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Full Length Research

Waiting for Peace: U.S.–Iran Negotiations through the Theatre of the Absurd

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Abstract

This study analyses U.S.-Iran negotiations in the theoretical context of the Theatre of the Absurd, with particular reference to Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The US and Iran's long-standing diplomatic relationship, it argues, is less about linear progress towards resolution and more about cyclical patterns of negotiation, collapse and renewal. The research re-examines diplomatic interaction as a form of political dramaturgy, drawing on literary theory and international relations. The negotiation process is shaped by repetition, uncertainty, and delayed expectations. The study adopts a qualitative and interpretive methodology based on textual analysis, historical investigation, and political discourse analysis to follow the key phases of U.S.-Iran relations, including the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the hostage crisis, nuclear negotiations, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and its subsequent breakdown. The findings suggest that diplomatic discourse and negotiation practice are often symbolic performances, not straightforward paths to resolution. Peace here is an expectation that is always there but is always deferred, like the invisible character of "Godot" in Beckett's play. The study concludes with an assessment of US–Iran diplomacy as an absurdist structure of endless waiting, where negotiation itself turns into an ongoing performance rather than a method of final settlement. This interdisciplinary approach has implications for both literary studies and international relations, showing how dramatic theory can deepen our understanding of geopolitical deadlock and diplomatic repetition..

Keywords: U.S.–Iran relations; Theatre of the Absurd; *Waiting for Godot*; diplomatic negotiation

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1. INTRODUCTION

CONFLICT WITHOUT RESOLUTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The United States and Iran remain involved in one of the longest and most paradoxical diplomatic conflicts in modern international politics. Since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the two countries have moved between hostility, indirect negotiation, strategic confrontation and brief diplomatic engagement, but not to sustained reconciliation. What makes the U.S.-Iran rivalry different from many other geopolitical rivalries is not just its longevity but also the cyclical, repetitive nature of diplomatic efforts that repeatedly promise resolution but collapse into renewed mistrust. This study claims such a

pattern bears a striking resemblance to the dramatic structure of the Theatre of the Absurd exemplified in *Waiting for Godot*, where characters are trapped in a perpetual expectation with no meaningful resolution. Before the 1979 Revolution, Iran and the United States enjoyed a close strategic alliance under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The 1953 CIA-backed coup that toppled Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh and restored the Shah's power significantly increased American influence in Iran. The coup had a major impact on Iranian political consciousness and helped solidify a permanent anti-

American sentiment within revolutionary discourse. Following the Islamic Revolution led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Iran re-imagined itself with anti-West and anti-imperialist ideology. The United States increasingly saw the new Islamic Republic as a destabilising regional force. The seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran and the ensuing 444-day hostage crisis codified diplomatic hostility and broke relations between the two states. Over the next decades, relations between Washington and Tehran played out in a series of recurring cycles of sanctions, military threats, proxy wars, and sporadic negotiations. The Iranian nuclear programme has been the central focus of modern diplomatic engagement. Western governments, especially the United States, worried that Iran's uranium enrichment programme could enable it to develop nuclear weapons, while Iranian officials insisted repeatedly that it was peaceful and a matter of sovereignty. The disagreement transformed the nuclear issue into a struggle, both strategic and symbolic, over sovereignty, regional power and ideological legitimacy.

The most important diplomatic achievement in decades between the two countries was the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015. The deal, which restrained Iran's nuclear activities in exchange for sanctions relief, was celebrated as a major victory for multilateral diplomacy. But the U.S. withdrawal from the agreement in 2018 by President Donald Trump deeply undermined the fragile trust developed during the negotiations. Iran gradually cut back on compliance with nuclear limits, and the US reimposed broad economic sanctions as part of its "maximum pressure" campaign. Some scholars have argued that the breakdown of the JCPOA reinforced Iranian doubts about the durability of US commitments and highlighted the fragility of diplomatic agreements to domestic political change (Hurst, 2016).

This pattern of engagement and collapse is repeated in recent diplomatic developments. Talks mediated by Oman, Qatar, and European intermediaries have repeatedly resumed, only to stall over issues such as sanctions relief, uranium enrichment, regional militancy, and verification mechanisms. Analysts increasingly characterise these negotiations as attempts to delay escalation and "buy time" in the face of rising tensions rather than as attempts to achieve lasting peace. The atmosphere of suspended resolution points to absurdist dramatic structures where action repeats, communication circles, and hope persists in the face of recurring disappointment.

The Theatre of the Absurd was developed after World War II, when playwrights tried to portray existential uncertainty, fragmentation and the seeming meaninglessness of modern life. Writers like Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco broke away from traditional forms of drama, depicting individuals trapped in cyclical situations with no clear resolution or progression. In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon wait indefinitely for a character who never shows up, buoyed by repetitive

dialogue and tenuous hope. The cyclical nature of the play, the uncertainty and the unfulfilled anticipation provide an interesting frame for understanding the current diplomatic deadlock.

Applying absurdist dramatic theory to the case of US-Iran negotiations provides an interdisciplinary framework for international relations beyond the traditional realist or liberal perspectives. This study interprets negotiation not only as rational strategic interaction but also as performative and existential processes structured through repetition, symbolism, mistrust and deferred expectation. Recent scholarship has highlighted the performative and narrative aspects of diplomacy, leading to the argument that political language often serves a symbolic rather than an instrumental function (Norton & Cooley, 2024). This perspective allows us to read U.S.–Iran relations not only as geopolitical conflict but also as a kind of political theatre, with constant waiting for a peace that is always partial.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

Aim

To examine U.S.–Iran negotiations through the lens of the Theatre of the Absurd and analyse how diplomatic interactions reflect themes of repetition, uncertainty, and unresolved waiting.

Objectives

1. To analyse the historical development of U.S.–Iran diplomatic relations.
2. To examine the major features of the Theatre of the Absurd.
3. To investigate similarities between *Waiting for Godot* and U.S.–Iran negotiations.
4. To evaluate how diplomatic language contributes to political deadlock.
5. To explore the relevance of dramatic theory in interpreting international politics.

