



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

# Moving quickly and quietly towards a new nuclear deal with Iran



Washington has been trying to make it look as if nothing is happening regarding the Iranian nuclear programme, but there have been signs of an agreement.

There has been a high frequency of talks between Iranian officials and Western representatives in recent weeks. Despite the semi-secrecy, leaked news has suggested that there has been significant progress.

After last week's meetings of representatives of the European group E-3 (the UK, France, and Germany) with Iranian chief nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani in the UAE, EU mediator Enrique Mora continued talks with him in Doha.

A significant sign that confirmed that diplomacy can lead to a positive outcome was sent last week by Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, who said that some kind of arrangement with the West "is not a problem" for Iran as long as its nuclear infrastructure remains unchanged.

None of the actors expects the talks, which are clearly in full swing, to return the situation to the 2015 agreement (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)).

## Irreparable damage due to Trump's withdrawal from the agreement

US withdrawal from the agreement in 2018, following the decision of Donald Trump, will remain one of his most harmful moves, and that competition is tough.

What many warned about has happened. Since the US exited the deal, Iran has continued to ramp up its nuclear programme without

restraints, approaching a level where it may soon be capable of producing a bomb.

Following orders from the Tehran government, Iranian facilities stockpiled 60% enriched uranium. To succeed in making a bomb, they need uranium with 90% purity.

This technological aspect is one of the main reasons for the accelerated pursuit of an agreement, because Iran could now reach the level where it would be ready to build a bomb in a short time, possibly even in a few weeks.

The rush towards an agreement is a race against time. To stop Iran in time, even with a temporary arrangement now, seems to be the most realistic option.

## Freezing the Iranian programme

The US is primarily interested in stopping the Iranian programme at this level and not continuing its progress.

This is echoed in Khamenei's statement that they do not want "their nuclear infrastructure to be tampered with".

Returning to the 2015 agreement now seems like a luxury, because there is no time for it, but also not enough political will. Simply put, many geopolitical circumstances have changed in the last eight years.

According to reports, the Biden administration has been conducting indirect talks with Iran. The current US administration advocates renewing the nuclear deal with Iran. But the question remains: What level of understanding could they reach?

Any deal with Iran at this point carries significant political risks for Biden's administration.

Iran is a politically toxic interlocutor because of the suppression of civil protests and its military support for the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

This is also the reason why the administration has been trying to keep their communications with Tehran regarding the nuclear deal at a low profile.

## Credible signs of getting closer

However, the release of \$2.8 billion of Iranian funds frozen in Iraq at the beginning of the month is a sign that Washington wants to establish trust with Tehran in anticipation of a more significant agreement.

The authorities in Tehran indirectly hinted that they could meet the US request and release three Americans detained in Iran.

Tehran agreed to exchange prisoners with Belgium and to release two Austrians detained in Iran.

This could seem like a practice run for the release of the three US citizens, which Washington cares deeply about, even though this diplomatic operation has been taking a special course in relation to the nuclear negotiations.

Washington has great expectations from a potential agreement with Iran, but rightly perceives it as a significant political risk.

Both hopes and fears have been fuelled by the

upcoming presidential campaign and the elections in less than a year and a half.

## The potential gain outweighs the risk

If the deal with Iran fails, Biden will be in considerable trouble because he has negotiated with the renegade regime whilst it carried out unprecedented repression against its own population, and helped Moscow in its aggression against Ukraine.

An agreement with Iran, even if it is temporary and verbal or indirect, would bring the US back to the Middle East significantly, and would silence Biden's critics, who accused him of removing the country from the region where it had a dominant influence, starting with Afghanistan.

The Iranian deal is under way in a changed environment compared to that of 2015. While the main regional actors - Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Israel - were against the deal at the time, developments that have taken place in the meantime mean that Saudi Arabia and the UAE now support the agreement, whilst Israel remains its critic.

The new nuclear agreement will also have a positive effect on Israel, regardless of its strong reservations regarding Tehran's staying at the level of 60% purity of enriched uranium and not going further, despite the agreement.

It is undoubtedly in Iran's interest that the JCPOA be renewed, even in a different form, because it will mean the easing of sanctions, which its faltering and isolated economy badly needs.

Further progress towards the agreement will

largely depend on the assessment of pre-election strategists in Washington on how much benefit and harm a possible deal with Tehran would bring.

Judging by the latest frequent talks with Tehran on several levels, and decisions that at first glance have no direct connection with the nuclear deal, estimates are that Biden should proceed towards a deal with Iran.