

Understanding reached, deal not yet

OPINION

In heavy air and under cloudy skies, Rome — the city of legendary empires — once again became the stage for a new chapter of diplomatic confrontation. The negotiations between Iran and the US, which for months had been stuck in twists and turns of silence and tension, have now found a glimmer of new life in the Italian capital. Though faint, this glimmer has fixed eyes on the future. After months of deadlock and silence, Rome has now turned into a crossroads of hopes and doubts — where Abbas Araghchi, Iran's foreign minister, and Steve Witkoff, the senior US representative, outlined new lines of dialogue in two rounds of intense, indirect talks.

New path in diplomacy

After concluding the second round of four-hour talks, Abbas Araghchi faced reporters with a calm yet cautious expression and stated: "The atmosphere of the negotiations was constructive and forward-moving. We reached a better understanding on a set of principles and objectives." He announced that a new phase would begin: Starting Wednesday, Iranian and American technical experts will kick off their specialized discussions to delve into the details of the agreement and outline a practical framework moving forward. According to Araghchi, after the expert-level talks, he and Witkoff will meet again in Oman on

Saturday to review the results and decide on the next steps. Yet, amid this optimistic news, Araghchi made a key statement that revealed the true essence of the situation: "There is neither reason for excessive optimism nor for excessive pessimism. We are still proceeding cautiously. I hope that next week, we will be in a better position — in a position to judge whether reaching an agreement is possible."

Why Rome, why Oman?

The choice of Rome and then Oman as negotiation venues is more than a geographical decision — it carries political messages. Rome, the heart of Europe, far from the media frenzy of the US or regional tensions, is the ideal place for talks requiring high sensitivity and subtlety. Oman, with its history of successful mediation — particularly in previous nuclear talks between Iran and the US — has once again been chosen as a neutral and trustworthy ground for entering the technical phase. Analysts say this shift shows that both sides are looking to build a secure space, allowing them to focus on negotiations without media pressure or political provocations.

From principles to implementation

An understanding on "principles and objectives" is a promising starting point, but entering the real details will be a serious test. Issues such as uranium enrichment levels and capacity, Iran's nuclear research and develop-



The illustration shows Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (R) and the US special envoy in the Middle East Steve Witkoff. ● AL ARABIYA ENGLISH

ment programs, verification mechanisms for commitments, the timeline and stages of sanctions relief, and guarantees for implementation — all these dossiers will be opened in the expert meetings in Oman.

External, internal pressures

The political and international backdrop of these talks is far from simple. In Washington, the US administration is under heavy pressure from Congress and regional allies, especially Israel. Any agreement must convince domestic critics that US interests are not at risk. In Tehran, the bitter memory of America's withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018 looms large. This time, Iran is seeking stronger, more tangible guarantees — ones that will prevent a repeat of that bitter scenario.

Cautious global welcome

On the international stage, the return to diplomacy has been met with cautious optimism. The European Union has officially welcomed the resumption of talks, emphasizing that any agreement must ensure Iran's sustained return to nuclear commitments and meaningful sanctions relief. China and Russia, which have grown closer to Iran in recent months, are also invested in the talks' success, as regional stability benefits their economic and geopolitical projects. Meanwhile, Israel has strongly warned against any revival of the nuclear deal, threatening unilateral action if necessary — a shadow that could still loom over the negotiations.

Economic, social consequences of deal

Even a temporary or phased deal could have an immediate impact on Iran's economy. Unfreezing assets, facilitating oil exports, easing banking restrictions, and reducing transaction

costs could provide short-term relief to the country's exhausted economy. On the other hand, Iranian society, long burdened by sanctions, is closely monitoring the talks. Even a clear sign of reduced tensions could shift the social atmosphere and restore hope for the future among the younger generation.

From Rome to Oman; from hope to reality

This time, Iranian and American negotiators may understand better than ever that no agreement will come about without difficult compromises. As diplomatic history shows, real agreements are born somewhere between maximalist demands and non-negotiable red lines. If, in Oman, experts can narrow technical differences, and if Araghchi and Witkoff can demonstrate the political will to continue the process in the third round, then hope for keeping the talks alive may be more than just a dream.

Hazy but open horizon

The world's eyes are fixed on Rome and Oman. A potential agreement, if achieved, will undoubtedly face a tough road ahead. But the fact that diplomacy has once again taken the place of threats and sanctions is itself a sign of the force that could guide a crisis-weary world toward some measure of calm. Until next Saturday and the third round of talks in Oman, all eyes remain on the Middle East — hoping that this time, diplomacy might prevail over the clamor of war and crisis.



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These days, Rome and Oman are not just hosting nuclear negotiations; they are witnessing a human effort to restore hope to a world that, more than ever, needs peace and dialogue. Amid breaking news, conflicting analyses, and endless waiting, we remain watchful — waiting for the moment when, perhaps this time, the diplomats' silence will give way to the smile of agreement.

The article first appeared in the Persian-language newspaper Haft-e Sobh.

