

but they could hold discussions on certain Middle East matters, for instance, on how Iran could help reduce tensions in the Red Sea. For now, however, the focus on the nuclear issue is positive, and it is expected that the talks will carry on.

**US must show will to lift sanctions**

If we consider the first round positive, it means that in later stages, both sides must work on confidence-building to ensure Iran does not acquire nuclear weapons and that sanctions are lifted. For this to happen, one step would be for Iran to show its willingness to scale back 60% enrichment. If Iran agrees to bring down its 60% enrichment, this part of the negotiations will drag on, with both sides haggling over the extent of the reduction.

Another key issue is sanctions. Iran expects that if talks progress over several rounds and trust is built, some sanctions will be eased and the US side will demonstrate its readiness to remove sanctions.

The Americans expect the International Atomic Energy Agency to step up its monitoring and oversight. Iran's nuclear activities during the negotiations and Mr. Grossi's upcoming visit to Iran are crucial. If Mr. Grossi

delivers a positive report, it will indicate that part of the Iran-US talks has been smoothed out. Therefore, bargaining must also take place on the issue of inspections, and an agreement between Iran and the IAEA should be reached — which could shorten the duration of negotiations.

**Trump likely wants to bypass Europeans**

Alongside these matters, Iran must engage with Europe, and talks with Russia and China are also important, as all these countries are part of the P5+1 group. Mr. Trump appears to want to bypass the Europeans, which will likely draw protests from them. Therefore, Iran must avoid repeating its past mistakes with Europe, move closer to them, and provide updates. Iran must also take the snapback issue seriously. Ultimately, before snapback comes into play, Iran needs to reach a broad agreement with the US so that the Europeans can more comfortably set aside the issues of sanctions and snapback.

I predict that the talks will ultimately move toward becoming direct. The question now is whether the next round on Saturday will be direct or not. In any case, preliminary dis-



Omani security personnel watch a convoy believed to be carrying US Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff in Muscat, Oman, on April 12, 2025. **FATIMA SHBAIR/AP**

cussions have already taken place between the two sides through the mediation of Oman's foreign minister. Both sides have returned to their respective countries and re-

ported back to their leaders — whether in Iran or the US. They will then decide whether the next round of talks should be direct or indirect. However, in my opinion, the negoti-

ations will most likely be direct. There is a chance of this, though it is not certain.

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Now that the next round has been set, it appears the focus is on the nuclear issue, with other matters not being brought up. This itself indicates that Mr. Trump's recent remarks — where he reiterated that he only wants to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons — were precise.

# First round of talks, its future

**By Saber Gol Anbari**  
Expert on int'l relations

**OPINION**

As I predicted, both the Iranian and American sides assessed today's talks as positive and constructive. The only thing left is for Trump, in his remarks, to ramp up the dose of optimism by speaking of the possibility of reaching an "imminent" agreement!

The Iranian negotiating team's media presence in this round was notably more active than in the past. It seems Trump's unique media approach has led the Iranian side to rethink its conservative media policy and even put out information before the American side.

Although Trump is an enemy of traditional media, he is obsessed with media and imagery, always seeking to turn everything into a media spectacle, and places great importance on image-building and narrative.

It appears that future talks will take on a more direct format. The brief, few-minute meeting between Araghchi and Witkoff after the indirect talks seems to lay the groundwork and set the stage for a shift in the dialogue's form.

Despite Araghchi and Witkoff expressing satisfaction with the first round of talks, an easy start does not mean easy progress. The negotiations in subsequent rounds may swing between optimism and pessimism, and it would not be surprising if, at some point, they even reach the brink of collapse — with Trump possibly threatening to walk away as a pressure tactic. Yet, the talks will not fall apart and will continue.

Ultimately, an Iran-US agreement is more likely than no agreement — though Trump's negotiating temperament may cause problems at certain stag-



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (2nd L) speaks with members of the Iranian delegation during a visit to Muscat, Oman where he held "indirect" talks with US Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff on April 12, 2025. **ENTEKHAB**

es. For example, even if talks come very close to an agreement, he might spring new demands or issues to create serious shocks and extract more concessions.

In reality, four factors could drive an agreement — whether temporary or final: first, Trump's own personality; second, the narrowing of the talks' agenda to the nuclear issue, facilitated by the US president's haste; third, Iran's specific condi-

tions; and fourth, the relatively favorable regional environment, along with the inability of Israel and Saudi Arabia to jointly lobby against the talks.

But the decisive variable here is Trump himself. Unlike the deep state in the US, he does not see himself entangled in the historical issues and problems between Iran and America and easily moves past these obstacles.

The Biden administration and the Europeans, however, are not like this.

For psychological reasons, Trump is obsessed with quick deals — whether with Iran, Russia, China, or others — often for the sake of image-building. He has repeatedly demonstrated this by emphasizing his willingness to negotiate and reach a deal with Tehran, sending letters, and so on.

While the unprecedented US military threats against Iran and the deployment of military equipment

to the region should not be downplayed, it would not be an exaggeration to say that this militarization is less a serious sign of potential war and more a move to speed up the process of reaching an agreement, reflecting Trump's impatience on the matter.

Of course, these threats also serve other motives beyond maximum pressure on Tehran to secure a deal — acting as a catalyst to that end. These include reassuring Israel's right-wing cabinet and its hardline lobby in the US to keep them in check, as well as preemptively shaping the post-agreement narrative from a position of strength.

However, if, during the talks, Trump perceives that limited force could be used without any significant cost to break potential deadlocks, he would resort to it. But overall, the notion that Trump is paving the way for war and military conflict reflects a misunderstanding of his character. Trump is impatient in achieving his goals and does not bother with lengthy preparations. Due to the costs of war, he has no appetite for it. His decisions are based on economic cost-benefit analysis — which is why, when tariffs backfired, he quickly suspended most of them.

Alongside his efforts to reach a deal with Tehran, Trump is also pushing for normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia, which is impossible without ending the Gaza war. Given the unlikelihood of Palestinian statehood as a condition for Riyadh-Tel Aviv relations, Trump seems to be trying to use a Gaza cease-fire and reconstruction as an alternative bridge.

Meanwhile, Trump is set to visit Riyadh and the region next month, likely preceded by a Gaza cease-fire in the coming two to three weeks. After that, we will see what happens with other regional issues.

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