

Hot Topic № 2 (15), 2026. Trump. Iran. War



Orlov, Vladimir A.
Founding Director of PIR Center

March 1, 2026

IRAN

Hot Topic



And they say you can trust Trump... He lured the Iranians to the negotiating table. Yet, just as the talks were steering towards a realistic compromise needed for what Trump always calls a «brilliant deal», he pulls the trigger. It wasn't just a warning shot. Instead, it was a full-blown military strike, delivered with the full might of the US military. And this is just the beginning.

Let us begin by addressing the following questions. First, what were the Trump's motives behind the strike? Second, how are the responsibilities divided between the USA and Israel in this war with Iran? And third, why should anyone believe a word Trump says?

The first question deals with the motives. The war of June 2025 ended in a strategic stalemate. On the one hand, the US-Israeli joint strikes inflicted significant damage on key Iranian nuclear facilities- especially on those essential for producing weapons-grade enriched uranium needed for a nuclear explosive device. Additionally, these strikes resulted in the elimination of key Iranian nuclear scientists. A detailed analysis of these developments will be presented in the PIR Center's report «The Nuclear Program of the Islamic Republic of Iran: An Assessment of the Current State and Capabilities», which will be released on March 2. On the other hand, according to the aforementioned report, as of this February «Iran still retains the required technical knowledge and experience gained from more than thirty years of nuclear research and development. Furthermore, over 30 nuclear facilities are still operating across the country. Most importantly, the fate of over 440 kg of HEU, which could potentially be used to create a special explosive munition, remains unresolved. This amount of HEU, upon further enrichment, could be sufficient for the production of ten nuclear warheads».

By the end of the previous year, a sense of growing despondency has taken hold in Israel. As authoritative Israeli officials told me at the time, Trump was «losing interest» in Iran, allegedly shifting his attention towards Venezuela and the Ukrainian crisis, presuming from the standpoint, that «the Americans did their job already». Hence, I was told, Netanyahu had to exert significant effort to reengage the Trump administration on a more aggressive posture toward Iran, arguing that «as long as Iran is not neutralized, it will remain a thorn in our side». This raises the following question: what does «neutralizing Iran» mean in practice? Does it entail the preferred Republican strategy of «regime change» (to put it simply, coup d'état) or a more limited campaign of «clearing out» remaining Iranian nuclear facilities with deep penetration conventional bombs?

However, as the Israelis soon discovered, their concerns were unwarranted. It turned out Trump had not shelved Iran. He was simply distracted by Venezuela, testing a new strategy – a partial regime change. Still, a full-scale «clearing» and humiliation of Iran was, by all appearance, part of his perceived mission. And this was not solely about Israel, nor merely about the nuclear program. Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the seizure of American hostages at the US Embassy in Tehran that very year, Iran has remained America's foremost intractable challenge on the global stage. Not the DPRK or Cuba. Not even Russia or China

(although Trump's «clearing» Iran would also send a timely and unmistakable message to Beijing). Back home, we would say Iran is «skewing the data». It is getting on Trump's nerves. Iranian negotiators turned out to be skilled ones. «They are dragging their feet, they are jerking you around», the Israelis goaded. And here comes the time for retaliation.

This brings us to the following conclusion: unlike the “warm-up” round in June, the ongoing war promises to be a serious undertaking. According to the Trump, there are only two possible scenarios: either the Iranian regime capitulates completely, begs Washington for forgiveness for all the «offenses», hands over its entire stockpile of HEU and renounces the idea of uranium enrichment forever; or those, who won't submit, are eliminated. The timing couldn't be better: Russia's hands are tied by the Ukrainian conflict; China, acting alone without Russia's backing, will not intervene militarily on Iran's behalf – it will grumble and that's it. The Arab states remain divided and, thus, will ultimately acquiesce: someone will gloat quietly, while others may adopt an anti-Iranian posture and find themselves on the receiving end of Iranian missile strikes (even if those missiles were aimed at targets on the US bases). One way or another, Iran will have to fight back alone. I am aware that a third scenario is also being discussed: the three parties (the USA, Israel and Iran) engage in a controlled exchange of strikes to «let off steam», calculate the damage inflicted upon one another, but still refrain from escalation to a full-scale war. Then Washington and Tehran resume negotiations, albeit from a different starting point. However, this scenario appears the least plausible to me.

The next question is: how are the responsibilities divided between the USA and Israel in this war with Iran? Destroying the Islamic regime is a common objective for both. The Israelis seem to possess exceptionally detailed information on what is happening inside Iran and the exact location of Iranian critical facilities – including those with nuclear materials. The United States has deep penetration conventional bombs at its disposal to address the most challenging military objectives. What we have here is a strong linkage – a kind of «joint venture», so to speak, between Israel and the USA under the motto «Iran must be defeated». Regarding the speculations that Washington and Tehran have allegedly reached an agreement in Geneva, but then Israel got jealous and February 28 happened... I do not believe a word of it.

This leads up to the main point: trusting Trump is impossible. To rely on his words is too perilous. He is capable of conducting negotiations while simultaneously preparing for renewed conflict. There is nothing more cynical than a president who blesses an organization called “Board of Peace” while giving orders to attack sovereign states. Cynicism in politics and diplomacy is a common thing. Career diplomats got used to it a long time ago, though the number of cynical actions has extremely skyrocketed these days. The coming days will reveal whether Trump's gambit with Iran collapses or whether Iran breaks under the strain. Military superiority is unequivocally on the side of the USA and Israel. As V. Pelevin puts it: “The power of contemporary philosophy lies not in syllogisms, but in air support”.

Alea iacta est. Trump has no way back since February 28. The only pragmatic advice to be given to all “peace supporters” – prepare for war.

This op-ed first appeared at the [Kommersant Daily](#) on March 1, 2026. (Translated from Russian by Sergey Shashinov, PIR Center intern)

Keywords: Middle East; Iran; The United States; Israel

NPT

E16/SHAH – 26/03/01



MAIN MENU

[About PIR Center](#)

[NONPROLIFERATION.WORLD](#)

[Research projects](#)

[Education & Training](#)

[Our publications](#)

[For the Press](#)

[Support PIR Center](#)