

Iran – post-war perspectives

Iran emerges from the war with Israel and the US strengthened, regardless of the costs it has incurred. Unless a permanent collapse in negotiations occurs, it can recover its losses very quickly, and given its potential, it has a chance of becoming one of the world's largest economies within a few years. Crucial in this context is not the nuclear issue, but the high-stakes game over the Strait of Hormuz. However, Iran's maximalist approach represents a risky gamble that, in the worst-case scenario, could completely derail the negotiations and shatter the country's prospects. On the other hand, both sustained escalation and a return to limited military action are too costly for the US and incapable of delivering long-term, positive results. Iran thus counts on forcing acceptance of its plans regarding the Strait of Hormuz, concerning the implementation of a new maritime traffic control regime and exclusive (or possibly joint with Oman) responsibility for security in the area.

Narratives and real political calculations

The narrative war over who won the actual war is meaningless. Moreover, the recipient of these messages is not the opposing side, but domestic public opinion. This applies in particular to the US and Donald Trump, who is facing negative poll numbers—a factor all the more significant given the risk of losing the Republican majority in both houses after the November midterm elections. The vast majority of Americans support ending the war, although they do not consider the provisions of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to be favorable to the US and have no sense of victory¹. These factors negatively impact the negotiations. On the one hand, they encourage Iran to harden its position, as it seeks to humiliate Trump and increase the likelihood of a Republican defeat in the midterm elections, however, in reality, it will bring no real benefit to Iran. On the other hand, framing the MoU as a defeat prompts Trump to make abrupt decisions and provocative declarations aimed at defending his image as a victor dictating tough terms to his opponent. This also harms the negotiations, the success of which should be in the interest of both sides. Trump's image sensitivity is being exploited by Israel, where a sense of defeat prevailed following the signing of the MoU. Consequently, Israeli media and social platforms were flooded with anti-Trump propaganda accusing him of submission to Iran. This, however, yielded limited results and to some extent fueled Trump's and his inner circle's frustration regarding the stance of Israel and Netanyahu.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has much greater control over domestic narratives, although voices of dissatisfaction have emerged there as well. These concerned not so much the war itself or its conduct, but rather the negotiations and the signing of the MoU. Opposition to the official course is thus based on the jingoistic assumption that Iran has brought its enemies to their knees and does not need to negotiate with them. From the very beginning of the war, competing concepts among various factions surfaced in Iran, which was exaggerated in Western media as an alleged decision-making rift. Meanwhile, the political elites of the Islamic Republic have never been a monolith, and intra-systemic pluralism is a reality. In the past, sharp clashes between different factions were

¹ Economist/YouGov Poll, June 19-22, 2026, The Iran deal, what Americans want from the parties and more, <https://yougov.com/en-us/articles/55029-iran-deal-what-americans-want-democratic-republican-parties-june-19-22-2026-economist-yougov-poll>

not uncommon, and holding high state offices offered no immunity from imprisonment². Furthermore, it must be understood that the Islamic Republic of Iran's approach to security and foreign policy has always been a combination of pragmatism and idealism. In the former dimension, Iran played a classic power game aligned with the paradigm of political realism, while in the latter, it appealed to Shiism and the ideology of the Islamic revolution³. However, the ideological dimension cannot be detached from its realistic counterpart, nor did it imply an irrational approach to policy. Iranians have always acted rationally, though regime survival took precedence over state interest.

Goals of Iranian policy

It is also necessary to separate ritual slogans expressing hostility toward the US and the desire to destroy Israel from Iran's actual policy, which did not entail pursuing a direct armed confrontation with either the US or Israel. It was therefore absurd to assume that Iran sought nuclear weapons to strike Israel, as that would be a suicidal act. The nuclear program served as a bargaining chip and an insurance policy. Moreover, as early as the beginning of the 1990s, Iran moved away from the policy of exporting the Islamic revolution, and the ideological dimension was often more of a tool than an end in itself. In this way, Shiite and non-Arab Iran built a network of allies and influenced public opinion in a region dominated by Sunni Arabs. One such tool was the Palestinian issue—this does not, of course, imply a purely instrumental approach to it, but nor did it determine Iran's overall policy.

