

# Russia voices readiness to help resolve Iran-US disputes amid 'Putin's mediation bid'

## International Desk

The Kremlin spokesman expressed Russia's readiness to help Iran and the United States resolve their disputes through negotiations as American media reported that Moscow had agreed to assist US President Donald Trump's administration in talks with Tehran over its nuclear program and its alleged support for regional anti-American resistance groups. Dmitry Peskov told Bloomberg that "Russia believes the US and Iran should resolve all issues through negotiations" and that Moscow "is ready to do everything in its power to achieve this."

Bloomberg's sources also said Russian President Vladimir Putin had agreed to mediate talks between Trump and Tehran during a phone call with his US counterpart on February 12. On February 18, senior officials from the Trump administration discussed the matter with their Russian counterparts during talks in Saudi Arabia.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov made a one-day visit to Tehran last week and held talks with Iranian officials over a range of issues, including Iran's nuclear program. When asked whether Russia had offered to mediate between Tehran and Washington, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman responded that it is normal for countries to extend such offers. "Given the importance of these matters, it is entirely possible that many parties will show goodwill and willingness to help resolve various issues. From this perspective, it is natural for countries to offer assistance if needed," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said.

In 2015, Iran reached a nuclear deal with Britain, Germany, Russia and China, which is known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The US quit the agreement in 2018, during Donald Trump's first term as US president, and Iran began moving away from its

nuclear-related commitments under the deal. The US unilateral withdrawal from the agreement and re-imposition of sanctions removed under the deal left the future of the JCPOA in limbo. However, Iran has been trying to revive the JCPOA during the past years and have held several rounds of talks with the European parties to the deal, which their non-compliance to the agreement had a great impact on the implementation of the agreement.

There have been speculations on new negotiations between Tehran and Washington on Iran's peaceful nuclear program in recent months, especially after Trump's return to power in the United States in January. However, Trump's language of threats and imposition of sanctions against Iran have made Iranian officials skeptical of negotiations with the US.

Trump last month restored his "maximum pressure" campaign on Iran which includes efforts to drive its oil exports down to



Dmitry Peskov  
● AP

zero. Iranian officials say that negotiations under pressure are not meaningful. Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali

Khamenei said in February that talks with the US were "not smart, wise, or honorable". Khamenei criticized Trump's past administration for not honoring its JCPOA promises.

"Negotiating with America is neither smart, wise, nor honorable. It will not solve any of our problems. The reason? Experience!" Ayatollah Khamenei said.

## Iran summons Turkish envoy to protest 'false statements'

### International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry summoned Turkey's ambassador on Monday to protest recent remarks by the Turkish foreign minister against Iran's regional policy.

Iran Foreign Ministry's Director General for the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe Mahmoud Heydari warned Turkey's Ambassador in Iran Hicabi Kirlangic that "false statements" could lead to tension between the two neighboring countries.

"The common interests of the two countries and the sensitivity of regional conditions require avoiding wrongful comments and unreal analyses that could lead to differences and tensions in our bilateral relations," Heydari said.

In an interview with Al Jazeera late last month, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said Iran risked plunging West Asia into "disorder."

"If this policy continues, I don't think it will be good," Fidan said, accusing Iran of seeking to "create disorder" in the region.

"If you are trying to sow chaos in a third country, other countries can also follow suit by supporting groups in your own country," Turkey's foreign minister added.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson also reacted to the Fidan's remarks earlier on Monday.

"We highly value our bilateral re-



lations with Turkey. Unfortunately, the words repeatedly heard (from Turkey) were highly unconstructive, and it was necessary for Iran to decisively and clearly state its position in that regard," Esmail Baqaei said.

"Perhaps it is necessary for our Turkish friends to think more about the Zionist regime's (Israel) policy in Syria and the region."

Meanwhile, a senior advisor to Iran's Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei strongly criticized Fidan's remarks, warning Ankara against repeating such unfounded allegations that could harm long-standing regional relations.

