Tomorrow's Affairs
Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

By: TA | AP Insight

Does the US have good options after the 60-day deadline for ending the war with Iran?

The deal that U.S. President Donald Trump signed at Versailles in June set an ambitious 60-day deadline for ending the war with Iran and reaching an accord on its nuclear program .

The deadline was Monday, and the two sides are further apart than they were then.

Talks, such as they are, have focused on reopening the Strait of Hormuz and lifting a U.S. blockade on Iran, both of which were supposed to have happened under the interim deal.

There has been no sign of any compromise on the strait, or that detailed nuclear talks have even begun.

The U.S., meanwhile, has no good options for getting out of the war it started alongside Israel.

Acceding to Iran's latest demands would mean giving it control over a critical international waterway that carried a fifth of the world's traded oil and gas before the war — and would be tantamount to admitting defeat.

Escalating the deeply unpopular war would further draw down U.S. supplies of advanced missile interceptors, jolt the world economy, and drive up gas prices ahead of U.S. congressional elections.

So both sides have dug in, hoping the other will blink first. So far, neither has.

The interim deal collapsed weeks later

The June deal, known as the Memorandum of Understanding, called for a halt to all military operations and set a 60-day deadline for an agreement to permanently end the war and resolve the longstanding dispute over Iran's nuclear activities.

It called for the Strait of Hormuz to be reopened but gave Iran a vaguely defined role in facilitating traffic, leaving open the possibility it could charge fees after the 60-day deadline. Iran has seized on that clause to claim control over the waterway.

A week after the deal was signed, Iran began firing on vessels using a route along the coast of Oman, on the other side of the strait, that is overseen by the U.S. military and intended to bypass Tehran's control.

The U.S. responded by striking Iran, which retaliated by attacking Arab countries hosting American forces, like Jordan, Kuwait and Bahrain.

The U.S. canceled waivers issued as part of the deal that had allowed Iran to sell its oil internationally and Trump restored a blockade of Iran's ports.

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The fighting eventually died down. A related truce in Lebanon between Israel and the Iran-backed Hezbollah has mostly held, even as Israeli troops occupy large areas in the country's south. Lebanon's "territorial integrity and sovereignty" were to have been ensured under the June deal.

Iranian officials say they stopped negotiating with the U.S. in June, while acknowledging that messages have been relayed by intermediaries.

Trump says the talks have continued, occasionally claiming progress after pulling back from threatening major strikes.

Pakistan, which played a key role in brokering the June agreement, noted last week that the deadline was Monday while expressing hope it would be extended.

“We are not closing the chapter,” Foreign

Ministry spokesman Tahir Andrabi said. “Pakistan is making all-out efforts to bring the two parties to the negotiating table.”

Iran's leaders think they can force Trump to give up the strait

Earlier this month, Iran issued a list of demands for reopening the strait, including the lifting of the American blockade, the withdrawal of U.S. forces from around Iran and the payment of reparations for damage inflicted in the war started by the U.S. and Israel on Feb. 28.

Even then, Iran has said it would control the strait — and potentially charge fees — through an agreement it is negotiating with Oman, and that the strait will not go back to being an open, toll-free waterway as it was before the war.

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Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen have meanwhile begun attacking Saudi oil tankers in the Red Sea, threatening another crucial trade route that had been used to relieve some of the pressure from the strait being closed.

Trump has rejected Iran's demands — saying it's Tehran that should pay war reparations and claiming the U.S. controls the strait.

He appears to be banking on economic pressure — in the form of the blockade and longstanding sanctions — to bring Iran's rulers to their knees.

Iran's economy has been battered by the war and isolation, and inflation has soared. The crisis could stoke renewed anti-government protests, like those that were brutally crushed in January.

Traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, which rose immediately after the interim deal, is back to a small fraction of what it was before the war.

Rising prices of fuel and other goods are expected to climb further the longer this continues with effects far beyond the Middle East.

The clock is still ticking for both sides.