

Media outlets claim Iran-US close to a temporary “understanding”

Jean Shaoul
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The *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal* and various outlets in the Middle East have carried reports in recent days of direct talks between the US and Iran, including meetings in Oman, over a potential, temporary nuclear agreement, dubbed an “understanding.”

The details of what would be an “informal,” unwritten agreement, insofar as they have been revealed, indicate its very limited and fragile nature in a region destabilized by decades of imperialist-stoked conflicts. Its aim is to drive a wedge between Tehran and Moscow as the US and NATO prepare a drastic military escalation in their war against Russia over Ukraine.

Iran would pledge not to enrich uranium beyond its current level of 60 percent purity, cooperate with nuclear inspectors from the United Nations’ International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), stop militias allied with Tehran from attacking US contractors in Iraq and Syria, refrain from supplying ballistic missiles to Russia and release three American-Iranian prisoners held in the Islamic Republic whom Washington says have been wrongfully detained.

For its part, the US would promise not to tighten the economic sanctions that have choked Iran’s economy, not to seize oil-bearing foreign tankers that it claims are carrying Iranian oil and not to pursue punitive resolutions against Tehran at the United Nations or at the IAEA for its nuclear activities. Washington would also unfreeze \$20 billion in Iranian assets held in foreign banks, whose use would be limited to US-approved third-party vendors for food and medicine for Iranian citizens.

In an indication of what might follow, the Biden administration issued a waiver last week allowing Iraq to pay €2.5 (equivalent to \$2.76 billion) for Iranian electricity and gas imports and make remittances to some of Iran’s creditors.

While Iran, three senior Israeli officials and a US official have acknowledged the talks mediated by Oman, the White House has denied that the discussions were aimed at securing an interim agreement, in part at least because a formal agreement would require the approval of the US Congress which is opposed to such a deal.

The Biden administration’s objectives in pursuing such a deal are to disrupt the growing cooperation between Tehran and Moscow that cuts across Washington’s geostrategic interests and ease the growing tensions in the region, amid an escalating covert aerial and maritime war between the US, and its attack dog in Tel Aviv, and Iran, that has threatened to erupt into open military conflict alongside the war in Ukraine

A Western official told Reuters that the aim of the deal between the US and Iran is to stop Israel from attacking Iran, because “If [the] Iranians miscalculate, the potential for a strong Israeli response is something that we want to avoid.”

During the 2020 election campaign, Biden pledged if elected to restart negotiations regarding the 2015 Iran nuclear accord. The Trump administration had unilaterally abandoned it in 2018, despite Tehran’s full compliance with the agreement, and launched an all-out economic war against Iran, including threatening retaliatory measures against any country that broke its illegal sanctions. Biden had hoped to use the resumption of the deal as a bait to detach Iran from Russia and China and, with the outbreak of the US-NATO instigated war with Russia, to open up new energy supplies for Europe.

Under President Ebrahim Raisi, who hails from the conservative faction within Iran’s clergy-led bourgeois nationalist regime that had opposed the 2015 deal, Tehran had sought to take advantage of the Russia-Ukraine war and western sanctions on Russia to stress Iran’s importance to both Russia and China, while keeping open the option of an agreement with the US. Desperate to get rid of the ever-tightening sanctions that had wrecked its economy, Tehran largely withdrew its preconditions for a deal, including that the US withdraw its designation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organisation.

But Washington kept attaching new conditions. Then, angered by Iran’s provision of drones, artillery and tank rounds to Moscow—materiel Tehran said it had provided prior to February 2022—in return for Russia’s offer to increase cooperation on missiles and air defence, Washington imposed further sanctions against Iran. It also prevailed on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to criticize and bully Iran over its nuclear programme and by the beginning of September 2022 outright abandoned the talks.

While Israel has long been known to have an undeclared stock of nuclear weapons, Tehran has always maintained its nuclear programme is solely for civilian purposes. All the major powers, the IAEA and the CIA have admitted that there has been no evidence to contradict its claim, testifying to the fact that the nuclear issue is nothing but a smokescreen for Washington’s hostility and aggression towards Iran.

At the same time, Washington has brokered an anti-Iran alliance of the Gulf states and Israel and greenlit Tel Aviv’s aggressive air strikes against targets linked to Iran and its regional allies in Syria.

