



By: *Harvey Morris*

Did Trump's regime change musing force Tehran to blink?



In an afterglow of bunker-busting euphoria, Donald Trump came up with a new acronym: MIGA, or Make Iran Great Again.

Speculating for the first time at the weekend that the latest conflagration in the Middle East might spell the end of the Tehran regime, the US president **posted**: “It’s not politically correct to use the term, ‘Regime Change,’ but if the current Iranian Regime is unable to MAKE IRAN GREAT AGAIN, why wouldn’t there be a Regime change??? MIGA!!!”

In the first half-year of his second term, friend and foe alike have become accustomed to trying to interpret Trump’s regular midnight musings on his Truth Social account. Is he simply joking, they ponder, or merely testing the political waters as he plots his next step? Or is he, as happens sometimes, actually signalling his true intent?

Which was it this time? Trump did not go so far as saying the US would assist in the demise of the clerical-led regime, having previously **assured** Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei that he did not want him killed “at least not for now”.

His veiled threat may have been enough, however, to make Iran’s leaders blink. They limited their response to Washington’s participation in Israel’s aerial assault to a largely symbolic **strike** on the US al-Udeid air base in Qatar, which they signalled in advance.

A still fragile truce

And within 48 hours of Trump’s MIGA post, he was **congratulating** both Iran and Israel on reaching a ceasefire deal to end their 12-day war, having welcomed Tehran’s early notice of its “very weak” retaliatory strike.

Iran inevitably took credit for the still fragile truce, with state television claiming Trump had begged for an end of hostilities and **citing** “the exemplary resistance and unity of our dear people” for imposing a ceasefire on the enemy.

In reality, the Iranian leadership may have escaped, at least for now, the most existential threat it had faced since the eight-year war with Saddam Hussein’s Iraq that dominated the first decade of the Islamic Republic.

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Strategically weakened, even before Israel’s initial attack, by the setbacks of its ‘axis of resistance’ allies in the region, the regime suffered further significant losses over the past two weeks.

Israel’s initial strikes targeted not only Iran’s nuclear infrastructure but also members of the senior military and Revolutionary Guard hierarchy on which the regime’s survival depends. The 86-year-old Khamenei **retreated** to a secret bunker and even began to contemplate who might replace him if he were killed.

Not about regime change?

In the final hours before the two sides agreed to Trump’s ceasefire deal, Israel’s missiles **struck** ever closer to the institutions of the regime, including Tehran’s Evin prison, where thousands of ‘enemies of the people’ are held.

It was a further signal that Benjamin Netanyahu’s government might be preparing to pursue its own threats of regime change. That aspiration may hold, at least for now, after Iran’s decision to step back from the brink.

As for Trump’s MIGA musings, senior Washington figures had been quick to clarify that the official White House party line was not to promote regime change.

The mission “was not, and has not, been about regime change” – Pete Hegseth

Senior officials stressed that the US strikes had been a one-off operation to prevent Iran from producing nuclear weaponry and to force it back to the negotiating table.

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth stepped in to **remind** reporters that the mission “was not, and has not, been about regime change”, while the White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt **explained** the president had been “simply raising a question”.

So which direction will Iran take from now? If a truce takes hold, there will be at least cautious optimism that Tehran might make concessions towards a verifiable deal to guarantee it has abandoned its alleged aspiration to produce nuclear weapons.

Or, if the process falters, will Tehran revert to a strategy of asymmetrical warfare, including targeted assassinations against its opposition enemies abroad and extensive cyber-attacks?

Why Albania?

On the day the US attacked Iran’s Fordow nuclear facility with 30,000-pound bunker-busting bombs, Iranian hackers brought the city government of Tirana, the Albanian capital, to a halt by **targeting** its municipal website.

Why Albania? Well, that is where one of Tehran’s most persistent opponents has its base – the People’s Mujahedin, or **MEK**. The US, including some close allies of Trump, has periodically flirted with the cult-like organisation it once considered a terrorist group. It was ostracised by Iranians for having sided with Iraq in their eight-year war.

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Did Tehran suspect that Washington might be planning to activate the group as a weapon in a campaign of regime change in Tehran? Given the MEK’s relative insignificance, almost certainly not. It may nevertheless have added a further grain of suspicion in Tehran that US strategy goes beyond curbing Iran’s nuclear ambitions.

A poisoned chalice

So was Trump really serious about regime change, or was it indeed just another midnight musing? And, more significantly, did Tehran’s leaders take it seriously?

If it played a role in restraining Iran and potentially opening the way to a peaceful accommodation, it doesn’t really matter. Errors and misunderstandings can sometimes play a greater role in events than studied diplomacy.



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At another existential moment for the Islamic Republic, in July 1988, a US warship **shot down** an Iran Air civilian airliner over the Gulf, killing all 290 aboard. The crew of the USS Vincennes had mistaken it for a hostile F-14.

The Iranians have never accepted the US version of events, which came at a time when Washington had put its resources behind Baghdad in order to avert a potential Iranian victory in the prolonged war.

Hashemi Rafsanjani, a future Iranian president, was among those who persuaded Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini that the Vincennes incident was further proof that the US would never allow Iran to win the war with Iraq.

Within weeks, Khomeini drank his figurative “poisoned chalice” and accepted a ceasefire.