



By: TA | AP Insight

Tehran seeks fair and equitable negotiations with the US



Iran's president said he instructed the country's foreign minister to "pursue fair and equitable negotiations" with the United States, the first clear sign from Tehran it wants to try to negotiate as **tensions** remain high with Washington after the Mideast country's bloody crackdown on **nationwide protests** last month.

The announcement marked a major turn for reformist President **Masoud Pezeshkian**, who had broadly warned Iranians for weeks that the turmoil in his country had gone beyond his control.

It also signals that the president received support from Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah **Ali Khamenei** for talks that the 86-year-old cleric previously had dismissed.

Turkey had been working behind the scenes to make the talks happen there later this week as U.S. Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff is traveling in the region.

A Turkish official later said the location of talks was uncertain but that Turkey was ready to support the process. The official did not provide further details.

Foreign ministers from Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have also been invited to attend the talks, if they happen, according to the official who spoke on condition of anonymity as they did not have permission to speak to journalists.

But whether Iran and the U.S. can reach an agreement remains to be seen, particularly as President Donald Trump now has included Iran's nuclear program in a list of demands from Tehran in any talks.

Trump ordered the **bombing** of three Iranian nuclear sites during the 12-day war Israel launched against Iran in June.

Iran's president signals talks are possible

Writing on X, Pezeshkian said in English and

Farsi that the decision came after "requests from friendly governments in the region to respond to the proposal by the President of the United States for negotiations."

"I have instructed my Minister of Foreign Affairs, provided that a suitable environment exists — one free from threats and unreasonable expectations — to pursue fair and equitable negotiations, guided by the principles of dignity, prudence, and expediency," he said.

The U.S. has yet to acknowledge the talks will take place. A semiofficial news agency in Iran on Monday reported — then later deleted without explanation — that Pezeshkian had issued such an order to Foreign Minister **Abbas Araghchi**, who held multiple rounds of talks with Witkoff before the 12-day war.

Khamenei adviser speaks on the nuclear issue

Late Monday, the pan-Arab satellite channel Al Mayadeen, which is politically allied with the Iranian-backed Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, aired an interview with Ali Shamkhani, a top Khamenei adviser on security.

Shamkhani, who now sits on the country's Supreme National Security Council and who in the 1980s led Iran's navy, wore a naval uniform as he spoke.

He suggested that if the talks happened, they would be indirect at the beginning, then move to direct talks if a deal appeared to be attainable.

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Direct talks with the U.S. long have been a highly charged political issue within Iran's theocracy, with reformists like Pezeshkian

pushing for them and hard-liners dismissing them.

The talks would solely focus on nuclear issues, he added.

Asked about whether Russia could take Iran's enriched uranium like it did in Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, Shamkhani dismissed the idea, saying there was "no reason" to do so. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov on Monday said Russia had "long offered these services as a possible option that would alleviate certain irritants for a number of countries."

"Iran does not seek nuclear weapons, will not seek a nuclear weapon and will never stockpile nuclear weapons, but the other side must pay a price in return for this," he said.

Iran had been enriching uranium up to 60% purity, a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels.

The International Atomic Energy Agency had said Iran was the only country in the world to enrich to that level that wasn't armed with the bomb.

Iran has been refusing requests by the IAEA to inspect the sites bombed in the June war.

"The quantity of enriched uranium remains unknown, because part of the stockpile is under rubble, and there is no initiative yet to extract it, as it is extremely dangerous," Shamkhani said.

Witkoff traveling to Israel

Witkoff is expected to meet Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other Israeli security officials on Tuesday, according to a White House official who was not authorized to comment publicly about the talks and spoke on condition of anonymity.

While in Israel, Witkoff will meet with the head of the Mossad intelligence service and the Israeli military's chief of staff, according to

another official who was not authorized to speak to the media and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Israel is expected to ask that any agreement with Iran include removing enriched uranium from the country, stopping the enrichment of uranium, limiting the creation of ballistic missiles and ending support for Tehran's proxies.

However, Shamkhani in his interview rejected giving up uranium enrichment — a major obstacle in earlier talks with the U.S.



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In November, Araghchi said Iran was doing no **enrichment** in the country because of the U.S. bombing of the nuclear sites.

Witkoff later will travel to Abu Dhabi, the UAE capital, later in the week for Russia-Ukraine talks, the official said.

"We have talks going on with Iran, we'll see how it all works out," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office on Monday. Asked what his threshold was for military action against Iran, he declined to elaborate.

"I'd like to see a deal negotiated," Trump said. "Right now, we're talking to them, we're talking to Iran, and if we could work something out, that'd be great. And if we can't, probably bad things would happen."

Mike Pompeo, a hard-liner on Iran who served

as CIA director and secretary of state in Trump's first term, said it was "unimaginable that there can be a deal."

"I think they may come away with some set of understandings," Pompeo said at Dubai's World Governments Summit. "But to think that there's a long-term solution that actually provides stability and peace to this region while the ayatollah is still in power is something I pray for but find unimaginable."

Also Tuesday, a ship transiting through the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf, reported being hailed on the radio "by numerous small armed vessels," the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said.

There was no identifying information on the vessel, which continued into the Persian Gulf.

The position of the incident appeared to be in Iranian territorial waters, where officials had warned of a naval drill by the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard in recent days.