



The Cyrus Cylinder استوانه کوروش or Cyrus Charter منشور کوروش was discovered under the foundation of a Babylonian palace in 1879, making it perhaps the oldest time capsule on record. It commemorates Cyrus' victory over Babylonia in 539 BC and sets out the rights of subjects in his expanding empire. It is often commemorated as the oldest charter of human rights in the world.

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## The Art of the Iran Nuclear Deal

Note From the Editor, by Paul Barker

President Trump likes to be seen as a great negotiator, the master of the art of the deal. That currently does not seem to be working out too well for Ukraine or the global economy, but perhaps, maybe, tentatively, there might be hope for a new nuclear agreement with Iran.

Ever so cautiously, indirect and slightly [direct talks between Iran and the US](#) have been initiated under the good auspices of Oman. The initial rounds of talks in Muscat and Rome concluded with positive and encouraging words. The third round, to be held in Muscat this Saturday, is supposed to deal with technical issues. Little is publicly known about the composition of the negotiating teams or the parameters within which they are allowed to negotiate. Leaders in both countries agree that diplomacy is far preferable to war, and they agree that a stronger, better agreement would include a significant role for American investment in and commerce with Iran. Steve Witkoff, the key American negotiator, sometimes appears open to allowing Iran to continue low levels of uranium enrichment for electric power and medical purposes, whereas more hardline members of the Trump administration insist on zero Iranian enrichment of uranium, a position which would be a deal breaker for Iran.

The DOGE initiated decimation of scientific and diplomatic expertise in the Departments of Energy and State will make it difficult for the US to conclude, let alone manage, an updated nuclear nonproliferation agreement with Iran. DOGE led budget cuts will

further complicate US agreement management capabilities. Under a better deal extensive safeguards and IAEA inspections will be essential to ensure that Iran's nuclear program is never weaponized.

If the Trump team is able to conclude an acceptable agreement, it should not face roadblocks in the Republican controlled Senate and House, obstacles which they would inevitably place on any agreement negotiated by a Democratic President.

Parties in Washington and Tel Aviv who demand "permanent dismantlement" and "zero enrichment" are not aligned with President Trump's stated desire to reach a deal that prevents Iran from developing nuclear weapons, prevents war and advances US interests in the region. If their viewpoint were to become the centerpiece of US policy, it would sabotage Trump's vision and ensure no deal could be reached.

While many things could hopefully be negotiated with Iran over time, raising them now as essential parts of the deal under discussion would be a certain way to blow it up. These issues include: demands for zero uranium enrichment capacity; restructuring of Iran's foreign policy priorities and alliances; and addressing Iran's notorious human rights record. The most urgent task now is to contain and reverse Iran's proximity to nuclear weapons capability. Trust can flow from this, and future issues addressed as time and leadership permit.

American capability to secure better and broader agreements will be enhanced by restoring and building American soft power, including an effective foreign aid program, a complete and competent diplomatic corps, cultural exchanges, and an honest and trusted Voice of America.

Steve Witkoff, the man tasked by President Trump with negotiating a new nuclear deal with Iran (and an end to the Israeli war against Gaza and the Russian war against Ukraine) has a background in real estate and no particular education or expertise in the history and politics of Iran let alone nuclear science. But that being said, he has reportedly been able to stand up to Netanyahu and secure a 30-day truce in the Gaza war, and he does seem to be entering the talks with Iran with an acceptable tone and scope for the discussions.

Renowned American diplomat, Richard Armitage, died last week. This is a good time to remember his sage advice, "We should discuss the full range of our relationship with the Iranians and should have enough confidence in our diplomacy to do so. Diplomacy is the art of letting the other guy have our way."