At least some of the Israeli attacks have been carried out with support from the US base in al-Tanf, which is on Syrian opposition-held territory close to the border with Jordan and Iraq.

The imperialist powers' brutal sanctions regime has caused Iran's oil exports to plummet, slashing the country's most important source of income and devastating its economy. Earlier this year, the Iranian currency fell to its lowest-ever level against the dollar, before recovering slightly following the announcement of the Saudi-Iran rapprochement brokered by China in March.

But with inflation officially running at around 50 percent and food inflation at 71 percent, extreme poverty is affecting ever wider layers, officially put at just over 30 percent of Iran's 87 million population in 2022.

Protests broke out last September, sparked by the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini at the hands of the clerical regime's morality police. Fueled by popular anger over the terrible social and economic situation in the country, they rapidly spiraled into mass demonstrations that lasted for months and were suppressed with mass arrests, lethal force and the execution of at least seven protesters. On May 9, a spokesman for the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights said that Iran had executed 209 people so far this year, describing its record as "abominable."

As would be expected, the Western powers, led by the US, cynically sought to exploit the protests for their own reactionary ends, hoping to leverage the fissures within the Iranian bourgeoisie and even bring about "regime change." In a development that underscores the predatory aims that lie behind all the "human rights" propaganda, the western media touted various extreme right-wing exiles, including "Crown Prince" Reza Pahlavi, the son of the Shah whose blood-soaked regime was toppled by the 1979 Iranian Revolution, as the voices of a "post-Islamic" Iran.

The social crisis, manifest in the ongoing protests by Iran's retirees who have seen the value of their pensions disappear and sporadic strikes by teachers and industrial workers, has forced the corrupt clerical regime back to the negotiating table. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the country's supreme leader, said he could endorse an agreement with the West if Iran's nuclear infrastructure was kept intact, while maintaining cooperation with the IAEA.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has made contradictory remarks about the potential agreement as he seeks to fend off criticism from both his far-right coalition partners and the opposition.

He told his cabinet that he was opposed to any interim agreement between the US and Iran, saying that it would not prevent Tehran from developing a nuclear weapon. Speaking on television, Netanyahu insisted, "Our position is clear. No agreement with Iran would obligate Israel, which will do everything required to defend itself." He added, "Our opposition to the deal—a return to the original (2015) deal—is working, I think. But there are still differences in outlook, and we do not hide these, regarding smaller agreements too. We have been stating our position clearly, both in closed and open sessions."

Netanyahu has sought to downplay the negotiations as a "mini-agreement, not an agreement," reportedly telling a meeting of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, "What's on the agenda at the moment between Washington and Tehran is not a

nuclear deal, it's a mini-deal," adding, "We will be able to handle it."

According to *Ha'aretz*, a senior Israeli official said that the US had been updating Israel on the emerging understandings and that Jerusalem was not trying to foil the talks, but instead would forward its objections. "There is an open and continuous dialogue with the Americans," the official said, adding that Israel had not been "surprised" by the latest reports on an emerging "understanding."

Last Thursday, Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant met US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin on the sidelines of the NATO defence ministers meeting in Brussels to discuss their expanding cooperation against Iran. Gallant raised the importance for Israel that an interim deal includes a commitment from Iran to end its production of both ballistic missiles and attack drones.

Last week, the *Eurasian Times* reported that the US had dispatched its much-vaunted F-22 Raptor stealth fighter jets to the Middle East as part of an open show of force against Russia, that along with Iran has defended the regime of President Bashar al-Assad in Syria. A CENTCOM press release noted, "While in the CENTCOM area, the 94th Fighter Squadron will integrate with coalition forces on the ground and in the air." It comes after CENTCOM has issued multiple warnings over the last months claiming that Russian warplanes often engage in dangerous engagements with US jets and fly sorties over US bases such as the al-Tanf, collecting vital intelligence.

This follows a two-week exercise in Saudi Arabia at the beginning of June as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met regional leaders in Riyadh. It included fighter jets from the US, several Arab countries and Israel aimed at developing air and missile defence cooperation against Iran.

These developments, coming in the midst of a dramatic escalation of the US-NATO war against Russia that cannot but impact the balance of power in the Middle East, underscore that whatever the immediate fate of the potential US-Iran "understanding" the region remains riven with fault lines, and is increasingly being sucked into the maelstrom of an expanding imperialist drive to repartition the world.



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