

Trump Is Lost on Iran

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President Donald Trump despises losers but is increasingly looking like one in the Iran war. When Iran most recently violated the two-month-old ceasefire, launching [35 missiles and drones](#), the United States responded not with epic fury but with a slap on the wrist, suggesting epic weakness. Instead, Trump should seize on these Iranian violations to restart military operations, restore American credibility, and end this war not with a deal but a powerful bang.

The 40-day U.S.-Israel military campaign advanced, if not fully fulfilled, many of Trump's stated objectives: decapitating Iran's leadership, sinking most of its navy, damaging some of its nuclear facilities, and degrading its ballistic missile capability.

Yet, on April 8, with the Iranian regime reeling, and the U.S. and Israeli militaries reportedly having about two more weeks of strikes in their campaign plans, Trump [agreed to a ceasefire](#) to negotiate a deal. On April 13, he [ordered the blockade](#) of Iranian oil exports, believing, wrongly, it would force the regime to make major concessions in a deal.

Ever since, Trump has been stuck. To his credit, he so far refused to accept a deal that would—like the one Presidents Barack Obama struck and Joe Biden sought—enrich the regime while only partially and temporarily limiting Iran's nuclear program. But he also has avoided resuming military operations, cowed by Iran's ability to block non-Iranian oil exports through the Strait of Hormuz, sending gasoline prices to [\\$5 per gallon](#).

Caught between what he sees as two unacceptable courses of action, Trump alternates between blustery threats and promises of imminent deals, further undermining his credibility.

Yet, Trump continues to display worrying signs of desperation for a deal. The U.S. response to Iran's ceasefire violation was not even proportionate—just a [handful of strikes](#). And earlier this week, Trump acceded to Iranian threats to walk away from negotiations if he didn't prevent Israel from bombing Hezbollah, which has been raining down missiles and drones on Israel's northern towns. Undermining the security of our valiant wartime partner, Israel, to save Iran's main proxy only made a good deal, and Israel-Lebanon peace, more remote.

Through his pursuit of a deal, Trump has demoralized the Iranian people, whose rescue he promised in [January](#), triggering this war. This abandonment not only undermines American credibility but harms our war effort, for it is the Iranian people who will issue the final verdict of this war, and Trump's credibility, by whether or not they feel emboldened to rise up against the Islamic Republic.

Trump's current, losing course will have grave consequences beyond Iran. The image of a weak, vulnerable, unsteady America is a Chinese victory. It means allies that rely on a strong America, such as the United Arab Emirates, Japan, and Taiwan will emerge weaker or turn away. A perceived loss in this war will also have domestic consequences. It will permanently damage the Trump administration, and the chances of a Republican winning the 2028 presidential election. It will also undermine the argument for a strong U.S. national security, and embolden the isolationists on the right, and much of the Democratic Party.

With this much, and more, hanging in the balance, Trump has to win this war. He must do so emphatically with a bang, not a whimper. There can be no deal, which would only legitimize and enrich the regime.

That requires the United States to resume military operations for a few weeks to severely damage remaining Iranian missile and nuclear facilities and open the Strait. And Trump must create conditions for regime collapse by damaging Iran's energy facilities, such as its refineries, gas pipelines and transmission grids, and effectively turn off the lights on the regime. He should also consider rendering inoperable Iran's oil exports facilities on Kharg Island.

Then he should take a page from his own handling of the 12-Day War, and simply state that the United States and Israel accomplished what they needed for now, will ensure Iran doesn't resume its nuclear program, and will support the Iranian people in every way possible, including providing weapons to any Iranian willing to fight the regime.

There are risks in this course, including Iranian retaliation against Gulf Arab energy facilities. All this will certainly spike oil prices in the short term, to the unfortunate detriment of the average American. But it will mean a victory for the United States and U.S. security, and our standing, as well as Trump's.

Trump risks converting an impressive military campaign into a strategic failure by sticking with a disastrous two-month ceasefire that squanders American leverage and reeks of weakness. Preventing a nuclear Iran, restoring American credibility and advancing U.S. national security requires ending this war quickly but forcefully.