## **US Policy**

**[As Iran fortifies nuke sites, US says it can have civilian nuclear program if no enrichment.](#)** Rubio says US looking to avoid war, but will do whatever necessary to stop Tehran acquiring nuclear weapons; satellite images show regime fortifying buried nuclear facilities. Lazar Berman, Times of Israel, 2025/4/23

**[Iran hawks, diaspora opposition turn on Trump as nuclear talks progress,](#)** Amwaj, 2025/4/22

**[No, Regime Change in Iran Is Not the Answer,](#)** Daniel Larison, Eunomia, 2025/4/24

**[Trump Waved Off Israeli Strike After Divisions Emerged in His Administration.](#)**

Israel developed plans for attacking Iranian nuclear facilities that would have required U.S. assistance. But some administration officials had doubts. Julian E. Barnes, Eric Schmitt, Maggie Haberman and Ronen Bergman, NYT, 2025/4/16

**[Language, Memory, and the Fragility of US–Iran Nuclear Diplomacy.](#)** For Iran, invoking the ‘Libya model’ brings complex dynamics to the forefront as Tehran weighs the risks of trusting and compromising with Western actors, Ludovica Castelli, Stimson Center, 2025/4/17

**[Why Trump’s Iran Diplomacy May Work,](#)** Trita Parsi, TIME, 2025/4/11

**[Trump’s New Iran Deal. Can Trump actually strike a deal with Iran? Quite possibly. But not because he’s a master negotiator.](#)** Joe Cirincione, 2025/4/11. The key to predicting Donald’s Trump’s national security decisions is to ask: What does Putin want?

**[Iran hawks, diaspora opposition turn on Trump as nuclear talks progress,](#)** AMWAJ, 2025/4/21

**[Russia, China, and the E-3 Root from the Sidelines As US and Iran Talk in Oman](#)**

Moscow does not want to see its military cooperation with Tehran tested by a collision between Washington and Tehran, Ilya Roubanis, Ehsan

Dastgheib, Vladimir Ivanov, Stimson Center, 2025/4/11

**[Trump must continue to move toward Iran talks, even as Netanyahu tries to derail it,](#)** Sina Toossi, Mondoweiss, 2025/4/9

**[The Stupidity of Trump's Iran Policy.](#)** Trump doesn’t want a diplomatic solution. He demands capitulation and threatens bombing if he doesn’t get it. It’s no wonder that the Iranian government doesn’t want to talk to him. Daniel Larison, Eunomia, 2025/4/4

**[Diplomacy or Conflict? Trump and Khamenei’s High-Stakes Gamble.](#)** Iran may be willing to move to direct diplomacy but will start out by insisting on a mediator – Oman – to gauge U.S. seriousness in talks, Shahir Shahidsaless, Stimson Center, 2025/4/8

**[‘Great.’ US envoy appears to respond to Iran FM tweet Iran will never pursue nukes.](#)** US Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff appeared to respond positively to the tweet by the Iranian diplomat, but later deleted it. The exchange came after an exchange of letters between Trump & Iran. Laura Rozen, Diplomatic, 2025/4/3

**[The war over war with Iran has just begun.](#)** Trump says he wants a deal but stakeholders in and outside of his administration are pushing for conflict. Sina Toossi, Responsible Statecraft, 2025/3/28



A newspaper featuring the headline story on indirect negotiations between Iran and the United States in Muscat, Oman, is displayed at a newsstand in Tehran, Iran, on April 12. The front pages of major dailies in Tehran prominently featured headlines about the negotiations, highlighting the renewed diplomatic channel amid regional tensions and sanctions-related disputes. (Photo by Fatemeh Bahrami/Anadolu via Getty Images)

[Signs U.S. Massing B-2 Spirit Bombers In Diego Garcia](#), The US is flowing in airpower to the Indian Ocean outpost as threats to Iran escalate and the bombing campaign against the Houthis grinds on. Joseph Trevithick and Howard Altman, TWZ, 2025/3/25

[Pentagon Prepares for Trump to Go Berserk](#). Unprecedented number of B-2 bombers amassed for Iran strike, Ken Klippenstein, 2025/4/7

[The Impending War on Iran – Trump’s Biggest Mistake](#), Alistar Crook, Countercurrents, 2025/3/26

[A hawkish WSJ op-ed from Elliot Kaufman argues](#) that Trump is abandoning what the author calls “Obama’s Law”—the idea that Iran can attack through proxies without facing direct consequences. The piece highlights Trump’s warning: “Every shot fired by the Houthis will be looked upon, from this point forward, as being a shot fired from the weapons and leadership of Iran.”



