



Iran Nuclear Talks Update: February 18, 2026

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While the United States and Iran continue to negotiate a potential nuclear deal, JINSA will resume its weekly release of the Iran Nuclear Talks Update. JINSA's resources on the status of the Iran talks is available at <https://jinsa.org/iran-talks/>.

Status: Ongoing

Last Met: February 17, 2026

Next Possible Meeting: Within the next two weeks

- U.S. Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff, Jared Kushner, and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi held a second round of indirect nuclear negotiations at the Omani Ambassador to Switzerland's residence in Geneva on February 17.
 - » Araghchi [stated](#) that the negotiating teams “were able to reach a general understanding on a set of guiding principles, on the basis of which we will move forward from now on and begin working on the text of a potential agreement.”
 - » An unnamed U.S. official [told](#) Reuters that “the Iranians said they would come back in the next two weeks with detailed proposals to address some of the open gaps in our positions.”
 - » However, while Vice President JD Vance [agreed](#) that “in some ways it went well” and that Iran “agreed to meet afterward,” he noted that Iran is “not yet willing to actually acknowledge and work through” some of President Donald Trump’s red lines for a deal.
 - Vance’s comments on the negotiations follow Trump’s February 16 statement in which the president [told](#) reporters that he would be “indirectly” involved in the Geneva talks.
 - » Omani Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi, who mediated the talks, [wrote](#) on X that the second round “concluded with good progress” and that while “much work is yet to be done...the parties left with clear next steps before the next meeting.”
- Before the second round of talks commenced, International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Rafael Grossi [met](#) with Araghchi in Geneva on February 16, writing on X that the two had “completed in-depth technical discussions.”
 - » For months, Grossi has [demanded](#) that Iran permit the IAEA to inspect its nuclear sites, particularly those damaged during Operation Midnight Hammer, as well as

for the regime to provide information on its missing stockpile of highly enriched uranium.

U.S. Demands for a Deal

- Trump administration officials continued to pressure Tehran into making a deal that ensures Iran cannot obtain a nuclear weapon, warning of severe consequences if the country's leadership fails to negotiate with the United States.
 - » Directly following the February 17 talks, Vance [claimed](#) that “there are a number of things that make it clear that [Iran is] interested in acquiring a nuclear weapon,” and that Trump will ensure “the Iranians cannot have a nuclear weapon,” whether that be “through diplomatic options or through another option.”
 - » After referencing Iran's failure to make a deal in June 2025 that led to the United States “sending the B-2s in to knock out their nuclear potential,” Trump [told](#) reporters on February 16 that Tehran does not “want the consequences of not making a deal.”
- However, despite the Trump administration's many statements pressuring Iran to make a deal, Washington remains ambiguous about its interest in diplomacy with Tehran.
 - » On February 13, Trump hinted that negotiations with Iran have long been a dead-end for the United States as he [told](#) reporters that regime change in Iran “would be the best thing that could happen” and that “for 47 years, they've been talking and talking and talking. In the meantime, we've lost a lot of lives while they talk.”
 - However, these statements follow Vance's February 11 discussion with reporters in which he [emphasized](#) that “if the Iranian people want to overthrow the regime, that's up to the Iranian people. What we're focused on right now is the fact that Iran can't have a nuclear weapon.”

Iran's Position

- Iranian leaders continued to reject U.S. pressure, insisting that the regime has no intention of pursuing a nuclear weapon while also indicating Iran will not tolerate Trump's military threats. They have also suggested that they could respond positively to sanctions relief and deals that “avoid unrealistic demands,” such as abandoning uranium enrichment.
 - » Following the talks, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian [argued](#) that Iran is “absolutely not seeking nuclear weapons,” and that “if anyone wants to verify this, we are open to such verification to take place.”
 - » An unnamed senior Iranian official [stated](#) on February 17 that “the key to sustaining effective talks is US seriousness on lifting sanctions and avoiding unrealistic demands.”

- » On February 16, Araghchi [wrote](#) in an X post that he would present “real ideas to achieve a fair and equitable deal” during the negotiations, but that he would not accept “submission before threats.”
- » On February 15, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi [asserted](#) that for the indirect talks, “the issue of zero enrichment is no longer raised and, as far as Iran is concerned, is not on the negotiating table.”

Iran's Aggression

- As the U.S. and Iranian negotiating team pursued diplomatic routes in Geneva, regime officials continued to escalate tensions in the Middle East with Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei dismissing U.S. demands and threatening kinetic action against American targets.
 - » On February 17, Khamenei, in a speech to the Iranian public, [threatened](#) to strike the U.S. military “so hard that it cannot get up again,” as well as to [send](#) the USS *Gerald R. Ford* aircraft carrier, which is on its way to the Middle East, “to the bottom of the sea.”
 - Khamenei also [noted](#) that Iran has an “undeniable right” to access nuclear energy and “own nuclear and enrichment installations,” while questioning U.S. interference in its program.
 - » As the second round of negotiations commenced, Iran also temporarily [closed](#) the Strait of Hormuz, a major international waterway, to hold live fire military drills in an attempt to demonstrate the regime’s regional power.

International Responses

- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [expressed](#) “skepticism of any deal” with Iranian leaders because “they lie, and they cheat.”
 - » He also [stated](#) that “there shall be no enrichment capability—not stopping the enrichment process but dismantling the equipment and the infrastructure that allows you to enrich in the first place.”