# Iran warns UK zero-enrichment stance threatens nuclear talks amid escalating tensions



Iran's nuclear negotiations are at a critical juncture, as tensions have escalated following comments from Peter Mandelson, the UK ambassador to Washington, which appeared to align closely with the US stance advocating for the complete elimination of Iran's uranium enrichment capabilities. This development has prompted Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi to declare that if the UK continues to pursue a zero-enrichment policy, there would be "nothing left for us to discuss on the nuclear issue."

The backdrop of this diplomatic tension is the ongoing struggle between Iran's right to enrich uranium—viewed by Tehran as a matter of sovereignty—and concerns from the US and its allies about the potential for these capabilities to facilitate the development of nuclear weapons. Araghchi's condemnation of Mandelson’s remarks highlights Iran's position that such demands would violate both the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and the commitments outlined in the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPoA). Under this agreement, Iran is permitted to enrich uranium to a maximum of 3.75% purity, contingent upon stringent international inspections.

Recent rounds of negotiations, which involved US officials and intermediaries from Oman, have revealed limited progress, although Araghchi noted that discussions with European nations continued amid the backdrop of heightened geopolitical uncertainties. Despite these complexities, a potential shift appears on the horizon. Iran's nuclear chief, Mohammad Eslami, recently suggested that Iran might permit US inspectors to monitor its nuclear activities, marking a willingness to explore avenues for dialogue that could alleviate mutual concerns.

Compounding the situation is the role of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), led by Rafael Grossi, who has reiterated that any new accord must include rigorous inspection protocols to ensure compliance. As Iran has escalated its uranium enrichment to nearly 60% purity—close to weapons-grade—the need for robust oversight is increasingly critical. Grossi has expressed cautious optimism that a workable solution may emerge despite current impasses, hinting at the possibility of reconciling the stark differences between US demands and Iran's insistence on its enrichment rights.

Adding to the intricacy of the negotiations, the recent fifth round of talks in Rome underscored the challenges both parties face in achieving a comprehensive agreement. Amidst ongoing economic difficulties, social unrest in Iran, and international sanctions, the Iranian leadership is under significant pressure to secure a deal that could alleviate both their domestic crises and international isolation. Diplomatic efforts are further complicated by the sidelining of European powers—Britain, France, and Germany—in ongoing US-led discussions, which have sparked concerns over the long-term stability of the negotiations. The E3 have expressed their continuing commitment to dialogue, even as they grapple with the implications of their diminished role in the process.

