

# US-Iran Negotiation Dynamics

## A Structural Diagnosis of Dual-Track Coercive Bargaining

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### Executive Summary

The present U.S.-Iran negotiation phase is not a transition toward stable peace, but a dual-track coercive bargaining structure in which pressure and negotiation proceed in parallel.

Market pricing, Iranian signaling, American coercive posture, and the continued maintenance of the Islamabad channel all point to the same conclusion: the possibility of renewed conflict remains an active variable within the negotiation itself, not a condition that has been set aside.

Iran's refusal to enter a second round is better understood as leverage adjustment under simultaneous external and internal constraints than as a declaration of diplomatic rupture. The United States, meanwhile, is combining intensified coercion with the pursuit of an early, politically consumable framework outcome.

Under these conditions, public messaging loses analytical value as a direct indicator of negotiation status; what matters instead is leverage structure and channel continuity.

## **Intermediate Equilibrium Under Contradictory Signals**

Markets are simultaneously pricing in both the prospect of negotiating progress and the possibility of renewed confrontation. The pattern in which oil prices fall sharply on signals of diplomatic engagement and surge again on indications of renewed Hormuz restrictions reflects a market judgment that the current situation does not constitute a linear path toward resolution.

Iran has responded not with unconditional intransigence but with a posture of conditional access management, while the United States has simultaneously signaled the possibility of resuming talks through the Pakistan channel alongside continued maritime interdiction and threats of further strikes. Meanwhile, back-channel contacts through Islamabad remain intact despite the suspension of formal negotiating rounds.

The simultaneous observation of these four behavioral patterns is itself constitutive of the current moment. A genuine stabilization phase would require market pricing, Iranian behavioral patterns, American signaling, and the direction of mediation channels to converge along a single trajectory.

Instead, all four axes simultaneously carry both the possibility of renewed conflict and the possibility of continued negotiation. The current state is not a transition toward peace but an intermediate equilibrium in which the option of resumed hostilities remains open while each party calibrates the utility of engagement.

## **Iran's Conditional Access Management**

Iran's refusal to participate in a second round of talks should not, in this context, be read as a declaration of intent to terminate negotiations. Three behavioral signals are occurring concurrently: the conditioning of delegation dispatch on the lifting of the blockade, the reimposition of restrictions in the Strait of Hormuz, and the continued maintenance of mediation channels.

Were Iran genuinely intent on ending negotiations, there would be no structural logic to this combination. When access restriction and channel preservation operate in parallel, the functional meaning of refusal approximates leverage adjustment within the negotiation rather than relational rupture.

This assessment is further constrained by the dual pressures facing the Iranian leadership, which must simultaneously manage external coercion and internal hardliner demands. Reckless escalation that courts additional military strikes would drive regime maintenance costs to an unsustainable level, while a publicly conciliatory posture would

exact an equally prohibitive toll on domestic legitimacy.

Under conditions in which both constraints operate simultaneously, Iranian behavior will necessarily converge toward a form that preserves a hardline external appearance while conditionally modulating actual engagement.

## **America's Dual Political and Strategic Objective**

The United States is operating under an equally non-singular objective function. The conduct of escalating pressure alongside the simultaneous pursuit of negotiation resumption and an early framework agreement points to a purpose that is distinct from the straightforward coercion of military capitulation.

That European diplomatic actors have expressed concern over the possibility of a content-thin framework deal reflects an external recognition of precisely this duality. Two objectives coexist: raising the terms of negotiation through coercive pressure, while securing a politically consumable early deliverable for domestic purposes.

When compounded by the fact that both parties are framing the identical state of hostilities suspension as a victory in their respective domestic narratives, the analytical utility of treating public messaging as a direct indicator of negotiating status is substantially diminished. "Refusals," "threats," and "hardline statements" may not constitute evidence of diplomatic rupture; the primary function of public communication in this environment is domestic political translation rather than factual disclosure.

## **The Structural Logic of Dual-Track Coercive Bargaining**

The coexistence of renewed Hormuz restrictions and the continued maintenance of the Islamabad channel confirms that the current game structure is dual-track. On one track, maritime leverage is being reclaimed; on the other, mediation channels remain open.

This combination is far more consistent with a structure in which pressure is deployed to enhance the value of negotiation while the negotiating channel itself is not severed, that is, the characteristic operating logic of coercive bargaining, than with any binary framework of war versus peace. It is precisely this structure that accounts for the apparent incoherence of the signals currently being observed.

If it is simultaneously true that markets are receiving contradictory signals, that Iran is practicing conditional management, that the United States is conducting pressure and dialogue in parallel, that international diplomatic actors are concerned with both de-escalation and the risks of a hasty agreement, and that both parties are independently

sustaining victory narratives, then the visible irregularity and inconsistency of observable signals is not an accidental misalignment but a structural consequence.

## **Why Public Messaging Misleads**

The present situation cannot be characterized as post-ceasefire stabilization. It is a dual-track coercive bargaining structure in which each actor pursues the maximization of negotiating utility while retaining the possibility of renewed conflict as a controlled variable within the negotiation itself.

Analytical frameworks centered on public messaging are therefore liable to produce systematic misreadings of this environment. What is required instead is a dual-criterion framework that tracks leverage structure and channel continuity simultaneously.

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