOA and the talks that were brokered by Oman before the war and in the proposals since. So that part can be addressed. The issue for Iran is, will the U.S. lift sanctions? It's crippling sanctions that are designed to prevent Iran from having a functioning economy. And if you listen to J.D. Vance today, he's already offered contradictory conditions in terms of what Iran would have to do. So first, this is Vance speaking—I think this is his first interview he did—speaking to CBS News.

#CBS News

We're going to get \$24 billion in frozen funds if they hit certain benchmarks. Is that true?

#JD Vance

Well, again, Ed, we're open to a lot of things that are on the table, but that \$24 billion just doesn't appear anywhere in any of the texts that we've talked about with the Iranians. What we have said is that we're willing to talk about unfreezing assets, but a much, much bigger deal is unsanctioning their economy so long as they make the long-term commitments on the nuclear program. Again, one of the things these hardliner elements in their country are going to do is misrepresent the deal so that they can sell it to certain elements of their domestic audience. But I think, again, the text is very clear. There's nothing about \$24 billion. What there is clarity about, though, Ed, is that Iran gives up its nuclear program for the long haul. They allow a real inspections regime. And then, of course, we want them to have a lot of benefits. The president has said we want them to be a successful country. Right. We want to turn over a new leaf with Iran, but that requires them to meet us in the middle.

#Aaron Mate

All right. So first of all, when he talks about \$24 billion, what's not mentioned in these discussions is that \$24 billion is Iranian money. It's not as if Iran's being given anything by the U.S. It's Iran's own stolen money that the U.S. has held for decades. But note there, the crucial thing he said is the main condition, the condition for sanctions relief from the U.S., is Iran concerning its nuclear weapons program. But Iran did that already under the JCPOA. But Trump broke that. Why did Trump break that? Because he wanted regime change. He wanted regime change because Iran resists U.S.-Israeli hegemony. And so he's been demanding Iran's surrender on that front as well — that Iran stop supporting groups that resist U.S.-Israeli hegemony, namely Hezbollah. And Iran hasn't budged on that. And here's J.D. Vance, after just saying to CBS News that the only condition for sanctions relief is Iran's nuclear program, he then adds a second condition.

#JD Vance

Fundamentally, sanctions relief. We're not giving them American money. Not a single dollar of American money will go to Iran. But what we are saying, George, is we're willing to give significant sanctions relief if the Iranians make the kind of long-term commitments that are necessary to be a normal country — to give up their nuclear weapons program, to stop funding terrorist activities all over the Middle East. And one of the really interesting things in the agreement—

#Aaron Mate

So there you go. You heard it there. In the second clip, he adds a second condition. It's not just about the nuclear program. So if that's the case, forget it. There's not going to be a deal. So all this is — and this is what I think — this is what ultimately will blow up the peace talks. Trump will insist on this, that Iran cut ties to Hezbollah. Iran won't. And so everyone will just walk away. So what we'll have is a status quo ante. Hooray for Trump. The Strait of Hormuz has been reopened. Maybe in the process, there'll be some limited sanctions relief on, like, the export of some Iranian products, maybe a token amount of unstolen assets. But in terms of an actual deal, if this is the condition, as

Vance just put it, and it's not just about nuclear, but it's also about Iran supporting its allies who resist U.S.-Israeli hegemony, then there's no peace deal.

#Max

Yeah, that was — I mean, this is in the tradition of Steve Witkoff, the envoy, constantly shifting the goalposts. He would go to Iran, or he'd go to Oman — they'd have good talks. And then he would go back to Washington and say something entirely different. For example, about Iran's alliances or ballistic missiles. And, you know, he would say — and I remember Steve Witkoff said early on in the war, "They're closing the Gulf of Hormuz. They can't do that." He didn't even know what the Strait of Hormuz was. There's a lack of understanding of the Iranian perspective and just the basic facts about Iran, the technical side of Iran's nuclear program, or about the region. And J.D. Vance is supposed to be the restrainer here who is in favor of the deal.

And he can't seem to articulate any clear conditions. Everything's based on benchmarks. Reminds me of the Oslo Accords, where nothing was set in stone. There are no borders. Everything is contingent on further talks. Then you have the fact that insurance companies aren't going to back shipping for the next six to twelve months unless there is stability, which means this deal has to be enforced by the U.S. in Lebanon and elsewhere in order to open up the Strait of Hormuz and provide long-term stability. The U.S. is making everything contingent on Iran. It's actually contingent on the U.S. and U.S. leadership. And the U.S. has obviously been completely compromised by its relationship with Israel. So it's another reason to believe this won't actually open up the strait or provide economic relief.

But obviously Trump is in panic mode. He's becoming panicked because the midterms are coming up. The bottom has dropped out of his base. Young men are turning on Trump in record numbers. There's a new New York Times poll showing he's lost 10% of young white male voters in the last month or so. The numbers are horrible on this war. So he has good reason to want a deal. But I don't think he's going to be able to enforce it. I think we're looking at a frozen conflict. At the same time, those who got Trump into this war, as I said, they're not happy about what's going on. Mark Dubowitz, if you're suffering economically in any way, it costs too much to fill up your tank and you drive for a living — you drive Uber, deliver food, whatever — or, you know, you have a long commute.

If you're a farmer and fertilizer costs are through the roof and you're at risk of losing your farm, any working-class American should thank Mark Dubowitz for that, because there's no figure who is more influential outside of government than Mark Dubowitz in pushing for this war. At the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, which was launched as an Israel lobbying outfit — look at the original foundation documents signed by Clifford May, which show that it was inaugurated to advance Israel's interests in Washington. And here's Dubowitz freaking out: refuel energy markets, rest and

rearm the military, develop a plan to support Iranians to cripple the regime, enforce sanctions with relentless pressure, don't get played at the negotiating table, test Tehran early, give little, demand results, walk away fast, hit harder. These are all like orders he's giving to Trump.

#Aaron Mate

And daily mantras that he says to himself to keep his spirits up in the threat of a truce. I don't want to say peace because, again, they're just pausing a war to rebuild. So I think Mark Dubowitz will actually get a lot of what he wants. They're going to just go back to the drawing board and figure out a new way to destroy Iran, including maybe trying to increase the chances of a civil war because a military campaign from afar didn't work.

And going back to Wyckoff for a second, just before I forget, he really illustrates how completely captive this administration is to the establishment war lobby, where initially he was talking about accepting the enrichment levels of the JCPOA, which were like 3.67%. He accepted that publicly. And then all it took was like a one-day freakout from the Israel lobby and other neocons, and he backtracked immediately and was then claiming zero enrichment. So that's how easily this administration caves to the slightest pressure from the war lobby. And there's no indication that, despite all the marks having their freakouts, much has changed.

#Max

Yeah, I was watching him on Mario Nawfal, and he kept interrupting. He was like all geeked out. It was wild to watch Dubowitz in the—sort of like Hitler in his bunker. He really sees this as an apocalyptic moment. But really what it just means is—for the Israel-first lobby—a setback, a major setback. And there's going to be a recalibration of the U.S.-Israel relationship. There will have to be because of this, because of the deep unpopularity of themselves and of Israel in the United States. They're going to have to bury it behind opaque cooperation initiatives, which we'll talk about later. But I do not see this deal holding. Now, at the same time, I don't see in the near term a major conflict restarting, but who's to say?