Much hinges on Iran-US talks

By Abbas Nasir
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OPINION

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and US presidential envoy Steve Witkoff met at the negotiating table in Rome yesterday to take forward "positive" talks on Tehran's nuclear programme initiated last week in, and mediated by, Oman. However, there is little clarity on what the process will deliver, although the two sides have reportedly agreed to task experts to discuss a framework for a potential deal in Oman next week.

With Donald Trump at the helm in the US, policies, particularly foreign policy, may appear chaotic but are generally formulated to uphold the interests of apartheid Israel, as big donors to American politicians' election campaigns — presidential candidates or Congressional — demand and get their pound of flesh.

This was evident in the fate of the Gaza cease-fire, which went into effect to coincide with Trump's inauguration at his insistence because he was keen to be seen as a peacemaker-president, despite Israeli reticence. The US envoy's arm-twisting worked. But only for a while. A lot of lobbying takes place behind closed doors — away from the public eye — as must have happened in this case, too. The result: Israel unilaterally violated the terms of the cease-fire agreement and changed goalposts, before resuming its geno-

cidal military campaign in Gaza. Credible third-party statistics say most Israeli air strikes post-cessate-fire have targeted women and children. Rescue workers have also been attacked; in one incident alone, 15 of them were ambushed and killed by the occupation forces.

A cover-up attempt failed because one of the murdered ambulance workers' mobile phone recorded the whole incident. It exposed Israel's lie that the ambulances were moving suspiciously, without lights or beacons. The video was found in the phone buried in a shallow grave with the paramedic.

Of course, no outrage was expressed by any democratic Western Persian government. Such is Israel and its backers' influence that from the US to the UK to Germany in the EU, the right to

protest — one of the most fundamental human rights — is being trampled upon in the name of 'antisemitism'.

The tragedy of the Holocaust is too recent a crime against humanity to be forgotten, and nobody can support bias of any kind; but it is far too convenient and wrong to label any criticism of the occupation and the denial of Palestinians' rights and their mass murder by Israel as 'antisemitic.' It is not.

Against this backdrop, why is America negotiating with Iran to get it to move away from enriching uranium to 90pc or more (weapons-grade) from the current 60pc and not going for the military option? From the US perspective, many of Iran's oil-rich Persian Gulf neighbours are very nervous about the outbreak of any hostilities spilling over

onto their soil. So, while Israel has publicly advocated for a 'Libya-like' dismantling of Iran's nuclear capability, the US position isn't that unambiguously maximalist. Witkoff has gone on record to say that a reduction in enrichment to a level that is for civilian use only will be acceptable. Obviously, under pressure from Israel, officials in Washington started backtracking on his statement, without really spelling out exactly what is acceptable. Although officially it wasn't said to be linked to the Iran-US talks, the timing of the visit last week to Tehran by Saudi Defence Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman, a former fighter pilot, and his chief of general staff could not have been coincidental. Considerable bonhomie was on display and significantly the visitor was granted an audience by the Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

The visit seemed aimed at underlining the Saudi position to Tehran that Riyadh disapproves of any US-Israeli military action against Iran since Iran and Saudi Arabia's relations are now back on track after a China-mediated normalisation process. It was clear from a media leak originating in Israel that the apartheid entity wishes to attack and degrade Iran's military capability. The leak said Trump vetoed an Israeli plan for a joint attack on Iran's nuclear facilities.

The plan proposed American air cover as Israeli "commandos" landed on the ground, penetrated fortified facilities deep underground, and destroyed them.

Even a US president totally beholden to the apartheid entity saw the dangers of such an escalation and preferred talks.

While he owes much to Israel, as is clear from huge arms shipments to it and the expulsion of even permanent American residents for merely protesting against the Gaza genocide, he also has commercial ties with the Saudis and wants to keep them and other Persian Gulf states onside. Moreover, Trump sees himself as bathed in glory as a peacemaker by expanding the Abraham Accords to Saudi Arabia.

Iran has made clear that it is willing to agree to any "reasonable" demands, i.e., it may be amenable to reducing its enrichment to verifiable civilian use thresholds but would not be prepared to "dismantle" its programme. Crippling sanctions may have brought Iran to the negotiating table, but its red lines remain. Many analysts say Iran is prepared to accept what was agreed to in the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action agreement during the Obama administration — a deal that Trump annulled in 2018 despite IAEA certification that Iran was adhering to its commitments. This was done under Israeli pressure.

A lot has changed since in the region, especially with the consolidation of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's role. The de facto Saudi leader may not have been assertive then as he needed American support to cement himself at the helm. But, observers say, he seems to have come of age now.

The Persian Gulf leaders' disdain



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for what they see as religiously inspired militancy in the Muslim world, particularly in Gaza, may keep them from doing anything concrete to stop the genocide, but even they would see the perils of endorsing an attack on Iran as they may themselves get sucked into the conflict.

Let's see if the talks break down and things move towards Israel's position or sanity prevails and a peaceful path is negotiated out of what could be a bloody scenario and regional conflagration.

The article first appeared on Pakistan's English-language newspaper Dawn.