As the discussions progress, the prospect of an interim agreement looms, with potential provisions for the lifting of certain sanctions against Iran in exchange for verification measures. However, the overarching sentiment from both sides remains one of cautious optimism, underpinned by the necessity of finding common ground in an increasingly volatile landscape. Iran is poised to navigate these treacherous waters, inclined to maintain its enrichment programmes while engaging in dialogue that could safeguard its sovereign rights and alleviate the pressures of international isolation.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/28/iran-nuclear-talks-europe-mandelson-us), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/world/china/any-us-iran-deal-should-include-robust-iaea-inspections-grossi-says-2025-05-28/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/28/iran-nuclear-talks-europe-mandelson-us), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/799a6604cdb2ddfe59c36acbbe69619f), [[4]](https://www.axios.com/2025/05/23/iran-nuclear-talks-rome)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/world/china/any-us-iran-deal-should-include-robust-iaea-inspections-grossi-says-2025-05-28/), [[7]](https://www.reuters.com/world/us-iran-nuclear-talks-must-conform-with-european-interests-says-french-foreign-2025-04-14/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/28/iran-nuclear-talks-europe-mandelson-us), [[6]](https://www.reuters.com/world/europeans-sidelined-us-iran-nuclear-talks-despite-holding-key-card-2025-04-10/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/799a6604cdb2ddfe59c36acbbe69619f), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/world/iran-three-european-powers-met-istanbul-discuss-nuclear-talks-iranian-official-2025-05-16/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/28/iran-nuclear-talks-europe-mandelson-us> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/any-us-iran-deal-should-include-robust-iaea-inspections-grossi-says-2025-05-28/> - International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Rafael Grossi emphasized that any new nuclear agreement between the U.S. and Iran must include 'very robust' inspections by the IAEA. The comments come amid ongoing talks aimed at curbing Iran’s rapidly advancing nuclear activities, which escalated after the U.S. withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal under President Donald Trump. Since then, Iran has increased uranium enrichment levels up to 60%, nearing weapons-grade, and ended additional IAEA oversight stipulated by the original agreement. Grossi underlined the importance of rigorous inspections to verify Iran’s commitment under any new deal, though he avoided directly calling for the reinstatement of the Additional Protocol, which allows for snap inspections of undeclared sites. This protocol was followed under the 2015 deal until the U.S. exited it in 2018. Although the IAEA is not directly participating in the current negotiations, Grossi maintains contact with both parties. Despite seeming deadlocks—such as the U.S. opposing any uranium refinement by Iran and Iran insisting on its right to enrichment—Grossi believes these differences are reconcilable, suggesting a practical, ad hoc approach might prevail in ongoing discussions.
3. <https://apnews.com/article/799a6604cdb2ddfe59c36acbbe69619f> - Iran and the United States have made 'some but not conclusive progress' in a fifth round of nuclear negotiations held in Rome, according to Omani mediator Badr al-Busaidi. The talks continue to focus on resolving disagreements over Iran's uranium enrichment program, with the U.S. demanding a halt to enrichment and Iran insisting on maintaining it domestically. Ideas are being circulated to bridge this gap, including creating a regional uranium supply consortium. Despite hardened U.S. positions and Israeli threats of military action, both parties remain engaged. Iran's internal economic and political pressures, including a plummeting currency, fuel subsidy concerns, and social unrest, underline its need for a deal. Meanwhile, the U.S. has intensified sanctions, recently targeting specific chemical shipments from China. The situation is further complicated by regional instability and Iran's strained alliances. While negotiations remain challenging, improved mutual understanding and constructive dialogue offer cautious optimism for progress.
4. <https://www.axios.com/2025/05/23/iran-nuclear-talks-rome> - The fifth round of U.S.-Iran nuclear talks concluded in Rome with limited progress but no breakthrough, as confirmed by Omani Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi, who is mediating the discussions. The negotiations have stalled over a key point of contention: Iran's insistence on maintaining the right to domestic uranium enrichment, which the U.S. opposes. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi described the talks as complex and acknowledged that more discussions are necessary. Al-Busaidi has proposed several ideas to bridge differences and expressed hope that unresolved issues can be clarified in the coming days to reach a mutually acceptable agreement. Concurrently, U.S. official Witkoff met in Rome with top Israeli officials, including Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer and Mossad Director David Barnea, highlighting the broader regional implications of the talks. The situation remains fluid, with all sides committed to pursuing a sustainable and honourable resolution.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/iran-three-european-powers-met-istanbul-discuss-nuclear-talks-iranian-official-2025-05-16/> - On May 16, 2025, senior diplomats from Iran and the European parties of the 2015 nuclear deal—Britain, France, and Germany (E3)—met in Istanbul for the first time since U.S.-Iran nuclear talks resumed in April. Although the E3 are not directly involved in current U.S.-Iran negotiations, they have continued diplomatic efforts with Iran to explore terms for a potential new agreement. Talks, previously held in March, focus on understanding potential parameters for a future deal. European diplomats are concerned about the lack of clarity in U.S. policy and are coordinating with Washington on the possibility of reimposing U.N. sanctions—commonly known as the 'snapback mechanism'—if no deal is reached. Under a U.N. resolution supporting the 2015 pact, the E3 have until October 18 to trigger this mechanism, potentially acting as early as August. Iran and E3 officials expressed a shared commitment to diplomacy and agreed to hold further discussions if needed. This meeting occurs amid deteriorating E3-Iran relations, worsened by sanctions on Iran for its missile program, detention of foreign nationals, and support for Russia in the Ukraine conflict. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio also met with E3 national security advisers in Istanbul to discuss Iran and Ukraine.
6. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europeans-sidelined-us-iran-nuclear-talks-despite-holding-key-card-2025-04-10/> - The United States' unilateral decision to engage Iran in nuclear talks without coordinating with its European allies—Britain, France, and Germany (E3)—has raised concerns among diplomats and analysts. These European nations still possess the authority to trigger the 'snapback' mechanism to reimpose U.N. sanctions on Iran, unlike the U.S., which withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal during Donald Trump’s presidency. Coordination with the E3 is considered vital to maintain pressure on Iran and pursue a successful diplomatic resolution. However, the U.S.’s lack of detailed discussions with European partners has led to reduced trust and fears that military conflict may become more likely. Despite this, the E3 have continued direct talks with Iran, attempting to explore new frameworks before the 2015 deal expires in October 2025. Iran has reacted strongly against the threat of snapback sanctions, warning of potential harsh responses, including revisiting its nuclear doctrine. The current situation echoes Trump’s prior foreign policy approach, which often marginalized European allies. As time runs short, European diplomats stress the urgency of coordinated efforts, while Iran remains open to E3 talks alongside U.S. negotiations to manage escalating nuclear tensions.
7. <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-iran-nuclear-talks-must-conform-with-european-interests-says-french-foreign-2025-04-14/> - On April 14, 2025, French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot stated that France, along with Britain and Germany, would closely monitor nuclear discussions between the United States and Iran. Speaking ahead of an EU foreign ministers' meeting in Luxembourg, Barrot emphasized that any negotiations must align with European security interests concerning Iran's nuclear program. The trio of European countries, often referred to as the E3, intends to ensure that any agreements or talks between the U.S. and Iran do not compromise European regional and global security priorities.