Over the past three decades, Iran has demonstrated several times its readiness to adopt a two-track policy toward the US: maintaining formal political hostility while opening up to economic cooperation⁴. In the long term, this would have led to the inevitable erosion of this increasingly artificial political hostility toward the "Great Satan." This would have been a natural consequence of Iran's growing openness, which took place between 2015 and 2018. Iran also had no objections to developing deeper political and economic ties with other Western countries, particularly in Europe. Rapprochement with Russia began only during the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as a consequence of an unfavorable shift in Iran's geopolitical position relative to the US (military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan), combined with Iran's classification as part of the "axis of evil" and the imposition of sanctions over its nuclear program. Following the signing of the JCPOA (The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – nuclear agreement)⁵, however, Iran was ready to capitalize on sanctions imposed on Russia over the annexation of Crimea by replacing Russian oil—and potentially gas—supplies, offering Europe an optimal diversification option. Despite the

² Even Iran's vice presidents, especially those from the time of Mahmoud Ahmedinejad's government, have been imprisoned, e.g. Esfandiar Rahim Mashayi (on charges of actions threatening national security) and Mohammad Reza Rahimi (corruption).

³ The balance between idealism and political realism in Iranian security policy is described in detail in the work of Robert Czulda, *Polityka bezpieczeństwa Iranu – wymiar wewnętrzny i zewnętrzny*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2022

⁴ Already in 1995, Iran signed an agreement with the American company Conoco, but it was blocked by the Bill Clinton administration, see e.g.: <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/03/07/world/iran-signs-oil-deal-with-conoco-first-since-1980-break-with-us.html>

⁵ The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is an agreement signed on July 14, 2015, in Vienna between Iran and the P5+1 group (the permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany), concerning Iran's nuclear program. On May 8, 2018, Donald Trump announced the unilateral US withdrawal from the JCPOA, which led to the collapse of the agreement.

atmosphere of distrust compounded after the 12-day war in 2025, then-Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei (killed on the first day of this year's subsequent war) gave the green light for Iran to open up to American investment in the event of a new agreement.

Nuclear issue

Contrary to common beliefs, the nuclear issue was not and is not the primary obstacle in Iran's relations with the US and the West. The prospect of a "nuclear Iran" as a key regional and global threat was crafted by Israeli propaganda, the informational value of which was negatively verified during the recent war. Nuclear weapons are sometimes termed "useless weapons"⁶ because they fail to achieve tactical or operational goals (due to the unimaginability of their use under normal conditions); their sole function is deterrence. The example of North Korea demonstrates that while nuclear weapons act as an insurance policy, they do not automatically guarantee an end to isolation or an increase in power. However, they protect against foreign interference into internal affairs, thereby securing regime survival. Meanwhile, Iran had legitimate reasons to fear actions by both Israel and the US aimed at overthrowing the Islamic Republic, as such goals were openly stated. Moreover, Israel declared support for separatist movements⁷. However, the recent war demonstrated the resilience of Iran's political regime and exposed the falsehood of intelligence provided to the US by Israel regarding the strength of the anti-regime opposition and the readiness of separatists to engage in armed action. In this context, it is worth adding that the situation of ethnic minorities in Iran is a far cry from the frequently repeated narrative of the forced assimilation of non-Persians⁸.

Iranian opponents of the deal with the US are ultraconservatives associated with, among others, former Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr (who resigned in August 2026 and was replaced by Mohsen Rezai, who enjoys better relations with Qalibaf) and Saeed Jalili, Masoud Pezeshkian's main rival in the recent presidential election. It is also a fact that in a published statement, Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei (who succeeded his father) distanced himself from the MoU, stating he "had a different opinion" but acquiesced when President Masoud Pezeshkian and other officials pledged to protect "the rights of the Iranian people and the resistance front" and assumed responsibility for accepting the agreement.

Critics of the deal in Iran

The critics' stance is based on the conviction that the US cannot be trusted and the belief that the US would bear higher costs from a failure to reach the deal due to its vulnerability to public pressure. Furthermore, this attitude is rooted in prioritizing ideological hostility over pragmatism—

⁶ This is how it was defined, for example, by H. Morgenthau in his work "Politics among Nations. The Struggle for Power and Peace."

⁷ Israeli narratives have been highly inconsistent in this regard, however, for example, in April 2023, a group of 32 Knesset members appealed to the Israeli Foreign Ministry to "support the independence of South Azerbaijan": <https://caucasuswatch.de/en/news/israeli-mps-appeal-to-foreign-ministry-for-support-for-independence-of-south-azerbaijan.html>. Israel has also repeatedly declared support for the aspirations of Iranian Kurds, although it has never provided them with concrete assistance. Maps of Iran's partition have also appeared in the news media.

