

JEFF MCMULLEN: Trump's "own goals" in Iran

April 8, 2026

Donald Trump's biggest blunders, Jeff McMullen writes, will hinder any prospect of a lasting peace or real stability in the war-torn Middle East.

While Iran's militant Islamist regime has often threatened to "wipe Israel from the map", no United States President before Trump has ever countered with a genocidal threat.

"A whole civilization will die tonight, never to be brought back again. I don't want that to happen, but it probably will. However, now that we have Complete and Total Regime Change, where different, smarter, and less radicalized minds prevail, maybe something revolutionarily wonderful can happen, WHO KNOWS? We will find out tonight, one of the most important moments in the long and complex history of the World. 47 years of extortion, corruption, and death, will finally end. God Bless the Great People of Iran!"

President Donald Trump on Truth Social

Trump's demented threats will loom large over any prospect of the announced two-week ceasefire in the Iran war leading to a broader and lasting peace between the belligerents. His wish for smarter minds to prevail is a devastating self-indictment.

In emulating Richard Nixon's so-called "[madman theory](#)", Trump mistakenly believed that veiled threats of nuclear annihilation might force an enemy to surrender or at least 'cut a deal'. There is no evidence these threats forced Iran's hand.

In reality, Trump was only revealing anger and panic after crucial miscalculations that led to closure of the Strait of Hormuz to most shipping; a growing toll on the U.S. and global economy; and above all the impact this had on his beloved US stock market.

On Easter Sunday Trump's post on Truth Social was full of rage:

"Tuesday will be Power Plant Day, and Bridge Day, all wrapped up in one, in Iran. There will be nothing like it!!! Open the Fuckin' Strait, you crazy bastards, or you'll be living in Hell—JUST WATCH! Praise be to Allah. President DONALD J. TRUMP"

With the war in Iran continuing past the five-week mark, Trump mingled with little children at the annual White House Easter Egg Roll. A giant Easter Bunny looked over his shoulder. It was mind boggling to watch [the President ramble](#) about the war in Iran, the price of eggs and, of course, how he had saved America.

"We had a dead country. We had an administration that didn't know what the hell they were doing. Today, we have the hottest country anywhere in the world. We're respected by everybody."

This is so far from the truth, even for a chronic liar, that it demonstrates how Trump has lost the plot.

Through his strategic missteps, lack of discipline and abandonment of self-control he has offended and alarmed allies, weakened the NATO Alliance at a critical time and disastrously undermined trust in United States global leadership.

The April 8th two-week ceasefire that came into force just one-and-a-half hours before Trump's apocalyptic deadline, might soon be cast by Secretary of War, Pete Hegseth, as a heaven-sent peace settlement. The ceasefire can hardly be credited to the hapless diplomacy of this U.S. administration.

The Iranians had every reason not to trust Trump's non-diplomat negotiators, Steve Whitkoff, a billionaire real estate developer and Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, both with extensive business dealings in the Middle East.

This war started when the U.S. team supposedly were deep in earnest negotiations to settle disputes over Iran's attempts to acquire nuclear weapons and amass a threatening arsenal of long-range missiles.

Will the Trump administration ever be trusted again by allies or adversaries?

On this occasion, Pakistan did the hard diplomatic yards to achieve the conditional cease-fire. Turkiye's Foreign Minister, Hakan Fidan helped through phone hookups with the Gulf States and relaying messages to Iran and the U.S. Then [China intervened](#) to persuade Iran that a short ceasefire could proceed to a satisfactory full settlement.

The United States and Iran were left to spin their [dubious claims of victory](#) and predictably bicker over who had forced whom to call off the fighting temporarily.

Unsurprisingly, [Israel soon announced](#) that it was not agreeing to end its attack on Hezbollah forces in Lebanon. Pakistan's Prime Minister [Shehbaz Sharif](#) who helped negotiate the ceasefire insisted that the conflict in Lebanon was a part of the agreement. So right here is just one of the early glaring cracks in the ten-point ceasefire plan.

As I [wrote last month](#), Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, has always had his own agenda which included crippling Iran's ability to attack and also severely degrading the effectiveness of Iranian terrorist surrogates such as Hezbollah.

New York Times journalists, Maggie Haberman and Jonathan Swan, have reinforced [Netanyahu's sway over](#) Trump's decision making.

In a [new book](#), *Regime Change: Inside the Imperial Presidency of Donald Trump*, they detail how Netanyahu joined Trump's key advisers in the White House Situation Room and convinced the President that Iran had become extremely vulnerable. It was the right time for a war that would be short, devastating and very quickly lead to Iranian regime change.

These miscalculations are staggering.

According to Haberman and Swan, Trump's CIA Director, John Ratcliffe, called this [scenario for regime change](#) "farcical". Secretary of State, Marco Rubio said bluntly it was "bullshit" and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Dan Caine calculated that it was just "hard-selling" by the Israelis because their plans were not "always well-developed". Yet, as Haberman and Swan conclude, disturbingly none of these team players dissuaded Trump from enjoining the Netanyahu gambit.

It is hardly surprising that many Israelis are unsettled by a war that lasted far longer than Netanyahu calculated. There have been numerous Iranian missile attacks on civilians including those in other Gulf States without any assurances now that they will be any safer in future.

The Israeli opposition leader, Yair Lapid, has said that the current situation is a [disaster for Israel](#). He claimed that Netanyahu had "failed politically, failed strategically, and did not meet any of the goals he set himself."

Iran's [Supreme National Security Council](#) has shattered President Trump's claims that the United States has achieved all its most important military goals in this war.

The Iranians insist that they will retain their right to enrich uranium and maintain a nuclear stockpile. Ending this threat was one of Trump's most crucial goals, after erroneously stating that last year's attacks on Iran's nuclear sites had "[obliterated the nuclear threat](#)."

Causing even greater alarm, the Supreme National Security Council is insisting that it will regulate the future flow of shipping through the Strait of Hormuz.

Furthermore, Iran wants to impose charges – call it a Trumpian tariff or permanent toll on traffic through the waterway.

During the war a [toll of about \\$2million](#) per oil tanker (paid in Chinese yuan or cryptocurrency) has been imposed on some of the ships allowed through the Strait.

Iran's objective now appears to be to create a lasting mechanism to repair the devastation inflicted by the war.

Strategically speaking, if a toll system persists it might make Iran one of the richer nations in the Gulf region. It would certainly drive up the cost of a barrel of oil, given that 20% of the world's supply usually passes by Iran and Oman which is also involved in seeking this toll arrangement.

Before the start of the Iran war, oil tankers and other shipping moved freely through the narrow Strait of Hormuz. If Trump were to accept Iran's unique geographic claim of now controlling this vital sea lane, it would amount to one of the greatest strategic 'own goals' in American history.

The Iranians are aware that the United States still has three aircraft carriers, supporting vessels, numerous aircraft, marines and special operation forces at the edge of this warzone.

Iran wants assurances that it will not be attacked again by the United States or Israel, that it will be paid reparations and that the sanctions imposed in various forms for more than four decades would be lifted.

In one of the demands most unlikely to be met, Iran also seeks the withdrawal of all U.S. forces from bases in the Gulf States.

There clearly is a chasm between Iran's version of a 10-point plan and the United States offering of a 15-point plan. We should still expect extremely difficult, protracted negotiations if Iran and the U.S. take up Pakistan's invitation for direct talks in Islamabad.

After threatening to end civilisation in Iran, it is just like Donald Trump to declare in his next social media post that "this is a big day for World Peace".

"Iran wants it to happen, they've had enough! Likewise, so has everyone else!...There will be lots of positive action! Big money will be made. Iran can start the reconstruction process. We'll be loading up with supplies of all kinds, and just "hanging around" in order to make sure everything goes well. I feel confident that it will. Just like we are experiencing in the U.S., this could be the Golden Age of the Middle East!"

Donald Trump on Truth Social

As his behaviour has become increasingly maddening, there are renewed calls by Democrats for a third attempt to impeach Trump.

Senator [Ed Markey of Massachusetts estimated](#) that there were now more than 50 Democrats in the House of Representatives and some 20 in the Senate willing to vote for impeachment.

Senator [Peter Welch of Vermont declared](#) that Trump's impulsive action in launching this war had caused grievous damage to Iranian civilians, including attacks on 60 hospitals, 44 schools and also on desalination plants on which the entire population depended.

Yes, the Iranian regime has killed tens of thousands of its protesting citizens since last Christmas and [brutal executions](#) of political opponents have continued.

Five weeks of the Iranian war has claimed the lives of thousands more innocent civilians, including the appalling slaughter of children in Iran and Lebanon. Thirteen U.S. military personnel have also gone home in coffins. This cannot be swept away by Trump's attempts to shift blame.

An unstable President, his chaotic leadership, tactical errors, profane outbursts and damage to U.S. credibility are combining to energise more American citizens to express their outrage.

What have they been doing, you may ask?

The truth is that only next November's midterm U.S. elections hold any possibility of curbing Trump's willingness to use American military power at whim.