Ali Akbar Velayati asserted that the Islamic Republic would not allow any country to undermine its deep-rooted and historic regional ties through irresponsible statements.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has always adhered to a policy of mutual respect and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. We expect Turkish officials to uphold diplomatic decorum and refrain from making baseless accusations," he stressed. The high-ranking advisor emphasized that Iran was a powerful nation with an ancient civilization and had consistently worked to promote regional security and cooperation.

The official further underlined the Islamic Republic's regional standing, warning Turkey against misjudging the country's position and strength in the region.

"If some figures in Turkey believe that by echoing incorrect stances influenced by foreign powers they can weaken Iran's standing in the region, they are gravely mistaken," he said.

## Hamas terms disarmament as 'red line' amid Gaza truce impasse

### International Desk

Hamas leader Sami Abu Zuhri said Tuesday that disarming is a red line for his movement and other Palestinian resistance groups engaged in negotiations to extend the Gaza cease-fire.

"Any talk about the resistance's weapons is nonsense. The resistance's weapons are a red line for Hamas and all resistance factions," Abu Zuhri said shortly after Israeli foreign minister Gideon Saar demanded the "full demilitarization" of Gaza to proceed to the second stage of the January truce.

Speaking at a news conference in the occupied al-Quds, Saar said Israel's conditions for proceeding to stage two of the cease-fire are Gaza's full demilitarization and the return of captives.

"We don't have an agreement on phase two," said Saar. "We demand total demilitarization of Gaza – Hamas and Islamic Jihad – and give us our hostages. If they agree to that we can implement tomorrow."

Hamas also urged Arab leaders Tuesday to "thwart" the relocation of Palestinians from Gaza as they meet in Cairo to counter US President Donald Trump's widely condemned proposal.

"We look forward to an effective Arab role that ends the humanitarian tragedy cre-



ated by the occupation in the Gaza Strip... and thwarts the (Israeli) occupation's plans to displace (Palestinians)," a statement by the group said.

Arab leaders gathered in Cairo on Tuesday to discuss an alternative to Trump's proposal for a US takeover of the war-battered territory and the relocation of its inhabitants to Egypt and Jordan.

The meeting came amid deadlock between Hamas and Israel over next steps in a fragile January 19 cease-fire in Gaza.

After the first phase of the truce ended over the weekend without agreement on how to continue, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office announced a halt to "all entry of goods and supplies" into the territory.

Israel's "closure of the Gaza Strip crossings for the third consecutive day, and its prevention of the entry of aid and goods, represents a Zionist insistence on violating the cease-fire agreement, and a clear war crime," Hamas said in its statement.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist

## Iranian court sentences ex-ministers to jail over corruption

An Iranian court sentenced two former ministers to prison over a multi-billion-dollar corruption case involving imported tea, the Judiciary said Tuesday. The case, known in Iran as the Debsh Tea Scandal, opened in 2023 and implicated more than 60 people, involving a total of \$3.7 billion, the Iran Newspaper reported in May, citing the country's chief justice.

Forty-two defendants were sentenced in the case, including former agriculture minister Javad Sadatinejad and former industry minister Reza Fatemi Amin, said Mizan Online, the judiciary's news

outlet.

Sadatinejad received a one-year sentence, while Fatemi Amin was handed two years for their roles in the scandal, Mizan reported.

The pair, who served under late president Ebrahim Raisi, were convicted of complicity in disrupting the country's economic system, with the sentences deemed "final and binding."

The court also sentenced Akbar Rahimi-Darabad, the chief executive of Debsh Tea company, to 66 years in prison for various crimes, including disrupting Iran's economy, smuggling foreign

currency and bribery.

Rahimi-Darabad was ordered to repay over \$2.38 billion in smuggled funds and a fine of \$1.5 billion.

Under Iranian law, jail sentences run concurrently, meaning Rahimi-Darabad would serve 25 years for the longest of his convictions.

In April 2023, lawmakers impeached Fatemi Amin over soaring car prices.

That same month, Sadatinejad was sacked from his position. In May 2024, he was sentenced to three years on another corruption case involving animal feed imports.

