

## Swift end to war still unlikely

Analysts say small window remains for US-Iran talks after attacks eroded fragile trust

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US President Donald Trump's dramatic description of "very strong talks" with Iran suggested the door to diplomacy has been flung open for what he said could be "a complete and total resolution of our hostilities in the Middle East".

But Iran almost immediately denied that talks had begun - and so far, there are only signs of small windows being opened - by a crack. One is the same window that was shattered during previous rounds of diplomacy, in February and in June last year, by US-backed Israeli attacks on Iran which destroyed the little trust that existed.

There's said to be some communication between lead negotiators in previous discussions - Iranian FM Abbas Araghchi and US envoy Steve Witkoff. But these conversations are described as very preliminary. And Tehran now sees the Witkoff track as subterfuge. "The statements of the US president are part of efforts to reduce energy prices and buy time for the implementation of his military plans," was the retort of Iran's foreign ministry, says an analyst.

Trump now says they're dealing with a "top person" in Iran. The unnamed individual being widely cited is Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf. He failed four times in presidential runs and described Iranians who took to the streets nationwide in February calling for change as "enemies and terrorists."

But in Trump's world, Ghalibaf is a strongman who could possibly bridge the divides between Iran's security and political establishments, reports BBC. "He's the last man standing who's seen as more ideologically flexible," said one source with knowledge of the various mediation efforts. "But even Trump said if he named him, they'd kill him, and then Israel immediately named him." This time, new countries are engaging in this age-old crisis including Pakistan, Egypt, and Turkey which have not been on the front lines of the war itself.

Trump likely believes this war has granted him additional leverage to get Iran to accept his conditions, and Iran senses it has not only fortified its position but has additional bargaining chips in the Strait of Hormuz," remarked Mohammad Ali Shabani, editor of Amwaj, media. In his post announcing the talks, Trump said he was postponing his threat to strike Iran's power plants for five days - meaning all eyes are on his new deadline - Friday, when the markets close.



PHOTO: AFP

A first responder surveys damage after Iranian missile strikes in central Israel, early yesterday. At least two Israelis, both men in their 50s, have been injured in a Hezbollah missile attack on the northern city of Karmiel.



## Iranian strikes pose 'existential threat'

Gulf states tell UN, denounce attacks on energy, airports

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Gulf Arab states told the UN Human Rights Council yesterday they face an existential threat from Iran as they condemned Iranian attacks on their infrastructure, which the UN rights chief said might constitute war crimes.

The nearly month-long US-Israeli war on Iran has sparked large-scale Iranian retaliation in the form of drone and missile strikes on energy and civilian infrastructure in Gulf countries, killing civilians and driving up oil prices.

"We are seeing an existential threat to international and regional



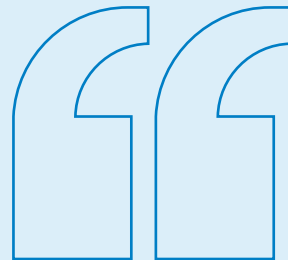
security. This aggressive approach is undermining international law and sovereignty," Kuwait's ambassador Naser Abdullah H. M. Alhayen told the Geneva-based council.

Other Gulf states also denounced Iran's actions which they said were designed to spread terror.

Countries at the 47-member council will vote on a motion condemning Iran's strikes, asking Iran for reparation and asking the UN rights chief to monitor the situation.

Iran defended its actions, saying more than 1,500 civilians had been killed in the US-Israeli strikes so far.

"We fight on behalf of all of you against an enemy that, if not restrained today, will be beyond containment tomorrow," said Iran's ambassador to the UN in Geneva Ali Bahreini, referring to Israel.



"This conflict has an unprecedented power to ensnare countries across borders and around the world."

UN rights chief Volker Turk on Middle East war

### JERUSALEM Israeli police kill Palestinian man

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli police officers killed a Palestinian man who tried to seize a weapon from an undercover security agent during an overnight operation in east Jerusalem, police said yesterday.

Officers from the Jerusalem district police and undercover border police carried out a raid in Jabal Mukaber neighbourhood, "targeting two suspects involved in terrorist activity," a police statement said.

"During the operation, one of the suspects attempted to grab a weapon from an undercover officer, who responded quickly and neutralised him," according to the statement.

The man's death was confirmed shortly after the incident. Palestinian official news agency Wafa identified the man as 21-year-old Qassem Shqairat.

Three other suspects were arrested and handed over to security authorities for further questioning, police added.

Jabal Mukaber is a Palestinian neighbourhood in east Jerusalem.

## Trump's 15-point plan to end war

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A media report late Tuesday revealed the details of a plan submitted by the US to Iran aimed at ending the war in the Middle East after President Donald Trump said Washington and Tehran had reached 15 "major points of agreements."

It includes the dismantling of all existing Iranian nuclear capabilities and a commitment that Iran will never pursue a nuclear weapon, Israel's Channel 12 reported.

There would be no production of weapons-grade nuclear material on Iranian soil and all enriched material would be handed over to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) within an agreed timeline, it said.

Iran's Natanz, Isfahan and Fordow nuclear sites would be decommissioned and destroyed and the IAEA would get full access to all information in regards to Iran's nuclear program, the report said, adding that Iran would cease the funding, directing and arming of its proxies in the region.

In addition, the Strait of Hormuz will remain open and a free maritime zone and "no one will block it."

A decision on Iran's missile program will be made later, but ranges and numbers "will need to be limited," the report added, noting that Iran will be able to use the missiles "only for self-defense purposes" in the future.

In return, all sanctions on Iran will be lifted, the report said, adding the country will also receive assistance in developing a civilian nuclear project in Bushehr. The removal of the "snapback threat" is also included among the points of the agreement, the report said, referring to the imminent, automatic reimposition of United Nations sanctions on Iran by the E3 countries - Britain, France and Germany. Hostilities have escalated since US and Israeli strikes on Iran began on February 28.

Iran has retaliated with repeated drone and missile strikes targeting Israel and Gulf countries hosting US military assets. Despite Trump's stated hopes for diplomacy, The Wall Street Journal reported that the United States is planning to send 3,000 soldiers from the elite 82nd Airborne Division to the Middle East.

Trump's envoys were negotiating a nuclear deal with Iran just two days before the United States and Israel launched the massive attack on February 28, killing Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on the first day. Iran had agreed in 2015 to broad restraints on its contested nuclear program in a deal that Trump ripped up during his first term as he joined Israel in applying pressure to the cleric-run state.

The reported new proposal would keep in place the Islamic republic which weeks earlier ruthlessly crushed mass protests, killing thousands, despite earlier vows of regime change by Trump and especially Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu.