

The sticking points in the US-Iran ceasefire talks

AFP | Paris, France

The United States and Iran have agreed a ceasefire and are due to launch talks in Pakistan on Friday aimed at reaching a longer-term deal, but crucial sticking points remain.

Iran has presented a 10-point plan as the basis for talks, but it includes maximalist positions previously rebuffed by Washington.

Here are the key issues:

Control over the Strait of Hormuz

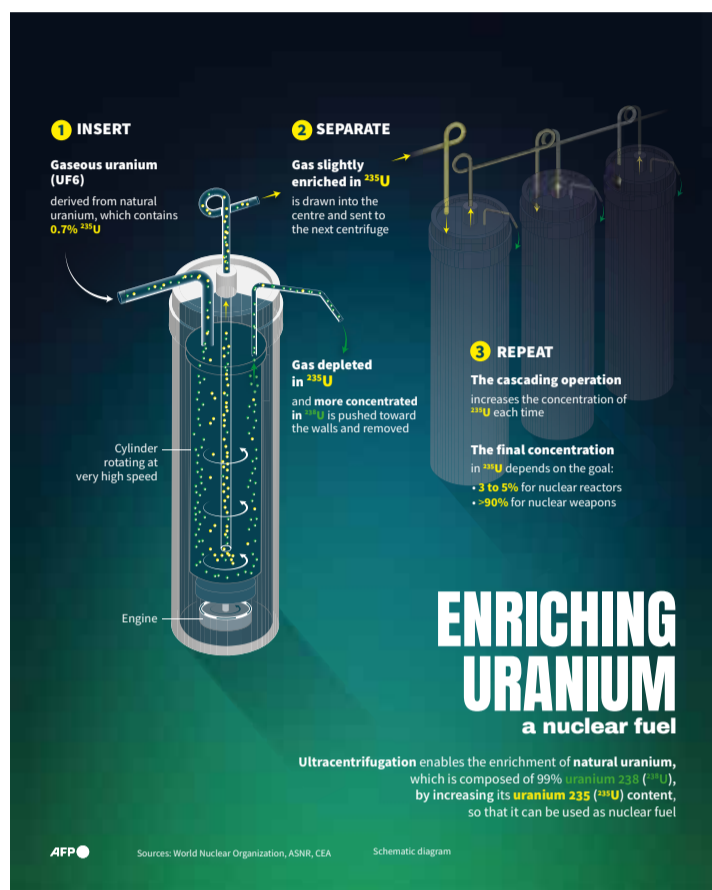
Tehran has agreed to temporarily reopen the route -- claimed as a victory by US President Donald Trump -- but has demanded control of the strait in its plan.

Iran and Oman -- the other country bordering the waterway and previous mediator between Washington and Tehran -- both said in recent days that talks were held to agree a peacetime protocol that would supervise maritime traffic through the strait.

Both Washington and Tehran have said they are considering a plan to impose tolls, but it was unclear if the Oman-Iran mechanism would involve fees.

According to an Iranian diplomatic source, the new mechanism provides for a passage fee organised in partnership with Oman. The Sultanate of Oman has not commented on this point.

Other than Omani tankers, crossings through the strait in recent days appeared to have used an Iranian-approved route just off the country's coast near Larak Island, which Lloyd's List



A liquefied natural gas (LNG) tanker is moored at a LNG berth in Kawasaki, Kanagawa prefecture

has dubbed the "Tehran Toll Booth".

Before the ceasefire, Tehran had warned it was preparing to impose new operating conditions in the route, with Revolutionary Guards saying the strait "will never return to its former status, especially for the US and Israel".

Sanctions relief

Iran, under crippling sanctions over its nuclear programme, has reiterated its demand for complete relief in its plan.

Trump had reimposed punishing sanctions in 2018 during his first term in office after he

pulled the United States out of a landmark nuclear deal with Iran that offered sanctions relief in return for strict enrichment curbs and supervision.

The sanctions have choked essential trade services such as banking, while scaring off companies from doing business in Iran.

They contributed to economic pains that sparked protests in December that turned into mass demonstrations against the Islamic republic in January before they were met with a violent crackdown.

The US and Israel had previously insisted on curbs on

Iran's long-range ballistic missile programme and an end to the country's support to militant groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon or the Houthis in Yemen.

There is no mention of either issue in the 10-point Iranian ceasefire plan.

Uranium enrichment

Trump justified the war by accusing Tehran of rushing towards the completion of an atomic weapon.

Iran's plan would require Washington to accept its urani-

um enrichment programme for civilian purposes.

But Trump again insisted on Wednesday that Iran would cease enrichment, and proposed a solution to retrieve its 440-kilogram stockpile of highly enriched uranium, which was targeted in US bombing last June and is believed to have been buried.

"There will be no enrichment of Uranium, and the United States will, working with Iran, dig up and remove all of the deeply buried (B-2 Bombers) Nuclear 'Dust,'" he posted

on his Truth Social platform, apparently referring to the aftermath of US strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities last year.

The United States and Israel launched strikes on Iran in the midst of negotiations in which Washington demanded Iran hand over its stockpile of enriched uranium and stop any further enrichment.

Tehran has insisted since 2003 it is not seeking a nuclear weapon but has a right to enrich uranium for civilian nuclear energy purposes.

UK PM arrives in Saudi Arabia, welcomes Iran war truce

AFP | Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer arrived yesterday in Saudi Arabia, on the first stop of a Gulf tour aimed at bolstering the ceasefire in the Middle East war, Downing Street said.

Starmer -- on his first visit to the region since the US-Israeli war against Iran started on February 28 -- was expected to meet Saudi Arabia's de facto leader, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, later Wednesday.

As the British leader's arrival was being announced, the Gulf kingdom's defence ministry said it had intercepted nine drones targeting Saudi territory in recent hours, despite the ceasefire agreed overnight between the US and Iran.

The ministry's post on X did not mention the location of the interceptions or any potential targets.

Earlier, Starmer welcomed the ceasefire deal, saying in a statement it "will bring a moment of relief to the region and the world". "Together with our part-



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer (C) leaves following a visit to Taif Airbase, Saudi Arabia.

ners we must do all we can to support and sustain this ceasefire, turn it into a lasting agreement and re-open the Strait of Hormuz," he added.

Hours later, Starmer issued another joint statement with the leaders of Canada, Japan

and various European countries, which said the goal must now be to negotiate an end to the war "within the coming days".

"This can only be achieved through diplomatic means," their statement added.

The UK leader's Gulf tour fol-



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer sits at a table (R) as he visits Taif Airbase, Saudi Arabia

lows a virtual meeting Tuesday of military planners from over 30 countries hosted by Britain.

It explored measures for an international coalition to make the Strait of Hormuz accessible and safe after a ceasefire, according to the Ministry of Defence.

Last week, a UK-led diplomatic virtual meeting of around 40 countries also discussed the critical waterway.

It has been largely closed since the war began, impacting global supplies of oil, liquefied natural gas, and fertiliser. UK armed fore-

ces personnel have intercepted more than 110 drone attacks in the region during the hostilities, while the Royal Air Force (RAF) have conducted more than 1600 hours of defensive operations, the Downing Street statement added.