[Iran Rejects \[Direct\] Talks with U.S. over Nuclear Program](#), John Limbert and James Jeffrey Interview on Newsmax, 2025/3/30

[Why Diplomacy with Iran Can’t Wait](#), Odeliya Matter, FCNL 2025/4/1

[Trump Demands the Impossible from Iran](#), Alastair Crooke, Former British Diplomat, 2025/4/5

[The Pentagon Didn’t Fire Dan Caldwell Over Leaks. They Fired Him for Opposing War With Iran](#). The Tucker Carlson Show, 2025/4/22

[Futility of Trump Negotiation Skills](#), Ben Meislas, Meidastouch Network, 2025/4/22

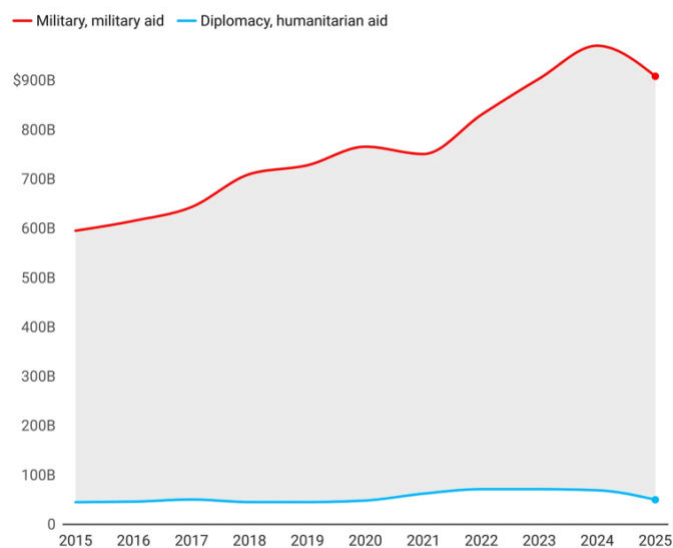
[Don’t Forget the Victims of Our Wars](#). We have an obligation to hold our government accountable when it wreaks havoc in other parts of the world. Daniel Larison, Eunomia, 2025/4/8

[The Path to War with Iran](#), Alastair Crooke, 2025/4/11

[On Iran, Trump Should Ignore Netanyahu](#). A nuclear deal with Tehran would serve U.S. interests. Adam Gallagher, The American Conservative, 2025/4/15

[Elon Musk Stands to Get Even Richer as Trump Backs \\$1 Trillion Budget for Pentagon](#), William Hartung, Democracy Now, 2025/4/9

The US spends 18 times more on war than diplomacy



Figures for military, military aid refer to Function 050 discretionary funding plus Title 22 assistance. Diplomacy, humanitarian aid is SFOPS funding minus Title 22 assistance. Funding amounts are in current dollars. Data: CBO, CRS, H.R.1968. More: stephensemier.com

Chart: Stephen Semler (@stephensemier | stephensemier.com) • Created with Datawrapper

[US spending on war vs. diplomacy](#), Stephen Semler, Polygraph Newsletter, 2025/4/14

[Former Israeli official leading Israel, Iran desk at the White House](#), Report comes amid sensitive talks over Tehran's nuclear program. Ben Armbruster, Responsible Statecraft, 2025/4/21

## Iran Policy

[Progress in Iran–US Talks as Seen from Iran](#). Iran's indirect negotiations reflect caution and a desire to control the diplomatic narrative amid perceived U.S. inexperience, Motahareh Heydari, The Stimson Center, 2025/4/24

