

Why parallel negotiations matter

PERSPECTIVE

As the third round of nuclear talks between Iran and the United States wrapped up, the Iranian Foreign Ministry, in line with the country's interests and the public good, has brought friends and partners on board and will continue to make decisions and take action based on the three pillars of its foreign policy, tailored to the demands of time and place.

Since the current Iranian government took office in August 2024, the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy has hinged on two key principles: bringing friends into play and roping in countries that, by diplomatic standards, have not been counted as Tehran's allies or partners and whose relations with Iran have been neutral or frosty; and weighing and defining Iran's interests according to the prevailing circumstances. The decisions and actions of the foreign minister and the team of diplomats and experts at the ministry can be seen as part and parcel of advancing this outlook and its objectives. This approach has stood out in two distinct phases since President Masoud Pezeshkian came to power and has delivered on the country's goals.

Building consensus to safeguard national interests

From late September 2024, in the early weeks of the new government, a string of developments made the Foreign Ministry's job both complex and vital. At that juncture, the ministry had to stand shoulder to shoulder with those lining up against Israel's warmongering, while at the same time heading off further adventurism by Tel Aviv through getting regional and global countries onside. From September through December 2024, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi's mission was to keep the specter of war with Israel at bay. To that end, Iran's neighbors played host to frequent Iranian envoys. The foreign minister's direct and candid talks with his counterparts and other officials in these countries centered on two key points: "Iran does not seek war," and "any conflict could turn the whole region into a living hell."

Given the sensitive security climate, the ministry opted for face-to-face meetings and frank negotiations over phone calls and official correspondence. Araghchi's visits to Bahrain, Jordan, and Egypt — countries currently experiencing chilly relations with Iran — were part and parcel of the policy of drawing so-called neutral states into Iran's orbit. This outreach, considering the geo-



Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (2nd-L) arrives in Jordan on October 16, 2024, for talks with the country's officials on regional issues.

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graphic position of these countries, was seen as a shrewd move at the time. Engagements in the capitals of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Oman — whether as allies or regional heavyweights — helped ensure that Israel's incursion into Iranian airspace was condemned not only by them but by many countries worldwide.

Moreover, Iran's stern warning, relayed by regional states to Israeli officials, drove home the point in Tel Aviv that the fallout from any move against Tehran would be more severe than ever, prompting Israel to hold back. With Donald Trump moving into the White House and his particular brand of engagement with Iran, a new chapter in Tehran's diplomacy kicked off. Although Trump at first slammed the door on diplomacy by signing the return of maximum pressure against Iran, a letter he sent to Iran's top officials raised questions about his intentions and opened the door to talks. Responding to this letter shot to the top of the Foreign Ministry's agenda and that of other relevant bodies in March. Tehran's reply was eventually sent via

Oman on March 26. Written exchanges between the two sides on April 12, in Muscat, Oman, with the Omani foreign minister acting as go-between, gave way to in-person, albeit indirect, talks. Thus, a new marathon in Iranian diplomacy got underway, reaching its third leg on April 26 in the Sultanate of Oman. This was a serious and tough stage, as wading into the details of the disagreements is both time-consuming and fraught with variables that could make or break a potential agreement.

According to the foreign minister's remarks at the close of the third round, both sides remain at odds over major and minor issues, but the talks were on track, and both parties have shown their resolve to move forward.

While indirect talks with the United States have grabbed headlines across global media, Tehran has not pinned its hopes solely on Muscat. From the outset, Iran has called on its friends to get behind the path of peace and stability. In the week leading up to the second round of talks, Araghchi headed to Russia for meetings with the president and

foreign minister, and before the third round, he touched down in Beijing for discussions with the Chinese foreign minister and other officials, with the nuclear talks topping the agenda.

Keeping China and Russia in the loop about the nuclear negotiations with the US makes perfect sense from both practical and strategic perspectives. As the foreign minister put it, Beijing and Moscow are Iran's "friends for tough times." Thus, updating them on developments with Washington while sticking to all red lines on Iranian independence follows a well-trodden path in international diplomacy, and Tehran has stuck to it.

China and Russia were also key players in the previous Iran-P5+1 nuclear talks, which, thanks to their positive roles, culminated in the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the JCPOA. Logically, Beijing and Moscow should be kept abreast of the new round of nuclear negotiations again, with all national interests safeguarded. The Foreign Ministry has also brought Germany, the UK, and France up to speed — the three European signatories to the JCPOA.

Iran's bilateral talks with representatives of these countries in Geneva and Vienna, as needed, underscore the Islamic Republic's determination to tap into all available capacities worldwide to protect its interests.

The impact of every event, decision, and move in Iran-US relations on regional countries and their alignment with Iran during this round of talks stands out as one of Tehran's main motivations for keeping regional capitals posted on the negotiation process, always tailoring its approach to the circumstances.

Domestic interest calculations in line with external conditions

Dynamic decision-making has been the hallmark of Iran's foreign policy since the current government assumed power, and this trait has marked many turning points during the Foreign Ministry's tenure. In line with its interests, following the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, Iran opted for strategic patience in the face of Israel's war trap, and the diplomatic corps pulled out all the stops to drum up political consensus against Israel's action in international and legal forums.

As soon as this strategic patience ran its course, with Operation True Prom-

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Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (R) and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi meet in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on October 9, 2024.

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