1.4 Research Questions

- How does the Theatre of the Absurd explain US–Iran negotiations?
- In what ways do US–Iran peace talks resemble *Waiting for Godot*?
- Why do diplomatic negotiations repeatedly fail to produce lasting peace?

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Decades of negotiations, sanctions, diplomatic summits and international mediation have failed to produce a stable and lasting diplomatic settlement between the United States and Iran. Each round of talks brings temporary optimism, then collapses back into renewed hostility, mistrust and strategic confrontation.

The persistence of this unresolved pattern raises important questions about the nature of diplomacy itself and whether certain geopolitical conflicts become structurally resistant to resolution.

Most of the existing literature on US-Iran relations has concentrated on issues of security, nuclear proliferation, economic sanctions, or regional power politics. While these approaches provide valuable political and strategic analysis, they often ignore the symbolic, performative, and repetitive dimensions of diplomatic interaction. As a result, the repetitive pattern of failed negotiations is often accounted for simply by reference to policy differences, without interrogating the deeper function of diplomatic discourse in reproducing cycles of hope and disillusionment.

This study underscores a considerable void in interdisciplinary research on the intersection of dramatic theory and international politics. In particular, little attention has been given to the ways in which the Theatre of the Absurd can shed light on the repetitive and unresolved structure of U.S.-Iran negotiations. By comparing diplomatic deadlock to absurdist dramatic texts (like *Waiting for Godot*), this research aims to show that U.S.-Iran diplomacy is more and more about a theatrical process of endless anticipation, where dialogue persists without real transformation.

The problem, then, is not only the failure of diplomacy to bring peace but also the normalisation of negotiation without resolution. Peace is always deferred, as diplomatic performance takes the place of substantive reconciliation. This creates a dynamic in which both states are politically and psychologically locked into a repeating pattern of confrontation and negotiation.

1.5 Importance of the study

This study is relevant for several academic fields and introduces a new interdisciplinary approach to international diplomacy. This research contributes to literary criticism by extending the application of absurdist dramatic theory beyond traditional literary analysis to political interpretation. While the Theatre of the Absurd has been extensively discussed in the context of existential philosophy and modern drama, its relevance to geopolitical negotiation has been relatively underexplored.

Second, it contributes to the fields of political drama and performance studies by conceptualising diplomacy as a theatrical performance informed by symbolic language, repetition, and staged political interaction. Dramaturgy is particularly relevant for modern political communication since contemporary diplomacy increasingly relies on media spectacles, rhetorical performances, and symbolic gestures.

Third, the research contributes to the literature of international relations by challenging purely realist or institutional explanations of diplomacy. Traditional theories are inclined to view negotiation as a rational

means of conflict resolution. But the persistent failure of US-Iran negotiations indicates that diplomacy can also be symbolic, psychological, and performative. Thus, this study extends the interpretive framework in which geopolitical conflict can be understood. Finally, this study contributes to interdisciplinary geopolitical analysis by showing how literary texts and dramatic theories can shed light on patterns of political behaviour, diplomatic stagnation and unresolved conflict. The research links *Waiting for Godot* to contemporary international politics and demonstrates the continued relevance of the application of literary theory in reading about modern global crises.

1.6 Scope and Delimitations of the Study

This study primarily examines U.S.-Iran relations from 1979 to the present, especially diplomatic negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme, economic sanctions, and ongoing peace initiatives. The paper covers key diplomatic developments such as the Iranian Revolution, the hostage crisis, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and attempts to restart nuclear talks.

In particular, the literary dimension of the study focuses on the central dramatic text of U.S.-Iran negotiations, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. While there will be references to broader absurdist philosophy and other absurdist playwrights, the study primarily uses Beckett's dramatic structure and thematic concerns as the main analytical framework.

A limitation of the study is that it does not attempt to provide a comprehensive political history of US-Iran relations or detailed policy analysis of nuclear diplomacy. Instead, the research is on interpretative and symbolic analysis via literary and dramatic theory. Some contemporary developments may also be politically fluid and subject to change during the course of the research, as diplomatic negotiations are still evolving.

A further problem is that interpretive analysis is subjective. Some conclusions are open to other interpretations according to theory and political orientation since the study applies literary theory to the field of geopolitics.

1.7 Theoretical Frame

This study is based on the theoretical foundation of the Theatre of the Absurd, absurdist philosophy and dramaturgical political analysis. The Theatre of the Absurd was a dramatic movement that arose in post-World War II Europe, articulating existential anxiety, uncertainty, alienation and the apparent disintegration of rational meaning in modern society. Playwrights such as Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco rejected the traditional dramatic structure in favour of presenting

human existence as cyclical, broken, and open-ended.

Absurdist theory posits that people continue to seek meaning in the face of a world that is unpredictable and often irrational. Beckett dramatises this existential condition in *Waiting for Godot* by means of characters trapped in endless waiting for an event or figure that never fully materialises. This study argues that US-Iranian diplomacy has a similar structure of deferred expectations, repetitive dialogue, and unresolved anticipation.

The research also makes use of elements of dramaturgical political analysis, especially the idea that political actors perform identities, intentions and symbolic gestures for both domestic and international audiences. Diplomatic negotiations are thus conceived not only as strategic political processes but also as theatrical performances shaped by rhetoric, symbolism, and repetition.

This framework merges absurdist dramatic theory with political analysis to enable the study to consider diplomacy as geopolitical strategy and existential performance.

1.8 Method

This study employs a qualitative and interpretative research methodology. The qualitative approach is appropriate because the research concerns meaning, symbolism, discourse and textual interpretation rather than quantitative measurement. This study is based on textual analysis, political discourse analysis and historical analysis.

The analysis of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is textual and focuses especially on the themes of repetition, uncertainty, silence, cyclical dialogue and deferred expectation. We then analyse these themes comparatively with diplomatic language and negotiation patterns in US–Iran relations.

