

Africa

The US military is preparing for the possibility of weeks of operations against Iran if Trump orders an attack.

BY REUTERS

The US and Iran yesterday began indirect talks in Geneva aimed at resolving their long-running nuclear dispute, with little clear indication of compromise as Washington masses a battle force in the region.

US envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner took part in the closed-door negotiations, which are being mediated by Oman, a source briefed on the matter told *Reuters*, alongside Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi.

US President Donald Trump said he would be involved "indirectly" in the Geneva talks and that he believed Tehran wanted to make a deal.

"I don't think they want the consequences of not making a deal," Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One on Monday. "We could have had a deal instead of sending the B-2s in to knock out their nuclear potential. And we had to send the B-2s," he added.

Tehran knows that a previous attempt to revive talks was under way in June last year when Washington's ally Israel launched a bombing campaign against Iran, and was then joined by US B-2 bombers that struck nuclear targets. Tehran has since said it has halted uranium enrichment activity.

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US, Iran hold showdown talks amid threat of war



BACKGROUND

Following the past strikes, Iran has halted uranium enrichment, but tensions remain high.

US navy sailors haul a line on the flight deck of USS Abraham Lincoln, an aircraft carrier, in the Arabian Sea on February 4. PHOTO/REUTERS

against Iran if Trump orders an attack, two US officials told *Reuters*.

Iran itself began a military drill on Monday in the Strait of Hormuz, a vital international waterway and oil ex-

port route from Gulf Arab states, which have been appealing for diplomacy to end the dispute.

Benchmark Brent oil prices LCOc1 drifted lower in Asian trade on Tues-

day as investors assessed the risk of supply disruption after Iran conducted the naval drills ahead of nuclear talks with the US O/R

Tehran and Washington renewed negotiations on February 6 on their decades-long dispute.

Washington and its close ally Israel believe Iran aspires to build a nuclear weapon that could threaten Israel's existence.

Iran says its nuclear programme is purely peaceful, even though it has enriched uranium far beyond the purity needed for power generation, and close to what is required for a bomb.

Since the June strikes, Iran's Islamic rulers have been weakened by street protests, put down at a cost of thousands of lives, against a cost-of-living crisis driven in part by international sanctions that have strangled Iran's oil income.

Unlike last time, the US has now placed what Trump calls a massive naval armada in the region.

Iran has joined the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which guarantees countries the right to pursue civilian nuclear power in return for requiring them to forgo atomic weapons and cooperate with the UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency.