

US-Iran negotiations: Mixed signals from Washington DC?

US Vice President JD Vance on May 28 said that the US and Iran were close to sealing a deal for ending the two-month conflict. Said Vance while speaking to reporters:



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As of Sunday, May 31 the US President Donald Trump was seeking edits to the US-Iran deal, for bringing an end to the conflict. Iran's main negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, also the country's speaker, unequivocally stated that Iran would only agree to an agreement which safeguarded Iran's rights.

US Vice President JD Vance on May 28 said that the US and Iran were close to sealing a deal for ending the two-month conflict. Said Vance while speaking to reporters:

'We're going back and forth on a couple of language points. We've made a lot of progress here,'

On May 27, Iran attacked a US military base in Kuwait in retaliation to a US strike on Bandar Abbas in Iran (Bandar Abbas lies on the Northern side of the Strait of Hormuz). The US attack on Bandar Abbas came hours after the US President had said that no one will control the Strait of Hormuz.

On May 27 itself, Donald Trump threatened Oman that it would attack the Gulf nation, if it tries to take control of the Strait of Hormuz a day later the US Treasury Secretary, Scott Bessent warned of sanctions against Oman. Said Bessent:

‘Oman, in particular, should know that the US Treasury will aggressively target any actors involved — directly or indirectly — in facilitating tolls for the Strait and any willing partners will be penalized’.

While Vance said that both sides were close to reaching an agreement, the US President had indicated that he was not satisfied with the progress of talks.

Israel’s expansion of ground operations against Southern Lebanon led to a jump in crude oil prices by 2%.

In a post on X, on June 1, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf lashed out at the US for failing to comply with the conditions of the ceasefire with Iran. Said Ghalibaf:

‘The naval blockade and escalation of war crimes in Lebanon by the genocidal Zionist regime are clear evidence of US noncompliance with the ceasefire,’

Statements from US officials regarding the US approach vis-à-vis South Asia

US State Department Spokesperson, Tommy Pigott, on May 30, while commenting on US ties with India and Pakistan said that ties with both countries stood on their own merit.

Said Pigott, ‘We value our relationship with both India and Pakistan. These relationships stand on their own merits and are not a zero-sum proposition. And we're committed to continuing to strengthen our results-driven and ambitious strategic partnership with India.’

The spokesperson’s response was to a question pertaining to the US decision to upgrade Pakistan’s F-16 fleet. Pakistan Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar was in Washington on May 29 and met with US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio. Piggott also said that ties between India and US were ‘historic’ and highlighted the close cooperation between both countries in the context of the Free and Open Indo Pacific as well as the agreement pertaining to critical minerals. Marco Rubio was in India May 23-26, in connection with the Quad meeting on May 26. Rubio met with PM Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister, S Jaishankar.

While speaking on May 30 at the annual Shangri-La Dialogue, held in Singapore, the US Secretary of Defence, Pete Hegseth praised Donald Trump for ‘..brokering peace between India and Pakistan’ after the escalation of military conflict last year. While highlighting the importance of India as an important security partner of the US in the Indo-Pacific, Hegseth also flagged Pakistan’s role as a mediator in the Iran-US negotiations.

India-China border talks

India and China held talks regarding the Line of Actual Control (LAC) on May 27. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said the talks were constructive. The Indian delegation was led by Sujit Ghosh, Joint secretary (East Asia) in the MEA while the Chinese delegation was led by Hou Yanqi, Director General of the Boundary and Oceanic Affairs Department of the Chinese foreign ministry

It also said: ‘The two sides reviewed the situation in the India-China border areas. They expressed satisfaction with the progress made in maintaining peace and tranquillity in the border areas, which has enabled progress towards gradual normalization of bilateral relations’

In conclusion, Donald Trump is giving mixed signals regarding Iran-US ties. While Iran faces severe economic challenges, it is unlikely to accept a deal which could be perceived as capitulation. Remarks of senior officials in the Trump administration suggest that Washington’s approach towards South Asia has witnessed a significant shift in the past year. India has been pragmatic, and not reactive, in handling some of the uncomfortable statements emanating from Washington.

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