⁸ W. Repetowicz, Ethnic minorities in Iran, Raport Urzędu ds. Cudzoziemców, Office for Foreigners Report, December 2023

a stance clearly not accepted by the majority of the elite (including hardliners, particularly within Sepah). A key argument of the MoU's opponents is that revenues from controlling the Strait of Hormuz carry greater weight for Iran than the prospect of sanctions relief or the unfreezing of assets. For now, however, the elites (including Sepah – Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) have extended a vote of confidence to Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, who will play a pivotal role in shaping both domestic and foreign policy at this turning point. Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi plays a key role externally, while President Masoud Pezeshkian handles the internal dimension. It is worth emphasizing that they, too, consider Iranian control over the Strait of Hormuz to be paramount, but view the MoU and further negotiations as the means to achieve that objective.

The MoU signed on June 17 was beneficial to Iran⁹. In particular, it included US commitments to lift all sanctions, unfreeze Iranian assets, and establish a special fund for the reconstruction and economic development of the Islamic Republic worth \$300 billion. Nevertheless, ambiguous terms led to mutual accusations of violations almost immediately after it was concluded. Disputes arose regarding the timeline for lifting sanctions, the mechanisms for unfreezing assets (valued at approximately \$100 billion), and the source of funding for the reconstruction fund. Key provisions from Iran's perspective included commitments to non-interference in internal affairs (renouncing US-backed regime change), the withdrawal of US armed forces from Iran's immediate neighborhood (ambiguous issue), and the renunciation of the use or threat of force.

Dispute over control of the Strait of Hormuz

The most consequential disagreements, however, stemmed from differing interpretations regarding the Strait of Hormuz. According to Paragraph 5 of the MoU, Iran was to ensure safe transit through the Strait of Hormuz "with no charge for 60 days only". The future "administration of the strait and maritime services" was to be negotiated between Iran and Oman "in line with applicable international law." The US interprets this as prohibiting any collection of tolls or fees by Iran, though Trump himself later suggested the US might collect fees, alongside a rather preposterous idea for US annexation of the strait. Iran maintained that fees for maritime administration and safe passage services do not constitute transit tariffs and are thus compliant with international law. According to various reports, Iran levied a fee of \$2 million per tanker during the blockade¹⁰. Given that roughly 30,000 tankers transit the strait annually, this would yield an astronomical \$60 billion (a figure inflated to \$100 billion in propaganda by Iranian MoU opponents). Such a level is completely unachievable in practice. Iran also initiated negotiations with Oman on a separate bilateral agreement—theoretically compliant with the MoU, but drawing threats from Trump toward Oman, as Washington opposes such an agreement during the ongoing US-Iran deadlock.

Issues surrounding the nuclear program were largely deferred to the final agreement. These need not present insurmountable hurdles, as Iran has previously demonstrated flexibility on the matter. Although hardliners oppose concessions, this issue is not at the top of the priority list for Qalibaf

⁹ Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran, available here: https://x.com/Iran_GOV/status/2067562439948808366

¹⁰ Anadolu Agency, Iran collects \$ 2M fees from some vessels passing through Hormuz, lawmaker says, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/iran-collects-2m-fees-from-some-vessels-passing-through-hormuz-lawmaker-says/3874652>

and Araghchi. They recognize that control over the Strait of Hormuz serves as a far more effective deterrent, and that creating conditions for rapid economic development is paramount for Iran's security. The Lebanese issue presents a much greater challenge. The MoU stipulates that the ceasefire encompasses Lebanon and commits the parties "to ensuring Lebanon's territorial integrity and sovereignty." Israel, however, continues its war against Hezbollah (though prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu ultimately backed down from plans for major escalation, such as attacking Beirut). While an agreement was reached on June 26 between the Lebanese government and Israel to condition the gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon on Hezbollah's disarmament by the Lebanese army¹¹, Hezbollah's rejection of the deal renders its implementation doubtful.

The dispute over the Strait of Hormuz led to an impasse in negotiations, a renewed exchange of military strikes in July, and the resumption of the blockade by both sides. Furthermore, the involvement of the Yemeni Houthis threatens to block another vital maritime route, the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb. In mid-August, the deadline of the truce intended to yield a final agreement expired. While this creates a dangerous vacuum, it does not automatically trigger a return to full-scale armed confrontation, as war would not be in the interest of either party.