The political discourse analysis approach is applied to the analysis of speeches, negotiation statements, diplomatic rhetoric and official political narratives produced by the United States and Iran. This allows the study to identify repetitive linguistic patterns, symbolic performances, and rhetorical contradictions within diplomatic engagement.

The historical analysis is used to contextualise the development of U.S.–Iran relations from the 1979 Revolution to the present-day nuclear negotiations. The study uses academic journals, diplomatic records, policy analyses and scholarly interpretations of international relations to provide a historical foundation for its theoretical argument.

The interdisciplinary method aims to connect literary criticism with geopolitical analysis, providing an interpretative perspective on diplomatic deadlock and unresolved international conflict.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The U.S.–Iran relationship has been the subject of extensive scholarly debate across the fields of international relations, diplomatic studies, security studies, and political communication. Most academic discussions of U.S.–Iran relations tend to centre on nuclear diplomacy, regional security competition, sanctions regimes, ideological conflict, and broader geopolitical rivalry. Scholars have frequently examined the strategic calculations shaping negotiations between the two states, particularly in relation to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), regional proxy conflicts, and the impact of sustained economic pressure on diplomatic behaviour (U.S. Department of State. (2009–2017).

However, while dominant political analyses tend to privilege rational strategy and institutional diplomacy, fewer studies have explored the symbolic, performative, and existential dimensions of protracted geopolitical conflict. Increasingly, the literature on diplomacy recognises that political negotiation is not merely a technical exchange of policy interests but also a mode of performance shaped by rhetoric, symbolism, and public spectacles. Modern diplomacy often unfolds as a carefully choreographed communicative practice directed at multiple audiences simultaneously.

According to Adler-Nissen (2009), diplomacy should be understood as a performative process in which states continuously construct political identity through symbolic interaction and public communication. This reframing shifts diplomacy from purely institutional negotiation to a form of political theatre in which representation, performance, and perception become central to international engagement.

In parallel, literary scholarship on absurdist drama has examined post-war theatrical works through themes of existential uncertainty, repetition, fragmentation, and failed communication. The Theatre of the Absurd emerged as a response to the perceived collapse of meaning following the devastation of the Second World War. Playwrights such as Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco rejected conventional narrative structures in favour of portraying human existence as cyclical, unresolved, and fundamentally uncertain.

Martin Esslin's seminal work *The Theatre of the Absurd* defines absurdist drama as a representation of humanity's search for meaning within an irrational and fragmented universe (Esslin, 1960, 2004). Despite the richness of scholarship in both political and literary studies, there remains limited interdisciplinary engagement between absurdist dramatic theory and international diplomacy. Geopolitical negotiations are rarely analysed through literary frameworks capable of

illuminating repetition, delayed resolution, and symbolic performance. This chapter therefore reviews existing scholarship on U.S.–Iran relations, absurdist drama, and dramaturgical political analysis to establish a theoretical basis for interpreting U.S.–Iran negotiations as a form of absurd political theatre.

2.2 Theatre of the Absurd

The Theatre of the Absurd emerged in the mid-twentieth century as a dramatic movement shaped by existential disillusionment, philosophical uncertainty, and the collapse of traditional systems of meaning in postwar Europe. Absurdist playwrights foregrounded fragmentation, silence, repetition, irrationality, and failed communication rather than coherent plot structures or linear resolution. These dramatic techniques reflected the influence of existential philosophy, particularly the works of Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, who questioned humanity's capacity to locate objective meaning within an unstable and incomprehensible world.

Central to this tradition is Albert Camus' concept of "the absurd". In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus (1955) defines the absurd as the tension between the human desire for meaning and the silent indifference of the universe. Although human beings persistently seek coherence, they remain situated within a reality that offers no inherent certainty. This condition produces repetition, anxiety, and existential paralysis—core thematic concerns of absurdist drama.

Within absurdist theatre, repetition is not merely stylistic but ontological. Characters repeatedly engage in circular dialogue, habitual actions, and fragmented recollections without meaningful progression. Esslin (2004) argues that absurdist drama intentionally disrupts linear narrative development in order to present existence as cyclical rather than progressive. This is especially evident in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, where dialogue consistently returns to its starting point without producing a resolution.

Failed communication further defines absurdist drama. Language in absurdist texts often loses its communicative function, becoming fragmented, contradictory, or nonsensical. In Ionesco's plays, dialogue frequently collapses into incoherence, exposing the instability of linguistic meaning itself. As Bennett (2015) notes, absurdist dialogue highlights the gap between speech and meaning, suggesting that communication may function more performatively than substantively.

From a political perspective, absurdist theory is particularly useful for analysing systems characterised by repetition, uncertainty, and deferred resolutions. International negotiations marked by endless dialogue, recurring crises, and symbolic rhetoric often exhibit absurdist qualities in which resolution is continuously postponed. In this sense, absurdism provides a valuable theoretical lens for interpreting geopolitical conflict as a

repetitive performance rather than a linear process of resolution.

2.3 Samuel Beckett and *Waiting for Godot*

Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953) is one of the most influential works of absurdist theatre and forms the central literary framework for this study. The play depicts two characters, Vladimir and Estragon, who wait indefinitely for the arrival of a figure named Godot. Throughout the play, they remain suspended in repetitive dialogue, contradictory reflection, and circular interaction. Godot never arrives, and the play ends without resolution, reinforcing themes of uncertainty, repetition, and existential paralysis.

The central motif of the play is perpetual waiting. Beckett transforms waiting into both a physical and psychological condition in which time appears suspended and action becomes impossible. Critics interpret this waiting as symbolic of humanity's search for meaning, salvation, political transformation, or existential certainty (Rovira, 2023). But the play's meaning is in the act of waiting, not in Godot's arrival.

