

Iran's foreign minister: Israel's war sabotaged diplomacy. The US can revive it

Our commitment to acting responsibly to avoid a full-scale regional war should not be misinterpreted as weakness

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In only five meetings over nine weeks, US special envoy Steve Witkoff and I achieved more than I did in four years of nuclear negotiations with the failed Biden administration. We were on the cusp of a historic breakthrough. To address US concerns that Iran may one day divert its peaceful nuclear programme, we held detailed, frank discussions — including on the future of Iranian uranium enrichment. There were several ideas for a win-win solution, put forward by both sides, and by Oman.

Equally important, we also focused on the termination of sanctions and US involvement in wider economic co-operation that constituted a trillion-dollar opportunity. Iran was open to mutually beneficial collaboration that would electrify the Iranian economy and address US President Donald Trump's priority to revive dying American industries, such as the nuclear energy sector.

Things were looking up, with a flurry of messages exchanged. But only 48 hours before a pivotal sixth meeting, Israel launched an unprovoked assault on my country. In addition to safeguarded nuclear facilities, homes, hospitals, our essential energy infrastructure and even prisons were bombed. Cowardly killings of academics and their families were also carried out. This was a profound betrayal of diplomacy. As Iran-US dialogue was finally gaining momentum, the reckless bombardment sent an unambiguous message: Israel prefers conflict over resolution.

Israel falsely claimed its air strikes were aimed at preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons. In reality, as a signatory to the non-proliferation treaty, Iran has always been committed to a peaceful nuclear programme under UN monitoring. As any dignified nation under attack would, Iran fiercely resisted the aggression until Israel had to rely on President Trump to end the war it had initiated.

Having been wronged once, Iran is now doubly cautious. Our commitment to acting responsibly to avoid a full-scale regional war should not be misinterpreted as weakness. We will defeat any future attack on our people. And should the day ever come, we will reveal our real capabilities, to dispel any illusions about Iran's power.

Needless to say, the progress made in talks between Iran and the US has been sabotaged; not by Iran, but by an ostensible ally of America. This is not to mention the fateful decision by the US to allow itself to be cajoled into undermining international law and the NPT with its own strikes.

Although Iran has in recent days received messages indicating that the US may be ready to return to negotiations, how can we trust further engagement? Iran signed a comprehensive nuclear deal with six countries in 2015, including the US, which Washington unilaterally abrogated three years later. And after agreeing to new negotiations in good faith, we have seen our good will reciprocated with an attack by two nuclear-armed militaries.

Iran remains interested in diplomacy but we have good reason to have doubts about further dialogue. If there is a desire to resolve this amicably, the US should show genuine readiness for an equitable accord. Washington should also know that its actions in recent weeks have changed the situation.

Iranians will never agree to surrender. Iran is a millennia-old civilisation that has overcome countless invasions, emerging stronger each time. We have always preferred peace, yet we have always been the ones to decide when, and how, aggression against our people ends. As the Israeli regime's miscalculations have proved, Iranians invariably rally in unison against aggressors.

Negotiations held under the shadow of war are inherently unstable, and dialogue pursued amid threats is never genuine. For diplomacy to succeed, it must be built on mutual respect. Nor can it survive perpetual sabotage by third parties who fear a resolution. The American people deserve to know that their country is being pushed towards a wholly avoidable and unwarranted war by a foreign regime that does not share their interests. As for Washington, it should know that the aggression has made our scientists and their achievements more dear to us than ever.

Trump's promise of "America First" is, in practice, being twisted into "Israel First". Having witnessed the sacrifice of thousands of American lives and the waste of trillions of their taxpayer dollars in our region, Americans appear to have had enough. The path towards peace requires a recognition in the US that respectful dialogue, and not reckless coercion, is the only sustainable way forward.

The choice is America's. Will the US finally choose diplomacy? Or will it remain ensnared in someone else's war?