

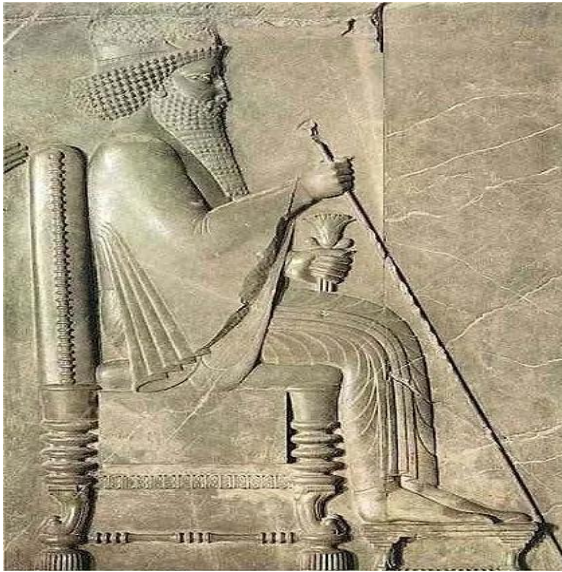
Diplomatic Quagmire and Persian Sceptre

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A newspaper-style opinion feature on pressure, nuclear denial, regime power, and the strategic risks of prolonged diplomacy

Ancient Persian royal imagery sets the tone for a hard-power argument about Iran, command, and state power.



Since the Islamic Republic of Iran seized power in 1979, the United States has seen nine different presidents take office. Yet none of them possessed the political courage to finish the job that Donald Trump began during his first term. Trump's maximum-pressure campaign, combined with the Abraham Accords and the elimination of Qasem Soleimani, marked the first serious attempt in decades to confront the regime's revolutionary ideology rather than merely manage its symptoms. Completing that work will require both courage and prudence. The path is fraught with risks that must be carefully managed if America is to avoid another generation of half-measures and strategic disappointment.

In an earlier article, three realistic courses of action were outlined for The United States president. The first is renewed negotiations. Forty-seven years of diplomatic engagement have demonstrated one consistent truth: the Islamic Republic is a serial liar. Its latest ballistic-missile barrage toward Diego Garcia offered fresh proof that its promises are worthless the moment they become inconvenient. Any new talks must therefore be conducted with extreme skepticism and ironclad verification mechanisms. It is true America wants to avoid quagmires when it comes to war but it should also avoid quagmires of negotiations too. Because the damage here will equally the same. If president George W Bush or Obama have addressed the problem then the cost of it would have been considerably lower compared to now.

The second option involves the rapid removal of Islamic Republic nuclear material from the Isfahan site coupled with the establishment of a 100-kilometer security parameter. This would create a narrow window of three to six weeks during which U.S. and Israeli forces could locate, secure, and extract remaining nuclear material before the regime reconstitutes its program in hidden facilities. But as

secretary of war Pete Hegseth said this will not remove the willingness of obtaining nuclear weapons in future.

The third and most decisive path is a targeted tactical operation centred on Tehran, executed in close coordination with Israel and elements of the Iranian people themselves. This option recognises that the regime's centre of gravity is not its aging air force or rusting warships but its political command structure and ideological enforcers.

Yet every option carries dangers that demand rigorous management. The first and most immediate risk is the regime's mastery of time-wasting or better to call it Diplomatic Quagmire.. Tehran has turned delay into an art form. Every additional day of diplomacy or half-hearted military posturing is portrayed inside Iran as a victory. The regime calculates that if it can stretch negotiations long enough, it may flip the U.S. Congress or Senate in midterms, or see a change of administration. Recent events illustrate the pattern: a promised two-week ceasefire has already stretched beyond one month, while the Strait of Hormuz briefly opened, "Up on Pakistan's request" has been closed again, providing fresh propaganda fodder for regime media claiming "resistance" is working. The antidote is simple: even negotiations aimed at formal surrender must have hard, short deadlines. America cannot afford another endless diplomatic quagmire.

The second major risk is the absence of a coherent, integrated strategy. No war has ever been won from the air alone, and history offers a blunt English proverb to remind us: you can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make it drink. Precision strikes may degrade capabilities, but without ground pressure or the credible threat of it, regimes like Iran's simply absorb the blows, disperse, and wait for political winds to shift in their favour. Any serious campaign against the Islamic Republic must therefore include planning for decisive follow-on operations that can force behavioural change rather than merely punish it.

Throughout military history, the "sceptre" or staff of command has been the ultimate symbol of power. Kings and conquerors rarely surrendered it willingly; it had to be taken by force. Today, the Islamic Republic's true sceptre is not merely its nuclear program but its integrated missile and drone arsenal, the means by which it projects terror across the region and deters its neighbours. Tehran may eventually trade away some nuclear concessions under extreme pressure, but it will fight bitterly to retain its missile and drone forces. These weapons are its daily instrument of blackmail against Persian Gulf states, Israel, and American bases. Donald Trump, or any president serious about victory, must be prepared to seize this capability rather than wait for the regime to volunteer it. They will not.

The Islamic Republic's strategy most closely resembles North Korea's. Pyongyang never needed nuclear weapons to hold Seoul hostage; its conventional artillery has kept the South Korean capital within range for decades. Similarly, Iran's conventional missile and proxy network already gives it substantial coercive power. If Washington convinces itself that merely capping the nuclear program or destroying a few outdated fighter jets and frigates constitutes success, it will have missed the point entirely. Iran's air force, largely

built around 1960s and 1970s American and Soviet designs, and its aging surface fleet have limited relevance in modern high-intensity conflict. Their destruction makes for impressive footage but yields marginal strategic effect. The real prize is regime change itself and removing the ideological engine that sustains both nuclear ambition and regional destabilisation.

Anything short of that leaves the United States holding a paper victory. Democrats will correctly label it a failure, arguing that the regime remains in power, still funds proxies, and will eventually reconstitute its programs. Republicans will face accusations of weakness. The American people, having watched another cycle of expensive but inconclusive operations, will grow more isolationist. The regime, bloodied but intact, will emerge stronger domestically by claiming divine protection against the Great Satan.

Finishing the job therefore requires clarity of purpose from the outset. The goal cannot be another arms-control agreement or a temporary pause in enrichment. It must be the end of the Islamic Republic as a revolutionary threat. This demands a strategy that combines diplomatic isolation, economic strangulation, precision strikes on command nodes, and where necessary, having some limited boots on ground to support for internal Iranian opposition forces ready to replace the theocracy with a government that respects its people and its neighbours.

The risks are real: escalation, refugee flows, oil-price shocks, and political division at home. Yet the greater risk is continuation of the status quo, a regime that grows bolder with each passing year, inches closer to nuclear breakout, and exports terror on a global scale. America has the capacity to lead a decisive coalition. What it has lacked for decades is the will to see the mission through.

The moment has arrived to finish the job. Half-measures have already consumed two generations. The third must not be wasted on the same illusions that failed the first two. Victory is achievable, but only if strategy matches rhetoric and the sceptre of Iranian power is taken rather than politely requested. History will judge whether this administration possesses the courage its predecessors lacked.

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