



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

Trump, Iran and the final attempt to avoid war



In Muscat (Oman), a neutral and versatile mediator in the Arab world, the United States and Iran have opened the most delicate **channel** of communication since the collapse of the 2015 nuclear deal.

For the first time since President Donald Trump began his second term in office, his team is directly, if only symbolically, confronting the most significant security challenge in the Middle East: Iran on the brink of the nuclear threshold.

Oman mediated these talks, which go beyond a mere diplomatic effort to prevent a nuclear escalation. They are a test of the Trump administration's ability to manage a crisis it has been building up for years with rhetoric and sanctions but also with a complete withdrawal from the previous nuclear deal, which, for all its flaws, at least froze the conflict.

At first glance, the timing of these talks seems odd: Iran is isolated, under heavy sanctions, affected by Israeli offensives against its regional allies and under internal pressure.

Trump, on the other hand, is operating from a strong position, supported by a military demonstration (warships, bombers) and the consolidated support of the Israeli government.

Behind the scenes, however, there is a reality that neither Washington nor Tehran can ignore: the conflict is already underway, and its escalation would devastate the region, cause an energy shock and propel the US into another war in the Middle East.

The choice of Muscat as a neutral venue without the EU, China, and Russia sitting at the same table is a further indication that Washington is seeking a "deal" and not a new global round of negotiations.

Few similarities with 2015

Comparisons with the 2015 **agreement** (JCPOA) are understandable but misguided. At that

time, Iran enjoyed strategic flexibility, received active backing from Europe, China, and Russia, and maintained a defensive stance.

Iran is now significantly closer to reaching the nuclear point of no return and has enough enriched uranium for multiple warheads. The 2015 agreement was multilateral, technically precise and politically restrained.

The current negotiations are, at least for now, bilateral, with little protocol and a lot of political risk.

The United States has set its minimum: Iran must not acquire nuclear weapons

For Trump, this is not a return to the old agreement but an attempt to get "his" deal - better, easier and with a personal stamp. For Iran, this is perhaps the last moment for de-escalation without a total military defeat or internal destabilisation of the regime.

Despite the loud rhetoric, the United States has set its minimum: Iran must not acquire nuclear weapons. The Trump administration, through special envoy Steve Witkoff, has shown its willingness to discuss and accept inspections, restrictions and the freezing of programmes.

There is no longer any talk of disarmament or destruction of the missile arsenal. This is a quiet but significant change.

Iran's restrictions

Iran makes it clear: the nuclear programme remains in place but without ambitions to develop weapons - if it receives a serious easing of sanctions and security guarantees.

The problem is that "guarantees" are not Trump's currency. His policy is transactional - agreement now, penalty if you breach it. Or just the threat of punishment, as in the case of Russia and Putin.



Trump's policy is transactional – agreement now, penalty if you breach it

Iran is entering the negotiations with ever weaker regional capacities - Hezbollah is under siege, Syrian positions destroyed, and the Houthis are under pressure.

Due to pressure from conservative structures in the country, Abbas Araghchi, the Iranian special envoy and chief nuclear negotiator, cannot afford to make any gesture that could appear to be a concession in public.

Even a symbolic handshake with US officials could cost him political credibility with those in Tehran who see any co-operation with the US as a betrayal. Therefore, "indirect negotiations" were the only form acceptable to Tehran.

On the other hand, Trump cannot afford another "weak" retreat. His support in conservative circles depends on his image of strength. But that strength must not turn into war because the American public, budget, and global commitments can no longer take it.

Israel has already given a clear signal: no deal short of the complete denuclearisation and disarmament of Iran is acceptable. Their vision is the "Libyan model", which means capitulation for Iran. This stance is unrealistic, but it means a constant threat of bombs in the shadow of every meeting.

Russia and China, preoccupied with their own strategies and crises, are on the sidelines for now, which Washington is using as an opportunity to develop a bilateral formula without the major powers. The EU is

symbolically important but realistically without influence - more of an observer than a partner.

What comes next: three possible scenarios

1. Limited agreement: Iran agrees to freeze the most dangerous components of its programme (for example, enrichment above 60%) in return for a partial lifting of sanctions and de-escalation. IAEA continues inspections without a formal agreement being reached. This scenario is likely to occur if pressure increases and military options remain on the table.
2. Failure of the negotiations: If Iran comes to the conclusion that Trump is offering nothing but humiliation, and the US comes to the conclusion that Iran is bluffing about its nuclear threshold - then the negotiations will fail and the rhetoric will radicalise. In this case, a military coup will become more likely than a new round of negotiations, and incidents in the Strait of Hormuz, such as attacks on tankers, could become common again.
3. New "Trump-style" agreement: Both sides surprise the world by signing an informal but politically strong agreement that includes a limited nuclear programme, inspections and certain security guarantees. This is the most unlikely but geopolitically most stable outcome.

The negotiations in Oman are not a diplomatic routine but a game on a knife-edge. And while many see this episode as symbolic, the most important development of the last six years is that the US president, known for his unpredictability, has opened a direct channel with Tehran.

The success of this process will not depend on the wording in the documents but on the political will of both sides to redefine the red lines without humiliation or escalation. Trump has shown that he knows how to break the status quo; now he has to show that he can

also build it up.

If this opportunity is missed, the next meeting might not take place in Muscat but in the skies above Tehran.