

# Door opens

**OPINION**

After years of hostility, the recent resumption of talks between the United States and Iran marks a fragile but noteworthy moment in international diplomacy. Led by US envoy Steve Witkoff and Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, the two delegations met in Oman for what both sides described as a "constructive" exchange. While the meeting was mostly mediated and brief, the tone and outcome offer cautious optimism in an otherwise tense geopolitical landscape. What makes this moment unique is not just the high-level engagement — the first of its kind since 2018 — but the departure from the confrontational rhetoric that has often dominated US-Iran relations. The fact that both sides agreed to a second round of talks suggests a mutual recognition that dialogue, even if limited and indirect, is preferable to escalation. For once, the language of diplomacy prevailed over threats, and that itself is progress. However, realism must temper optimism. The geopolitical and domestic stakes for both countries are higher than ever. Iran's nuclear programme has advanced significantly since the American withdrawal from the 2015 agreement. According to international observers, Iran has stockpiled uranium enriched up

to 60 per cent purity — dangerously close to weapons-grade — far exceeding the limits of the original deal. On the American side, political pressure to appear tough on Iran is immense, particularly with military options constantly looming in the background. This backdrop complicates negotiations. Iran seeks sanctions relief and a fair deal that respects its

sovereignty while preserving elements of its nuclear capability for peaceful purposes. The United States, meanwhile, is adamant that Iran must never obtain nuclear weapons — a stance reinforced by regional allies and the memory of failed past agreements. Finding common ground between these two positions will be extraordinarily difficult. Still, the decision to engage — even indirectly — demonstrates a willingness to explore alternatives to confrontation. The involvement of Oman as a me-

diator reflects a smart use of regional diplomacy, and even the brief in-person interaction between Mr. Witkoff and Mr. Araghchi can be seen as a symbolic thaw in relations. While small, such gestures are often the building blocks of larger breakthroughs. But expectations should remain measured. This is only the beginning of what could be a long, winding road. The success of these talks will depend not just on what is said at the negotiating table, but on whether both sides are willing to make difficult compromises

under intense political scrutiny. In a world increasingly dominated by zero-sum thinking, the return to dialogue is a welcome shift. It's a reminder that diplomacy — however imperfect or indirect — still holds the potential to defuse tensions and avert disaster. Whether this opportunity evolves into a lasting agreement remains uncertain. But the door has been opened, and that, for now, is something to build on.

*The article first appeared on The Statesman.*



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## Standing at edge of Iran war cliff

**By Ron Paul**  
Former Republican congressman

**OPINION**

Millions of people around the world were at the edge of their seats over the weekend, waiting to hear whether Trump special envoy Steve Witkoff's indirect talks with the Iranian foreign minister would ratchet down tensions or would break down and bring on a major Middle East war. If it seems bizarre that the outcome of a meeting between a US president's designated negotiator and a foreign government minister could determine whether we plunge into possibly our biggest war since World War II, that's because it is bizarre. In fact, this is an excellent example

of why the Founders of the United States were so determined to keep war-making authority out of the Executive Branch of government. No one person — much less his aide — should have the power to take this country to war. That is why the Constitution places the authority to go to war firmly and exclusively in the hands of the representatives of the people: the US Congress. After all, it is the US people who will be expected to fight the wars and to pay for the wars and to bear the burden of the outcome of the wars. When that incredible power is placed in the hands of one individual — even if that individual is elected — the temptation to use it is far too great. The Founders recognized this weakness in

the system they were rebelling against — the British monarchy — so they wisely corrected it when they drafted the US Constitution. Unless the US is under direct attack or is facing imminent direct attack, the Constitution requires Congress to deliberate, discuss, and decide whether a conflict or potential conflict is worth bringing the weight of the US military to bear. They wanted it harder, not easier, to take us to war. When wars can be started by presidents with no authority granted by Congress, the results can be the kinds of endless military engagements with ever-shifting, unachievable objectives such as we've seen in Afghanistan and Iraq. We are currently seeing another

such endless conflict brewing with President Trump's decision to start bombing Yemen last month. The stated objectives — to end Houthi interference with Israeli Red Sea shipping — are not being achieved so, as usually happens, the bombing expands and creates more death and destruction for the civilian population. In the last week or so, US bombs have struck the water supply facilities for 50,000 civilians and have apparently blown up a civilian tribal gathering. Starting a war with Iran was the furthest thing from the minds of American voters last November, and certainly, those who voted for Donald Trump were at least partly motivated by his promise to end current wars and start no

new wars. However, there is a strange logic that to fulfill the promise of no new wars, the US must saber rattle around the world to intimidate others from crossing the White House. This is what the recycled phrase "peace through strength" seems to have come to mean. But the real strength that it takes to make and keep peace is the strength to just walk away. It is the strength to stop meddling in conflicts that have nothing to do with the United States. That is where Congress comes in. Except they are not coming in. They are nowhere to be found. And that is not a good thing.

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US Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff (C) talks to Ron Dermer (R) and other Israeli officials in this undated photo. ● RESPONSIBLE STATECRAFT