[Iran and U.S. Technical Discussions Set to Begin in Oman Saturday, Iranian Opposition Rejects War](#), Iran Unfiltered, NIAC, 2025/4/25

[Behind the US-Iran talks: five points of convergence between Trump and Khamenei](#). Seyed Hossein Mousavian, Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, 2025/4/16

[A Nuclear Deal With Iran Is Possible—but Only if the U.S. Learns From History](#). A former Iranian diplomat outlines a path forward. Seyed Hossein Mousavian, Foreign Policy, 2025/4/18.

[Iran's foreign minister: The ball is in America's court](#), Iran is ready for indirect negotiations with the United States. A solution to the crisis is within reach. Seyed Abbas Araghchi, WAPO 2025/4/8

[In stunning U-turn, Khamenei said to approve of US investment in Iran](#), Amwaj, 2025/4/10

[Iran could agree to direct talks if progress in indirect mediation](#). Indirect talks with the US could get underway likely in Oman in two or three weeks. Laura Rozen, Diplomatic, 2025/4/3

[Iran Delivers Response to Trump Amid Uncertainty of Trump's Policy](#), NIAC Action, 2025/3/28

[Tension between Azeris, Kurds escalates in northwestern Iran](#), Amwaj, 2025/3/24

**Travel Advisory from Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans, 2025/4/4:** PAAIA has received credible reports of a recent arrest, and **the IRI is actively questioning and harassing US citizens** in what appears to be a pattern of politically motivated detentions ahead of potential negotiations with the United States. Because of these reports from Iranian Americans we know and in combination with communications from the State Department, we want to deliver this message to you.

[2025 Annual Member Survey Report](#), NIAC, 2025/4/10

[Keynote speech by H.E. Dr. Abbas Araghchi the Iranian Foreign Minister that was to be presented at the Carnegie International Nuclear Policy Conference, Austria MFA, 2025/4/22](#)

## Region

[Inside the Saudi King's letter to Iran's supreme leader](#), Ali Mamouri, Amwaj, 2025/4/23

[US 'open' to supporting a Yemen ground operation](#), American private contractors, meanwhile, are giving factions there advice, Stavroula Pabst, Responsible Statecraft, 2025/5/15

[Why Let the Yemen War Bleed our Military Stockpiles?](#) When DoD insiders are worried, you know something is wrong. Kelley Beaucar Vlahos, The Conservative American, 2025/4/15

[A US-Iran Deal Would Be Good for Israel](#), Andrew Day, The American Conservative, 2025/4/16

[Why and how Israel missed its chance to strike Iran's nuclear sites](#) – exclusive. JPost reveals for the first time the full extent of the debates between Israel's political and security echelons over striking in Tehran. Jonah Jeremy Bob, Jerusalem Post, 2025/4/23

[What Would a Military Strike on Iran Mean for the Middle East?](#) An attack by the United States or Israel would have profound effects on domestic Iranian politics, the strategy of U.S. Gulf allies, and broader regional dynamics. Mahsa Rouhi, Aziz Alghashian and Saeid Jafari, Foreign Policy, 2023/3/27

[Trump Is Changing the Rules in the Middle East, Netanyahu Is Left to Watch From the Stands.](#) From Iran to Syria, U.S. President Trump's Mideast policy has caught Prime Minister Netanyahu off guard. While Netanyahu's concerns are likely being heard, it's doubtful they carry the same weight they did during Trump's first presidency. Zvi Bar'el, Ha'aretz, 2025/4/18

[The Real Scandal Is the Illegal War in Yemen. Dozens](#) of innocent Yemenis are dead and many more are maimed so that Trump and his allies could congratulate themselves for being “tougher” than Biden. Damiel Larison, 2025/3/26

[Will Iran derail the 'Development Road' set to run through Iraq?](#) Amwaj, 2025/3/26

