



By: Daniel Lacalle

Trump's memorandum with Iran is not a concession but a tool of control



The full text of the memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Iran makes one thing clear: conditionality keeps the initiative in the US's hands and dismantles the narrative that portrays the agreement as a surrender to Tehran.

A memorandum of understanding with Iran is neither a capitulation nor a final peace deal. The MoU's purpose is to establish the negotiation framework and outline the prerequisites for signing any binding agreement.

The detailed reading of the MoU points in a very different direction from the one pushed by some commentators who confuse an MoU with a final deal.

The memorandum does not grant automatic concessions; it builds a structure of conditions that preserves the United States' leverage.

Some critics complain that there has been no **regime change**. They should be looking at Iran's opposition, which has not presented a credible programme for change, a replacement team, or the capacity to move under an increasingly repressive regime.

As in other authoritarian cases, what the United States can realistically do is to shape the incentives and monitor the process, not to manufacture a new government from the outside.

Not a final agreement

Let us go to the text. The first distortion that needs to be dismantled is the most basic: confusing a **memorandum of understanding** with a final agreement.

An MoU organises a negotiation, defines the boundaries of the discussion, and sets out the steps of the process, but it does not, by itself, trigger the counterparty benefits that might appear later in a final treaty.

That is why the wording of the document matters so much. Phrases like "subject to" or

"as part of the final agreement" are not diplomatic decoration; they are conditional clauses. They mean nothing is granted in advance.

Iran is not granted trust or a hidden advantage; it must earn both

Every step is subordinated to verifiable compliance by Tehran on four fronts: reopening the Strait of Hormuz without limits or restrictions; handing over enriched uranium, freezing the nuclear programme, and delivering a total ceasefire of hostilities, including all proxies.

That is precisely where the political strength of the text lies. The US keeps control because it retains the decisive lever: **sanctions** are not lifted or eased at the moment the MoU is signed, nor during the first sixty days, but only when Iran has met all the concrete milestones.

This creates a system of incentives that is measurable, reversible, and monitored.

Iran is not granted trust or a hidden advantage; it must earn both. And it must do so under the credible threat that any breach will restore maximum economic and strategic pressure.

The difference is not semantic, but political

This entire framework of conditionality contradicts the concept of "surrender" that some individuals are promoting. Those who portray the MoU as a cash giveaway either do not understand or pretend not to understand that the discussion is not about providing new funds but about a limited, conditional release of some Iranian assets that were frozen in the past and only if very specific conditions are met.

The difference is not semantic, but political.

One thing is to transfer resources with no strings attached; something very different is to gradually and conditionally unlock Iran's own funds, which were turned into a pressure mechanism through sanctions.

Washington is not giving anything and is not transferring anything

The same applies to the absurd claim that the United States is "giving Iran 300 billion dollars." Washington is not giving anything, not transferring anything, and the key point is that what is discussed is a strictly conditioned, externally managed investment vehicle.

If implemented, Gulf investors would have real oversight of Iran's economy. This investment vehicle would only be established if Iran fully opens its economy.

Anyone who does not understand this scenario is simply ignoring evidence from similar cases.

Iran is forced to choose

The second crucial element in the MoU is that pressure does not disappear on the three strategic fronts; it is actually concentrated on them: Hormuz, uranium, and hostilities.

In the Strait of Hormuz, the text does not normalise the situation for free. An effective end to attacks and a verifiable de-escalation framework without automatic compensation are crucial for the reopening and stabilisation of maritime transit.

Those claiming that Iran will receive "millions with no sanctions" are simply lying. No sanctions are lifted until full compliance is verified.

Keeping pressure on Hormuz forces Iran to choose: either continue suffering under a blockade that chokes an economy heavily dependent on that choke point or move towards conditional relief.

On the nuclear front, the MoU is not a

concession from the **United States**; it is a way to immobilise the regime's main bargaining chip: its capacity to enrich and stockpile uranium.

Any ceasefire or operational pause that may derive from the MoU is not a strategic amnesty for Tehran

The references to controlling enriched stock and limiting operations in the programme show that Washington is seeking something very concrete: stripping Iran of its only real instrument of strategic blackmail while a final agreement is negotiated.

Without that leverage, the regime enters the negotiation table in a significantly weaker position, which is precisely what makes the memorandum a valuable prior containment tool.

The same logic applies to hostilities. Any ceasefire or operational pause that may derive from the MoU is not a strategic amnesty for Tehran. On the contrary, it works as a monitored behaviour test.

If Iran violates the terms, responsibility for the failure falls squarely on the regime and legitimises the reactivation of military and economic pressure.

This situation makes the memorandum a tool of exposure: it forces Tehran to show whether it truly seeks relief for its population or simply wants time, financial oxygen, and room to regroup. Those sixty days do not give Iran time; they reduce it.

Reducing the long-term relevance of Hormuz

Both Iran and the United States know that new infrastructure in neighbouring producers is reducing the long-term relevance of Hormuz.

The window in which the strait can be used as

a decisive energy weapon is closing, and every month of stalemate hurts Tehran more than Washington. Failing to understand the importance of this narrow time frame is to misread the entire strategic game.

Many of those who did read it chose to ignore key phrases such as “subject to the final agreement” and “as part of the final agreement”

This situation explains why anti-US propaganda rushed to dominate the narrative before the full text was examined and why many of those who did read it chose to ignore key phrases such as “subject to the final agreement” and “as part of the final agreement.”

Their messaging rests on three repeated distortions: presenting a roadmap as if it were a final commitment, describing conditional asset releases as a massive gift of US taxpayer money, and selling any tactical pause as a victory for the regime.

None of these claims survives a serious reading of the MoU’s language or of the incentive structure it creates.

Washington negotiates with realities

Critics say you cannot trust the **regime in Tehran**. The MoU is the written evidence of that lack of trust.

They say Iran is being given access to money without conditions. That is flatly false. And they say the United States should simply have “ended the regime.”



The MoU does not close the negotiation; it opens it under terms that put Iran under sustained, measurable scrutiny - Daniel Lacalle

Those complaints should be addressed to the Iranian opposition that failed to organise a viable alternative and to Western allies who preferred to look away instead of backing a coherent strategy.

Washington does not negotiate based on wishful thinking or television war gaming; it negotiates with realities, and the reality today is that managed pressure and conditional opening are feasible, while certain maximalist fantasies are not.

The importance of the memorandum lies not in what it gives, since it gives nothing upfront, but in what it retains.

It retains the ability to condition, verify, reverse, and escalate pressure. It retains US control over timing and sequencing. And it retains the possibility that any eventual final agreement will be built from a position of economic control, where the investment fund mechanism is crucial, rather than from a logic of appeasement.

That is the central point that destroys both the “surrender” narrative and Tehran’s propaganda: the MoU does not close the negotiation; it opens it under terms that put Iran under sustained, measurable scrutiny.

Iran gains nothing upfront, and time is working against it. The United States gives nothing away, and time works in its favour. The **Gulf nations** understand the situation perfectly.