

Iran confirms indirect nuclear talks with US in Oman, but rules out interim deal

Iran's Foreign Ministry says agreement must adhere to supreme leader's guidelines and include sanctions relief, also hints at possible prisoner swap with US

By **TOI STAFF** and **AGENCIES**

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File: A student looks at Iran's domestically built centrifuges in an exhibition of the country's nuclear achievements, in Tehran, Iran, Feb. 8, 2023. (AP Photo/Vahid Salemi)

Iran on Monday confirmed indirect talks with the United States in Oman regarding its nuclear program, but said it was uninterested in a potential interim deal on the issue.

The comments come a day after the Islamic Republic's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei [expressed support](#) for an agreement on the country's nuclear program with the West, but added that "the existing infrastructure of the nuclear industry should not be touched."

In a Monday press conference, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanaani thanked Muscat for its efforts, according to the Tasnim news agency, in an apparent acknowledgement of the recent report by [Axios](#) on the matter. There has been no official confirmation from the US.



He said Tehran was not interested in an interim agreement with Washington, but would consider a revival of the 2015 nuclear deal, which the US pulled out of in 2018.

“We consider the other things that are said as media speculations. We would not confirm anything as negotiation for an interim deal,” he said.

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A return to the deal was only one of the issues being discussed, Kanaani said, adding any agreement reached needed to adhere to Khamenei's standards and include sanctions relief.

Israeli officials have accused the US and Iran of seeking an interim nuclear agreement that would allow Tehran to continue enriching uranium.



Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei speaks during a ceremony commemorating the death anniversary of the late revolutionary founder Ayatollah Khomeini, shown in the poster at top right, at his mausoleum just outside Tehran, Iran, June 4, 2023. (Office of the Iranian Supreme Leader via AP)

On Friday, the Axios website [reported](#) that last month US officials made clear in messages passed to Iran that there would be a severe response if Tehran reached the 90 percent uranium enrichment levels required for use in a nuclear weapon — a short technical step from the current level.

The most recent estimate by the International Atomic Energy Agency is that Iran has 114.1 kilograms (251 pounds) of uranium enriched to 60% purity — a level for which nonproliferation experts already say Tehran has no civilian use.

Khamenei said Sunday that the world could not stop his country from obtaining nuclear weapons if it chose to pursue such a goal, but that Tehran doesn't want them for religious reasons.

He also urged cooperation with the IAEA while warning against succumbing to "bullying" based on "unfounded claims."



In this photo released on Thursday, August 11, 2022, by the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanaani speaks in Tehran, Iran. (Iranian Foreign Ministry via AP)

The White House on Thursday [denied](#) a report that Washington and Tehran were making progress on a new nuclear deal, a potential development Israel has been watching closely and with [mounting concern](#) in recent weeks.

Israel lobbied hard against the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers, which the US pulled out of in 2018. Subsequent efforts by Europe and US President Joe Biden's administration to revive the agreement and bring Washington back into the pact have also been met with protests from Jerusalem. Israel argues that diplomatic efforts fall short of preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, pushing instead for a credible military threat.

Israel is concerned that a new deal could legitimize Iran's nuclear activity and erase international support for military action.



File: International Atomic Energy Organization, IAEA, Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi, right, speaks with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian, left, during a round of talks, in Tehran, March 4, 2023. (AP Photo)

Kanaani on Monday also indicated that a prisoner exchange with the United States was possible.

“Regarding the issue of exchanging prisoners with America... negotiations are ongoing through mediators... If the other party shows the same seriousness and goodwill, this can happen in the near future,” he said.

At least three US citizens — Siamak Namazi, Emad Shargi, and Morad Tahbaz — are held in the country’s prisons, according to Iran’s judiciary and the US State Department.

Iran occasionally announces the detention of people it says are spying for foreign countries, without providing proof to back up such claims.

Namazi, an Iranian-American businessman, has been in prison since his arrest in October 2015 and is the longest-held detainee. His father Mohammad Baquer Namazi, a former UNICEF official, was arrested in February 2016 when he went to Iran to try to free his son.

They were both sentenced to 10 years on spying charges in October 2016. Baquer, under house arrest since 2018, had his sentence commuted in 2020, and was finally granted permission to leave the country for medical treatment in October.



This undated photo shows Baquer Namazi, left, and his son Siamak, in an unidentified location. (Babak Namazi via AP)

Tahbaz, an Iranian-American who also holds British nationality, was arrested alongside other environmentalists in January 2018 and sentenced to 10 years in jail for “conspiring with America.”

Iranian-American venture capitalist Emad Sharqi was sentenced to 10 years in prison on spying charges, Iranian media reported in 2021, saying he was captured trying to flee the country.

Karan Vafadari, an Iranian-American member of the Zoroastrian minority faith, was arrested in June 2016 on allegations of spying and released on bail in July 2018. He is still unable to leave Iran.

Iran’s judiciary reported last year that “dozens” of Iranian nationals had been detained in the United States, including Reza Sarhangpour and Kambiz Attar Kashani, who are accused of having violated US sanctions against Tehran.

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Non-U.S. readers should recall that the nuke deal was one of Obama's self-professed legacies. Biden's cabinet is full of former Obama appointees. Biden was Obama's VP. Many of Biden's decisions and those of his cabinet have not been based on necessity or logic--in many cases they've been decisions ...

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