[Iran, Iraq trade accusations as US naval forces stop 'Iranian tankers'](#), Amwaj, 2025/4/2

[U.S. Strikes in Yemen Burning Through Munitions With Limited Success.](#) In just three weeks, the Pentagon has used \$200 million worth of munitions in Operation Rough Rider against the Houthi militia, officials said. Eric Schmitt, Edward Wong and John Ismay, NYT, 2025/4/4

[Iran-backed militias in Iraq ready to disarm to avert Trump wrath](#), Ahmed Rasheed, Reuters, 2025/4/6

[Russian lower house of parliament ratifies 20-year pact between Russia and Iran](#), Reuters, 2025/4/8

[Will troubled pivot to Europe, Turkey lead Armenia back to Iran, Russia?](#) Amwaj, 2025/4/16

## Nuclear and Missiles

[FAQ re Iran's Nuclear Program & the Trump Administration's Negotiations Toward a New Nuclear Deal](#), Kat DesCamp-Renner, J Street, 2025/4/22

[The Challenges Involved in Military Strikes Against Iran's Nuclear Programme](#), Darya Dolzikova and Justin Bronk, RUSI, 2025/4/21

[Who Is Really "Gambling With World War III"?](#) Daryl Kimball, Arms Control Association, April 2025

[Netanyahu Says Iran Deal Would Work Only If Nuclear Facilities Are 'Blown Up'](#) The Israeli leader said he and President Trump spoke about a military option for Iran 'at length', Dave DeCamp, Anti-War.com, 2025/4/8

[As more countries enter space, the boundary between civilian and military enterprise is blurring. Dangerously.](#) Zohaib Altaf, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 2025/4/9

[No Joke: US considering nuclear power for Saudi in grand bargain.](#) Surprise — the Trump team's latest bid for Saudi-Israel normalization goes way too far and appears to be a one-way street. Responsible Statecraft, 2025/4/21

[Official Proposals on the Iranian Nuclear Issue, 2003-2013](#), ACA, 2023

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

*"There are opportunities lost through military spending [...] Opportunities to invest in biomedicine, clean energy, smart farming technologies and much more."*

— Roberto González, professor of cultural anthropology at San José State University, California, ["Move fast, kill things: the tech startups trying to reinvent defence with Silicon Valley values."](#) *The Guardian*

## Sanctions, Economy

[Book Review](#) on making sanctions more effective, by Kelsey Davenport, Arms Control Association, April 2025: [Sanctions for Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation: Moving Forward](#), by Armend Bekaj and Peter Wallensteen, eds., Routledge Global Security Studies 2025

[Sanctioning a China-Based "Teapot" Refinery to Pressure Iran Further](#), Tammy Bruce, State Department, 2025/4/17

## Human Rights

[Should human rights derail US-Iran talks?](#), Sina Toossi, Responsible Statecraft, 2025/4/28

[Over 300 Activists Declare Readiness to Defend the Country Amid U.S. Threats](#), Iran Unfiltered, 2025/4/7

[Trump Shouldn't Forget the Iranian People](#), Holly DagesAzadeh Pourzand and Kelly J. Shannon, NYT, 2025/4/12

# Hypocritical Use of Human Rights Issues Would Undermine Diplomacy with Iran

Sina Toossi, Responding to NYT article, 2025/4/14

I agree that human rights must be a core concern in US foreign policy, including when it comes to Iran. And the impact of US sanctions and negotiations—especially on the country’s economy and civil space—can definitely shape the human rights situation on the ground.

But I find the argument in this piece troubling. We’re 18 months into a US-backed mass killing and destruction in Gaza, and yet this op-ed calls for making human rights “central” to negotiations with Iran to in part help Trump “build goodwill and credibility with regional allies.” Many of those same allies are responsible for some of the region’s most egregious rights abuses. This kind of selective invocation of human rights risks turning a vital principle into a political tool.