Conclusions

The likelihood of concluding a final agreement between Iran and the US remains high despite ongoing disputes. Lifting sanctions and restoring Iran as a full-fledged international actor offers the country an economic boom. Iran requires massive investments following decades of sanctions and partial isolation. Meanwhile, it holds the world's second-largest natural gas reserves, significant oil reserves, and an immense demographic potential, with a population of 93 million. In addition, the Iranian education and research sectors maintain a relatively high standard, marked by substantial female participation among both students and scholars. This yields vast growth potential.

China can be expected to serve as Iran's strategic investment partner, a stance reflected in statements by Chinese leadership. In 2021, both nations signed an agreement outlining a 25-year, \$400 billion Chinese investment program in Iran. While implementation has stalled so far, China's perceived value of this partnership is set to rise. This does not mean Iran will limit itself to a single partner. Arab states (particularly Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Oman) and Turkey are already showing interest in expanding relations beyond trade and investment. Furthermore, Pakistan's role during the war and in facilitating negotiations will drive deeper Pakistani-Iranian cooperation, aligning with both nations' partnerships with China. The defense pact concluded between Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan poses no threat to Iran or its future relations with these states.

Russia, by contrast, as a competitor in hydrocarbon markets with limited advanced technology to offer, will play a marginal role. Moreover, a substantial increase in Iranian oil and eventual gas exports will enable effective displacement of Russia's market share, dealing a blow to Russian state revenues. Iran will have no qualms about benefiting at Russia's expense. However, establishing

¹¹ Department of State, Trilateral Framework between the United States of America, the State of Israel, and the Republic of Lebanon, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/06/trilateral-framework-between-the-united-states-of-america-the-state-of-israel-and-the-republic-of-lebanon>

Iran as a major gas player will require massive infrastructure investments, including transit pipelines and LNG facilities. A viable option would involve reviving plans for a pipeline running from Iran through Turkey to Southern Europe, alongside expanding transit infrastructure through Armenia, Georgia, and the Black Sea into Central Europe.

In this landscape, it is vital for the European Union, and Poland in particular, not to miss the emerging window of opportunity. Intensifying diplomatic engagement should begin immediately, expanding into academic and think-tank channels. This will help preserve the favorable perception of Poland and other European nations that refrained from involvement in the conflict, translating goodwill into economic cooperation. For the EU, Iran represents a primary option for energy diversification, offering a path toward complete independence from Russian hydrocarbons. Given the scale of Iran's reserves, no other diversification alternative is as significant. By comparison, gas reserves in Azerbaijan—which emerged as an important EU supplier after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine—account for less than 6% of Iran's reserves, while Iran currently exports gas only to neighboring Iraq. European firms could also play a major role in restoring and expanding transit infrastructure and executing broader investment projects, given Iran's massive capital requirements. Trade with Iran need not be restricted to energy commodities; even under active sanctions, commercial ties persist. For example, trade volume between Germany and Iran reached €1,2 billion in 2025¹², primarily involving medical equipment, agricultural machinery, and industrial goods. Trade volumes are expected to surge once sanctions are lifted (following the 2015 JCPOA, German-Iranian trade rose to over €3 billion¹³ in the period of 2017-2018 despite incomplete sanctions relief).

Poland's current trade volume with Iran stands at a modest ~€60 million¹⁴, though it spiked to over €220 million in 2018¹⁵ due to crude oil purchases. The underlying commercial potential is substantially higher, extending to Polish participation in Iranian investment projects. Preliminary discussions should take place prior to sanctions removal. Poland should reactivate its 2015 "Go Iran" initiative, including resuming talks regarding geophysical assessment and potential crude oil extraction from the Soumar field in western Iran by PGNiG (a letter of intent was signed in 2018). The "Go Iran" framework also targeted the Iranian market for Polish agricultural machinery, buses, and geological services. Because Iran's structural needs have expanded rather than diminished, these plans remain fully relevant. Early engagement, supported by Polish state institutions that facilitate networking and negotiations, would allow Polish companies not only to reap tangible economic benefits, but also to secure a starting position before the Iranian market is dominated by competitors.

¹² <https://www.dihk.de/en/policy-dossiers/economic-relations-between-germany-and-the-middle-east-173570>

¹³ <https://de.statista.com/infografik/14988/deutschlands-handel-mit-dem-iran/>

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.pl/web/iran/iran>

¹⁵ <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/irn/partner/pol?selector541id=2018>