Hopeless expectation further structures the emotional logic of the play. Vladimir and Estragon continue waiting despite uncertainty, as abandoning hope would force confrontation with existential emptiness. This condition closely parallels diplomatic negotiations in which states continue engagement despite repeated disappointment and enduring mistrust. Negotiation, in this sense, becomes a mechanism for sustaining political hope rather than achieving resolution.

Cyclical dialogue reinforces the play's absurd structure. Conversations repeat, contradict, and fail to develop into meaningful progression. Beckett deliberately undermines traditional dramatic development by replacing narrative progression with repetition. As Ayolov, (2026) argues, this repetition reflects instability in memory, identity, and communication within modern existence.

The symbolic figure of "Godot" remains deliberately ambiguous. Beckett resisted fixed interpretations, allowing Godot to function as an open-ended symbol of deferred meaning. Interpretations range from salvation to political change to metaphysical certainty. Within this study, "Godot" is interpreted as the metaphor for the elusive promise of diplomatic peace between the United States and Iran—continuously anticipated yet never fully realised.

2.4 Dramaturgy and Politics as Performance

The relationship between politics and performance has gained increasing prominence within political theory and diplomatic studies. Political actors, including states and diplomats, routinely engage in performative behaviour aimed at shaping domestic opinion, influencing

international audiences, and signalling strategic intent. As a result, diplomacy can be understood not only as negotiation but also as staged political performance involving symbolism, rhetoric, and controlled interaction.

Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory provides a foundational framework for this perspective. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Goffman argues that social interaction resembles theatrical performance, in which individuals manage impressions through front-stage and back-stage behaviour. Although originally sociological, this framework has been widely applied to international politics, where states perform identities, intentions, and legitimacy before global audiences (Brodie Forsyth, 2024).

In diplomatic practice, symbolic gestures often carry greater significance than material outcomes. Summit meetings, public addresses, sanctions announcements, and nuclear negotiations function as political theatre designed to project credibility, strength, and strategic resolve. Bleiker (2018) argues that international politics is fundamentally aesthetic and performative, shaped not only by material interests but also by narratives, symbolism, and emotional representation.

This performative dimension is especially evident in U.S.–Iran relations. The diplomatic language frequently combines ambiguity, repetition, and symbolic signalling, allowing both states to maintain domestic legitimacy while projecting strategic flexibility internationally. As a result, negotiation processes often appear more performative than substantive.

Contemporary scholarship also highlights the role of media in amplifying the theatrical dimensions of diplomacy. International negotiations increasingly unfold within a global media environment where perception is as significant as policy outcomes. Political leaders perform strength, resistance, compromise, or moral authority for both domestic and international audiences, reinforcing the dramaturgical nature of diplomacy in protracted conflicts such as US–Iran relations.

2.5 Gap in the Literature

Despite extensive scholarship on US–Iran relations, nuclear diplomacy, absurdist drama, and political performance, there remains a significant lack of interdisciplinary research connecting absurdist theatrical theory with geopolitical negotiation. Most analyses of US–Iran relations are grounded in realist, liberal, or institutional frameworks that prioritise strategic interests, security concerns, sanctions, and regional power competition. While these approaches effectively explain material dimensions of the conflict, they often fail to capture its symbolic, repetitive, and existential characteristics.

Similarly, literary scholarship on the Theatre of the Absurd remains largely confined to dramatic criticism, existential philosophy, and modernist literary studies. Few scholars apply absurdist theory to contemporary

international relations or diplomatic practice. As a result, the recurring structure of geopolitical deadlock has often been overlooked in favour of concepts like endless waiting, cyclical dialogue, deferred expectation, and failed communication.

This study addresses this gap by developing an interdisciplinary framework that integrates absurdist dramatic theory with political analysis. Drawing on Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, it interprets U.S.–Iran negotiations as a form of absurd political theatre. In doing so, it contributes to international relations scholarship by demonstrating how dramatic theory can illuminate the symbolic, performative, and existential dimensions of unresolved geopolitical conflict.

3. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF U.S.–IRAN NEGOTIATIONS

3.1. Introduction.

The US-Iranian diplomatic relationship is one of the longest and most complicated geopolitical rivalries in modern international politics. Since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, both states have experienced cycles of hostility, strategic confrontation, indirect negotiation, and temporary diplomatic engagement. There have been sporadic efforts at cooperation and negotiation, but these efforts have consistently failed to provide a path toward long-term reconciliation. Instead, U.S.–Iran diplomacy has become a cycle of hope, diplomatic stalemate, implosion, and more hope. Military or strategic analysis does not account for the ongoing conflict without resolution. Instead, U.S.–Iran negotiations are a manifestation of deeper ideological, historical, and psychological tensions that stem from competing narratives of sovereignty, legitimacy, and regional power. Scholars often characterise the relationship as one marked by institutionalised mistrust, where all diplomatic efforts are constrained by historical memory and domestic political pressures (Takeyh, 2021). The legacy of the 1953 CIA-backed coup against Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh, the anti-American rhetoric of the Islamic Revolution, and decades of sanctions and regional rivalry have all contributed to a diplomatic environment in which suspicion often trumps cooperation.

The paradox at the heart of this diplomatic conflict is that, despite the periodic hostility and repeated failures of negotiations, both states continue to return to the table. The repetitive structure is not only a product of strategic necessity but also of the inability of either side to fully extricate itself from the diplomatic process. Negotiations always come in times of economic crisis, regional instability, or military escalation, but they always break down due to mistrust, domestic political opposition, and differing strategic goals. As a result, U.S.–Iran diplomacy increasingly resembles a political performance in which

negotiation becomes permanent and resolution elusive.

This chapter looks at the historical development of US-Iranian negotiations from the Iranian Revolution of 1979 to recent nuclear diplomacy. The chapter demonstrates, through the analysis of key diplomatic crises and negotiation processes, how patterns of repetition, deferred expectations, and recurring breakdowns have become structurally embedded in the relationship between both states.