More importantly, the idea that Trump should “push for human rights as a central element of talks with Iran” to “strengthen his negotiating position,” as your piece argues, is very likely to backfire. Not only would it derail already fragile diplomacy, but Iran would almost certainly respond by spotlighting America’s own human rights record—from Gaza, to El Salvador, to the repression of student protests on US campuses. Introducing such a framing at this stage risks collapsing the talks, prolonging sanctions that punish ordinary Iranians, and bringing the region closer to a devastating war.

We should absolutely care about human rights in Iran, but I would argue that the most effective way to advance them is through sustained engagement, not by derailing diplomacy. A negotiated agreement could reopen channels of communication, commerce, and political contact between the US and Iran. These renewed ties would offer meaningful leverage—leverage that can and should be used to press for human rights improvements.

We’ve seen this work before: after the JCPOA was signed, European governments successfully raised specific prisoner cases and pushed back on Iran’s execution policies, particularly around drug offenses. This period also saw European businesses entering joint ventures that were made contingent on higher standards for labor rights, gender equity, and global social responsibility norms. Constructive diplomacy creates openings for pressure that isolation and confrontation simply cannot.

[Recorded executions hit their highest figure since 2015](#), Amnesty International, 2025/4/8. “Those who dare challenge authorities have faced the most cruel of punishments, particularly in Iran and Saudi Arabia, with the death penalty used to silence those brave enough to speak out.” Agnès Callamard

- **Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia responsible for 91% of executions**
- **States weaponizing death penalty against protesters and ethnic groups**
- **Rise in drug-related executions in violation of human rights**

[Iran Leads World in Recorded Executions Amid Sharp Rise in 2024](#), NIAC Human Rights Tracker, 2025/4/16

[The State Department is changing its mind about what it calls human rights](#), Graham Smith, NPR, 2025/4/18

## Environment

[Wet Bulb Dead Zones could make Parts of Middle East, Pakistan, Uninhabitable — Even at Night](#), Juan Cole, Informed Comment, 2025/4/9

[The Countdown to Iran's Day Zero: A Crisis of Water, not War](#), Reza Talebi, Informed Comment, 2025/4/22

## Advocacy Action

[The Reality of Project 2025](#), Red Wine & Blue,

[PAAIA Advocacy Priorities](#), Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans

- Officials of the Islamic Republic (IRI), Not the Iranian People, Should Be the Subject of Any Travel Ban
- Iranian Americans are a Dynamic and Highly Educated Community That Contributes Significantly to U.S. Economy, National Security, and Society
- The Iranian People Are Natural Allies of the U.S. in the Middle East
- Current Visa Granting Processes Safeguard U.S. Security
- Conclusion: A Strategic Approach

[The US needed a Peace Corps in the '60s — it still needs one today](#), Betsy Small, The Hill, 2025/4/19

[NPCA Advocacy Toolkit, A Time for Collective Action](#), National Peace Corps Association, 2025 April

## Media

[Usually divided Iranian media expresses backing for talks with US](#), AMWAJ, 2025/4/14

[Upsurge in attacks on journalists](#), particularly women, working on Iran, Negar Mortazavi, X, 2025/4/19

## History

[Iran's Islamic Revolution and the US: Why Diplomats Matter](#), Fariba Amini and George Lambrakis, Informed Comment, 2025/4/23

["Iran's Rise and Rivalry with the US in the Middle East" — A Book Talk](#), Professor Mohsen Milani interviewed by Barbara Slavin, 2025/4/3. The book was written before the 2023/10/7 Hamas attack on Israel, but he foresaw the forces that would unfold later.

[Canada and America in Better Times](#), Alex Tabarrok, Marginal Revolution, 2025/3/26. How the Canadians saved 6 US diplomats in 1979. PB note: I met Flora McDonald in Kabul in 2002 and she recounted and verified this story.

[Just Another American President](#). Trump's second term has been cruel and disastrous, but in those respects he has a lot in common with his predecessors. Seymour Hersh, 2025/4/10

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