

Armed Conflict



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MENA SITUATION UPDATE: Diplomatic success unlikely despite reinstatement of US-Iran negotiations for February 6; continue to be ready for escalation scenarios

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Executive Summary:

- US-Iran negotiations are slated to proceed in Oman on February 6, following a brief cancellation on February 4. This likely resulted from posturing intended as a show of force ahead of talks.
- However, the rift shows the parties' diverging policies, particularly on the scope of the discussions, which Iran seeks to limit to the nuclear file only.
- Together with the reputational stakes for the US and President Trump personally, this renders a breakthrough unlikely, with armed conflict constituting the more plausible scenario.

Current Situation:

US-Iran Talks

- On February 4, US-Iran talks slated for February 6 were reportedly [cancelled](#) after the US rejected Iran's request to change the meeting location to Oman and limit negotiations to the nuclear file.
- A February 4 report, citing two US officials, subsequently stated that talks would proceed following lobbying efforts by unspecified Middle Eastern leaders urging the US not to pull out of negotiations. A US official allegedly stated that Washington will participate at their insistence, but remains "very skeptical."
- On February 4, Iranian Foreign Minister (FM) Abbas Araghchi stated that "nuclear talks" with the US are scheduled to be held in Muscat at 10:00 (local time) on February 6.
- On February 4, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated that in order for talks with Iran to be meaningful, they would need to address Iran's ballistic missile program, "sponsorship of terrorist organizations across the region," and the "treatment of its own people," in addition to the nuclear program.

Other developments:

- In a February 4 interview, President Trump stated that Iran had attempted to approach its bombed nuclear facilities, but could not approach them due to the damage caused by US "Operation Midnight Hammer" in June 2025. He added that Iran was deliberating starting a new nuclear site in a different part of the country, until the US discovered their intentions and warned of severe consequences.
- Israel's Security Cabinet is slated to meet at 16:00 on February 5, with Israeli reports stating that the meeting was moved up on short notice.

Assessments & Forecast:

1. The cancellation of the talks was likely part of pre-negotiation posturing intended to constitute a show of force by both parties ahead of the highly anticipated negotiations. However, the quick reinstatement reflects a continued desire to engage in diplomacy and was likely partly facilitated by intensive mediation efforts from regional stakeholders who wish to prevent military escalation that could adversely impact their states.
2. Nonetheless, the rift also reflects the elevated distrust and slim prospects for a successful diplomatic process that would result in a new nuclear agreement. It particularly highlights the parties' diverging policies, including Washington's apparent insistence on including discussions on Iran's ballistic missile program and its support for its regional proxy network, as underscored by Secretary of State Marco Rubio's remarks. Tehran expressed refusal to include these aspects, demanding to limit talks to the nuclear issue, as suggested by FM Araghchi's affirmation that "nuclear talks" will take place on February 6. This is because Tehran views its missile program and regional allied factions as critical to its national security and regional geopolitical aspirations.
3. Divergence between Washington and Tehran also extends to the nuclear agenda, as Iran maintains that domestic uranium enrichment is a sovereign right, while Washington treats this issue as non-negotiable. However, the US likely still perceives Iran as facing an unprecedented economic and political crisis, informing an assessment that sustained pressure, combined with the military buildup and threat, will compel Tehran to agree to US terms on a favorable deal.
4. The US and President Trump's own reputation is at stake within this context, especially with regard to President Trump's strong criticism of previous administrations and the concessions that they have made vis-a-vis Iran, particularly in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Ending the negotiation process without clear and substantial concessions from Iran would thus result in a significant reputational loss for Washington and President Trump himself.
5. **FORECAST:** Overall, this will continue to render a compromise, which both parties will find sufficient, unlikely at this stage. In turn, this makes the eventual collapse in talks and the eruption of armed conflict the more plausible scenario at the current juncture.

Recommendations:

MENA:

1. Update and implement business contingency plans (BCPs) and security protocols across the MENA region to ensure business continuity in escalation scenarios. Conduct arena-specific risk assessments, incorporating the risks involving the potential eruption of regional hostilities.
2. Reconsider nonessential travel to **Gulf states** at this juncture.
3. Reconsider travel to states that may be particularly adversely impacted in a scenario of regional armed conflict, including **Lebanon** and **Jordan**.
4. Avoid all travel to **Iraq** at the current juncture.
5. Avoid travel to military installations in the region, especially those hosting US personnel. Adhere to authorities' updates and advisories.
6. Remain cognizant of and take precautions against the potential resumption of Houthi maritime attacks in the Red Sea, as well as extensive GPS/GNSS disruptions in the Arabian/Persian Gulf, should armed conflict break out in the region.
7. **MAX Security has strong on-the-ground capabilities across several arenas in MENA, including secure transportation, the provision of safe havens, and contingency consultation and planning. Contact us at operations@max-security.com or +44 20-3540-0434.**

Iran:

1. Avoid all travel to Iran at the current juncture, given the economic and political crises, the risk of arbitrary detention, and prospects for a US military escalation against the country.
2. Foreign nationals operating in Iran are advised to leave the country at this time due to the above-mentioned risks.
3. Avoid all travel to hotspots of protest activity due to the elevated risk of violence and arbitrary arrests, and refrain from discussing protest activity in conversations and on social media. Maintain a low profile and avoid any public support for the protesters, including on social media, due to the heightened risk of arbitrary arrest and detention by Iranian authorities.
4. Allot for continued and extensive disruptions to business continuity, including internet and telecommunications shutdowns.
5. Monitor the situation and update business contingency plans, accounting for scenarios such as the escalation of nationwide unrest and armed conflict.
6. In the event of military strikes against the country, shelter in place and avoid the vicinity of government, law enforcement, and military installations.

Israel:

1. Avoid nonessential travel to Israel at this time.
2. In the country, adhere to all security precautions regarding armed conflict, militancy, and civil unrest.
3. Continue monitoring regional developments and promptly adhere to all Home Front Command (HFC) notifications. Ensure that the HFC or other "Color Red" alert applications, such as "Tzofar", "Tzeva Adom", or "Cumta-Red Alerts", are downloaded to receive timely alerts.
4. Refresh and retain business contingency plans (BCPs) and security protocols, and ensure shelters' preparedness for extended periods to increase resilience in escalation scenarios.