3.2 The Iranian Revolution and Hostage Crisis, 1979

The 1979 Iranian Revolution fundamentally changed the nature of US-Iran relations and cemented the mistrust that continues to shape diplomatic interactions between the two countries. Before the revolution, Iran under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was one of the United States' closest strategic allies in the Middle East. The CIA and British intelligence orchestrated a coup in 1953 that overthrew Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh after he had nationalised Iran's oil industry, and American political, military, and economic support for the Shah rose after that. The coup served Western strategic interests, but it also sowed seeds of long-term resentment among many Iranians who saw American involvement as an infringement of national sovereignty (Gasirowski & Byrne, 2004).

The revolutionary movement led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini presented the United States as both a symbol of Western imperialism and a direct supporter of authoritarian rule in Iran. The newly established Islamic Republic, after the fall of the Shah, tried to reformulate Iranian national identity on the basis of anti-Western and anti-American ideology. This ideological shift was dramatically escalated by the U.S. embassy hostage crisis in November 1979, when Iranian student militants stormed the American embassy in Tehran, taking fifty-two American diplomats and citizens hostage for 444 days.

The hostage crisis was one of the defining moments of modern US-Iran relations because it turned political hostility into institutionalised diplomatic estrangement. The crisis not only severed formal diplomatic ties but also embedded enduring narratives of humiliation, betrayal and mistrust within both political systems. The hostage crisis in the United States reinforced the perception of Iran as irrational, extremist, and inherently inimical to American interests. Resistance to the United States thus became part of the ideological fabric of the Islamic Republic and was cast as defending revolutionary sovereignty from foreign control.

Scholars argue that the hostage crisis created a psychological infrastructure of distrust that continues to shape diplomatic negotiations decades later (Limbert, 2009). History and symbolic politics were increasingly constraining the two states' diplomatic engagement. Even during the negotiations, political leaders in both countries had a duty to demonstrate ideological resistance to their domestic audiences. Diplomatic interactions often

became symbolic confrontations rather than mechanisms for mutual compromise.

The institutionalisation of distrust after the revolution also helped create indirect diplomacy. Intermediaries like Oman, Switzerland, Qatar, and European governments increasingly facilitated negotiations due to the political sensitivity of formal diplomatic communication. This indirect form also served to reinforce the ambiguity and separation that marked U.S.-Iran engagement.

3.3 Nuclear Diplomacy and Sanctions.

The Iranian nuclear programme became the focal point of US-Iran diplomacy at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries. Iran repeatedly insisted its nuclear programme was for peaceful civilian purposes, but the US and some Western allies worried that the ability to enrich uranium could help pave the way for nuclear weapons development. Thus, nuclear diplomacy has become a more expansive geopolitical struggle over sovereignty, regional power, ideological legitimacy, and international security.

Economic sanctions became one of the major tools used by the United States to pressure Iran to restrict its nuclear activities. Sanctions have expanded over the years to include Iran's banking system, oil exports, military sectors, and international trade networks beyond nuclear concerns. American policymakers often portray sanctions as a non-military instrument that could compel behavioural change without a direct military confrontation. However, critics argue that sanctions often exacerbated anti-American sentiment within Iran and empowered hardline political factions that were not amenable to compromise (Kabdygaliyev, 2020).

The link between sanctions and diplomacy shows the contradictory nature of U.S.-Iran negotiations. Sanctions were intended to increase economic pressure on Iran in order to encourage them to engage in negotiations. But sanctions also deepened distrust by reinforcing the Iranian perception that the United States aimed for regime destabilisation, not diplomatic compromise. Iranian leaders have always insisted that negotiations carried out under economic pressure have no real legitimacy and are a reflection of an uneven balance of power.

The nuclear talks, too, became a highly performative and symbolic exercise. Both governments frequently spoke about strength, resistance, and national sovereignty in public statements, while private diplomatic channels sought compromise. This duality created a situation where the diplomatic rhetoric often contradicted the realities of negotiation. Domestic political audiences often used statements to harden public positions and complicate diplomatic flexibility. The cyclical nature of nuclear diplomacy was particularly clear in the sequence of negotiation stages, with its successes, partial concessions, return of sanctions, and rising tensions. Frequent failures often prompt international mediators, such as the European Union,

Russia, and China, to try to keep negotiations going. However, both states never fundamentally resolved their underlying mistrust, leaving each diplomatic breakthrough fragile.

3.4 The JCPOA and the Collapse of Diplomacy

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which Iran, the United States, and several other world powers signed in 2015, was the most important diplomatic success in U.S.-Iran relations since the 1979 Revolution. In return for relief from sanctions and readmission to the global economy, the deal required Iran to limit its uranium enrichment, reduce stockpiles of nuclear material and accept international monitoring by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The JCPOA was hailed by many as proof that sustained diplomacy could overcome decades of hostility and strategic mistrust. The agreement offered an opportunity to halt nuclear proliferation through diplomacy, not military confrontation, according to former U.S. President Barack Obama. Similarly, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani described the deal as a path to economic recovery and international normalisation.

But the deal was politically controversial in both countries from the beginning. In the United States, critics complained that the deal did not deal with Iran's regional influence, its ballistic missile programme, and its support for proxy groups across the Middle East. In Iran, conservatives charged that the government had abandoned revolutionary principles and left itself open to future American policy reversals.

These concerns became significant when President Donald Trump announced in 2018 the unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA. The pullout fundamentally damaged diplomatic trust between the two countries and deepened Iranian doubt about the dependability of American promises. Following the withdrawal, the U.S. re-imposed severe economic sanctions under its "maximum pressure" campaign, and Iran slowly reduced its compliance with nuclear restrictions.

The collapse of the JCPOA was a sign of the fragility of diplomatic progress in US-Iran relations. The negotiations had temporarily eased the tensions, but the agreement did not address the deeper structural mistrust underlying the relationship. Scholars, like Parsi (2017), argue the collapse reflected the broader instability of diplomacy conducted in highly polarised domestic political environments.

After the U.S. withdrawal, renewed tensions included military clashes in the Persian Gulf, attacks on oil infrastructure, and the 2020 assassination of Iranian general Qassem Soleimani. These events increased

regional instability and brought both states closer to direct military confrontation. But later indirect negotiations were resumed through European and Middle Eastern mediators. Again, it shows how diplomacy keeps returning despite repeated breakdowns.

3.5 Repetition and the Diplomatic Cycle

The hallmark of US-Iran diplomacy is its cyclical nature. Over the decades, the negotiations have played out over and over again, with a discernible pattern of diplomatic optimism, strategic engagement, breakdowns, escalation, and renewed attempts to negotiate. This iterative process is reflective of the structural inability of both states to fully resolve or abandon the conflict and the geopolitical imperative.

During times of political change, military tension, or economic crisis, there are often moments of diplomatic hope. Every so often leaders of both countries indicate willingness to negotiate, and international mediators help facilitate renewed talks. But such moments of optimism are often spoilt by competing domestic pressures, ideological opposition and strategic mistrust. Discussions progress, and differences over sanctions, verification, regional influence or political legitimacy begin to emerge.

The collapse phase is generally marked by charges of bad faith, renewed sanctions, military threats, or violations of negotiated agreements. But these breakdowns notwithstanding, negotiations do eventually restart: neither state can fully divest itself of the strategic importance of the other. So diplomacy is cyclical, not transformative.

The repetitive structure is very similar to the patterns of absurdist drama discussed in previous chapters. Like Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, both states are trapped in a process of interminable expectation, where the hope of peace persists in the face of repeated disappointment. The diplomatic negotiations go on, not because it seems they can be settled, but because abandoning them would risk an escalation that could not be controlled.

The cyclical nature of US-Iran talks also speaks to the performative aspects of contemporary diplomacy. Leaders perform resistance, compromise, strength, and victimhood before domestic and international audiences. Diplomatic language is ritualised through repeated promises of "progress," "constructive dialogue," and "historic opportunities." Yet actual resolution remains absent.

Ultimately, the history of US-Iran relations suggests that diplomacy between the two countries has become an endless process of negotiations without end. The conflict continues not in a state of permanent war or permanent peace, but in cycles of engagement and breakdown that keep the diplomatic process alive.

4. WAITING FOR GODOT AND THE ABSURDITY OF PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter develops a comparative interpretive analysis between absurdist dramatic structure and the lived reality of U.S.–Iran diplomatic engagement. Building on the theoretical foundation established in earlier chapters, it argues that prolonged negotiations between the United States and Iran increasingly resemble the dramaturgical logic of the Theatre of the Absurd, particularly Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. In both domains, actors remain suspended within cycles of anticipation, repetition, and deferred resolution, where meaning is continuously generated through expectation rather than outcome (Bleiker 2018).

Beckett's dramaturgy deliberately dismantles traditional narrative progression, replacing causal development with stagnation, cyclical dialogue, and unresolved waiting. As Esslin (2004) notes, absurdist theatre portrays human existence as "a pattern of meaningless repetition" in which action is perpetually suspended and resolution is structurally withheld. This conceptualization provides a compelling framework for interpreting diplomatic systems that appear trapped in recurring negotiation cycles without definitive settlement. In this sense, U.S.–Iran relations are not merely geopolitical interactions but also performative structures of anticipation, where diplomacy itself becomes a form of staged waiting.

Recent political scholarship increasingly emphasizes the performative and symbolic dimensions of international negotiations. Adler-Nissen and Drieschova (2019) argue that diplomacy operates through ritualized communication practices that often prioritize symbolic legitimacy over substantive resolution. This insight aligns closely with absurdist dramaturgy, in which language functions less as a tool of communication and more as a mechanism of sustained expectation. Within this interpretive frame, U.S.–Iran negotiations can be understood as a political theatre of deferred peace.

4.2 Endless Waiting and Deferred Peace

One of the most striking parallels between *Waiting for Godot* and U.S.–Iran diplomacy lies in the structure of endless waiting. In Beckett's play, Vladimir and Estragon repeatedly anticipate the arrival of Godot, a figure who never appears, yet whose potential arrival structures their entire existence. Their actions, dialogue, and emotional states are organized around expectation rather than fulfillment. As Beckett (1953/2011) constructs it, waiting becomes both the content and the condition of existence.

Similarly, U.S.–Iran negotiations are repeatedly organized around the anticipation of diplomatic breakthrough, yet such breakthroughs remain consistently incomplete or reversible. From the JCPOA

negotiations to subsequent attempts at revival talks, both states repeatedly return to the negotiating table under the assumption that agreement is imminent. However, each cycle of negotiation generates temporary optimism followed by renewed stagnation or collapse. This pattern reflects what Parsi (2017) identifies as "recurring diplomatic expectation without durable trust formation," where negotiations produce moments of hope that are structurally undermined by historical mistrust.

The analogy between Godot and "peace" becomes particularly significant in this context. In both cases, the anticipated object—whether a figure or a political settlement—functions as a structuring absence. Peace is continuously invoked in diplomatic discourse, yet it remains perpetually deferred. As Beckett's characters continue waiting despite evidence of non-arrival, so too do political actors persist in negotiation despite repeated historical breakdowns.

This condition can also be interpreted through the lens of political temporality. International relations scholars such as Molly Andrews et al (2024) and Wray et al., (2023) argue that diplomatic processes often operate within "suspended temporalities," where crises are managed through delay rather than resolution. In this sense, waiting itself becomes a political strategy. The absence of resolution does not signify failure but rather sustains the diplomatic process as an ongoing system of managed anticipation.

Thus, both Beckett's dramaturgy and U.S.–Iran diplomacy reveal a shared structure: the perpetuation of expectation in the absence of closure. In both cases, waiting becomes an end in itself rather than a means toward transformation.

4.3 Circular Dialogue and Diplomatic Language

A defining feature of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is its circular dialogue structure, in which conversations repeatedly return to earlier points without progression. Characters contradict themselves, forget prior statements, and recycle fragmented ideas. This linguistic repetition reflects what Esslin (2004) describes as the "breakdown of communicative logic," where language no longer produces stable meaning but instead circulates as repetition.

A comparable structure can be observed in U.S.–Iran diplomatic discourse. Official statements from both governments frequently emphasize familiar themes: commitment to diplomacy, insistence on national sovereignty, accusations of bad faith, and calls for mutual respect. Despite changes in political leadership, these rhetorical patterns remain remarkably consistent. Each negotiation cycle reproduces similar linguistic formulations, even when substantive outcomes differ.

For example, diplomatic language surrounding the JCPOA and its subsequent revival attempts consistently oscillates between optimism and skepticism. Negotiators often describe talks as "constructive," "ongoing," or "productive," even when no concrete agreement is

reached. This repetitive rhetorical structure mirrors what Bleiker (2018) identifies as the aesthetic dimension of diplomacy, where language functions as symbolic performance rather than direct representation of political reality.

In this context, diplomatic language becomes a form of circular discourse rather than linear communication. Statements do not necessarily move negotiations forward but instead sustain the appearance of progress. This linguistic repetition produces what may be described as “discursive stagnation,” where political actors continue speaking without fundamentally altering the conditions of disagreement.

Moreover, circular dialogue in diplomacy serves a strategic function. By repeating familiar phrases and commitments, states maintain the possibility of future negotiation while avoiding definitive rupture. This resembles Beckett’s characters, who continue speaking not to resolve their situation but to prevent silence, which would signify existential confrontation. In both cases, language becomes a mechanism for sustaining uncertainty.

4.4 Silence, Uncertainty, and Political Anxiety

Silence in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* is not absence but presence—it is an active condition that intensifies uncertainty and existential tension. Moments of silence in the play often interrupt dialogue, creating gaps in meaning that expose the fragility of communication. As Mohammad, (2026). argues, Beckett’s use of silence reflects the instability of human understanding, where meaning is always partial and deferred.

Within U.S.–Iran relations, silence similarly functions as a powerful diplomatic instrument. Periods of stalled negotiation, absence of communication, or indirect mediation through third parties create strategic uncertainty. These silences are not neutral; they are politically charged intervals during which both states reassess strategy, signal dissatisfaction, or prepare for renewed engagement.

Mistrust is central to this dynamic. Following decades of conflict, both states interpret silence through the lens of historical suspicion. Iranian policymakers often view U.S. diplomatic pauses as precursors to sanctions or military pressure, while U.S. policymakers frequently interpret Iranian silence as strategic defiance or concealment. This mutual mistrust generates what scholars describe as “strategic ambiguity,” where uncertainty becomes embedded within diplomatic structure itself (Anadolu Agency. (2026).

Uncertainty also produces political anxiety, which in turn reinforces cyclical negotiation behavior. Rather than resolving disputes, both states repeatedly return to negotiation as a risk management strategy. Diplomatic engagement becomes a way of controlling escalation rather than achieving resolution. This condition aligns closely with Beckett’s dramaturgy, in which characters

persist in waiting not because they expect resolution, but because abandonment of waiting would confront them with existential void.

Thus, silence and uncertainty do not interrupt diplomacy—they constitute its structural foundation. Like the pauses in Beckett’s drama, diplomatic silence intensifies the meaning of what remains unsaid, reinforcing the instability of political communication.

4.5 Peace as Symbolic Illusion

In Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, Godot functions not as a concrete entity but as a symbolic construct whose meaning is perpetually deferred. Bernaoui and Benchohra, (2025) argue that Godot represents the “structure of deferred meaning itself,” rather than any fixed referent. The significance of Godot lies in its absence, which organizes the entire dramatic experience.

Within U.S.–Iran relations, “peace” operates in a strikingly similar manner. Peace is repeatedly invoked as the ultimate goal of diplomacy, yet it remains structurally elusive. Each negotiation cycle is framed as a potential breakthrough toward peace, yet each outcome ultimately reproduces instability, mistrust, or partial agreement. As Takeyh (2021) notes, U.S.–Iran relations are characterized by “recurring diplomatic engagement without convergence of strategic expectations,” where peace remains aspirational rather than realized.

Peace, therefore, becomes a symbolic construct that sustains diplomatic activity without guaranteeing transformation. It functions as what may be described as a “discursive horizon”—a point of reference that structures negotiation without ever being fully reached. In this sense, peace resembles Godot: it is continuously anticipated, rhetorically constructed, and strategically invoked, yet never fully materialized.

Recent international relations scholarship reinforces this interpretation by emphasizing the symbolic dimension of diplomatic goals. Adler-Nissen and Drieschova (2009) argue that international agreements often function as “performative achievements,” where the declaration of agreement may matter as much as its substantive enforcement. This insight suggests that peace itself may operate more as a symbolic performance than a stable political condition.

Ultimately, the analogy between Godot and peace reveals a deeper structural similarity between absurdist theatre and contemporary diplomacy: both are organized around the expectation of resolution that never fully arrives. In both cases, meaning is generated through anticipation rather than fulfillment, and existence is sustained through the repetition of deferred hope.

5. CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS

5.1 Summary of Findings

The aim of this study was to examine U.S.–Iran negotiations through the theoretical lens of the Theatre of

the Absurd, especially Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, in an effort to understand prolonged diplomatic impasse. The analysis of the preceding chapters has shown that the U.S.-Iranian relationship can be characterised neither by episodic diplomatic failures nor by a deeper structural repetition where negotiation itself is cyclical, performative, and eternally inconclusive. First, the study finds that U.S.-Iran negotiations regularly exhibit patterns found in absurdist dramaturgy. Such patterns are marked by unresolved repetition, cyclical escalation and de-escalation, and the persistent recurrence of diplomatic optimism followed by failure. Negotiations do not seem to be leading to stable peace but to self-regeneration through a cycle of recurring crises and temporary diplomatic openings. This is in keeping with Esslin's (2004) description of the absurdist theatre as a dramatic form in which "meaning is produced through repetition rather than resolution". As the characters in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* are caught in endless waiting that never results in arrival, so US-Iran diplomacy continues to generate anticipation with no definitive resolution.

Second, the findings show that the diplomacy between the U.S. and Iran is becoming more and more like a repetitive political performance. Even when no major breakthroughs are achieved, the language of diplomacy, official statements, and processes of negotiation are often characterised by familiar rhetorical structures emphasising dialogue, progress, and mutual understanding. "Today the world of international politics is profoundly aesthetic and performative," Bleiker (2018) contends, and "diplomatic communication is as much about symbolic enactment as policy negotiation." In the case of US-Iran relations, this performative aspect helps explain the enduring cycles of negotiations without a definitive transformation, echoing what Mälksoo (2026) describe as diplomacy as "staged interaction" shaped by narrative, ritual, and symbolic positioning.

Third, the study reaffirms that US-Iran relations continue to structurally postpone lasting peace. Yet even large diplomatic accomplishments such as the JCPOA have been susceptible to political winds, domestic political pressures, and distrust of strategic intentions. The breakdown and partial revival of talks suggests that peace is less a final destination and more a constant horizon of expectation. In this sense, peace is like Beckett's "Godot": always expected but never fully achieved in stable form (LitCharts Editors. (2026). As Parsi (2017) observes in his discussion of Iran's diplomacy, even successful deals tend to be fragile if the reasons for mistrust and the potential for domestic political volatility are not addressed, resulting in repeated cycles of engagement and breakdown.

Taken together, these findings suggest that U.S.-Iran relations are best understood not as a linear trajectory toward conflict resolution but as a recursive system of negotiation in which anticipation, breakdown, and renewal are structurally embedded. The diplomatic process itself becomes self-perpetuating, akin to the repetitive structure

of absurdist theatre identified by Esslin (2004), where action continues without final resolution .

5.2 Contribution to Knowledge

This research adds to the present body of scholarship in international relations, literary theory and political communication by providing an interdisciplinary framework that fuses absurdist dramatic theory and geopolitical analysis. While existing research on U.S.-Iran relations has predominantly centred on strategic realism, nuclear diplomacy, and regional security dynamics (Parsi, 2017; Takeyh, 2021), this research broadens the analytical lens by applying a cultural and dramaturgical interpretation of diplomatic actions.

The main contribution of this work is to show how the theory of drama can greatly contribute to the understanding of geopolitical conflict. The research shows how diplomatic processes can operate not only through rational calculation but also through symbolic repetition, performative anticipation and deferred meaning by adopting Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* as an interpretive model. This is in line with recent scholarship that highlights the performative aspects of international politics, where diplomacy is understood as a type of staged interaction guided by narrative and symbolism (Bernstein et al., 2025). In this respect, diplomatic negotiation is not simply problem-solving, but meaning-production within a theatricalised political space.

Moreover, the study adds to the emerging field of political dramaturgy in that it shows that international negotiations can be studied through the use of concepts typically associated with literary and theatrical studies. It shows how the characteristics of absurdist theatre, such as repetition, silence and unresolved dialogue, can be usefully applied to the reading of a prolonged geopolitical stalemate. The findings of this study support Bleiker's (2018) claim that global politics is governed not only by material forces but also by aesthetic and representational practices.

Ultimately, this research pushes the epistemological boundaries of international relations, demonstrating that literary frameworks are not just metaphorical crutches but analytical tools capable of illuminating the symbolic and existential dimensions of diplomacy.

5.3 Suggestions

The findings of the study suggest several recommendations for future research and academic exploration.

First, interdisciplinary political analysis, which combines literary theory, drama studies, and international relations, needs further development. Such approaches can offer more subtle understandings of diplomatic conduct, especially in instances where ongoing cycles of negotiation are not accounted for by traditional realist

perspectives.

Second, future studies should broaden the field of political dramaturgy by applying theatrical frames to other geopolitical conflicts. Comparative analyses of different international rivalries could help to assess whether the absurdist tendencies in US-Iran relations are unique or indicative of broader structural tendencies in contemporary diplomacy.

Third, we invite scholars to explore the role of literary theory in international relations, especially in cases of long-term stalemates in negotiations, ideological polarisation, and symbolic diplomacy. This may entail engagement with existential, post-structuralist, and narrative theories that are complementary to Beckett's absurdist frame of reference and could enhance understanding of political repetition and deferred resolution.

Finally, acknowledgement of the symbolic and performative aspects of negotiation may be useful to policy analysts and diplomats. Understanding diplomacy as strategic interaction and communicative performance may also help to temper expectations about what diplomatic resolution can and cannot achieve, especially in long-standing conflicts such as the US-Iran relationship.

5.4 Summary

The study concludes that the interpretive lens of absurdist theatre provides the best framework for understanding US-Iran relations, with diplomacy functioning as an ongoing cycle of expectation, repetition, and deferral. The relationship between both states is characterised by recurrent patterns of negotiation, tension, and diplomatic breakdown, rather than a gradual path towards reconciliation.

In this sense, U.S.-Iran diplomacy echoes the existential structure of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, where meaning is forever deferred and resolution always is out of reach. Esslin (2004) suggests that the capture of the human condition in absurdist drama resides in the repetition without resolution, a dynamic reflected in the diplomatic cycles of engagement and collapse seen in this study. In a similar way, Beckett's (1953/2011) endless waiting is an evocative metaphor for diplomatic processes where "peace" is called upon but never fully achieved.

In the end, the study argues, the US-Iran relationship is a process of endless negotiation with no end, where diplomacy is both a strategy and a performance. This situation is not in line with current models of conflict resolution and confirms the hypothesis that some geopolitical relations are defined not by a linear progression towards peace or war but by the consistent repetition of unfulfilled expectations.

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