

# US, Iran meet in nuclear talks

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US Secretary of State John Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif met Thursday in the highest-level talks between the two countries since the 1979 Iranian revolution.

The face-to-face encounter took place in the framework of a joint meeting of the foreign ministers of the so-called P5+1 group (consisting of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council—US, Russia, China, Britain and France—plus Germany), which was formed in 2006 to conduct diplomatic negotiations with Iran on its nuclear program. The meeting was hosted on the periphery of the UN General Assembly session in New York City by European Union foreign policy representative Catherine Ashton.

Going into the meeting, both US and Iranian representatives voiced optimism that progress could be made toward an agreement on the Iranian nuclear program.

“We’re going to have a good meeting, I’m sure,” Kerry said early on Thursday. For his part, Zarif used his Twitter account to term the meeting “a historic opportunity to resolve the nuclear issue,” provided the Western powers accept the “new Iranian approach.”

“While we do not anticipate that any issues will be resolved during today’s P5+1 meeting, we are hopeful that we can continue to chart a path forward,” a US State Department spokesman declared.

In advance of the meeting there were expressions of the tensions generated by decades of US-led economic sanctions against Iran and continuous provocations—including assassination of Iranian scientists—carried out on the pretext of preventing the country from building a nuclear weapon.

Iran has consistently denied that it is developing nuclear power for anything but peaceful purposes and insists that its activities are in full compliance with the Non-Proliferation Treaty. US intelligence estimates have concluded that the country has no nuclear weapons program.

Iran’s recently elected president, Hassan Rouhani, addressing a meeting on nuclear disarmament in his capacity as head of the Nonaligned Movement, called attention to the hypocrisy of the US and the West in indicting Iran for a nonexistent nuclear weapons program while defending Israel, which has amassed hundreds of nuclear warheads

and, unlike Iran, has refused to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or allow any inspection of its facilities.

“Almost four decades of international efforts to establish a nuclear weapon-free zone in the Middle East have regrettably failed,” Rouhani said, adding that Israel must immediately join the NPT and dismantle its nuclear arsenal. Earlier, Rouhani said he believed a deal could be reached on Iran’s nuclear program in as little as three months.

Also on Thursday, Iran had a 20-page “explanatory note” posted on the web site of the UN nuclear watchdog agency, denouncing the charges that Iran is developing nuclear weapons as “baseless allegations,” which it described as “unprofessional, unfair, illegal and politicized.”

The paper was apparently a response to quarterly reports by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) expressing concerns about military applications of the Iranian nuclear program. It charged that these statements were based upon “forged, fabricated and false information provided by Western intelligence services and known sources hostile to Iran.”

Iranian representatives are set to meet with the IAEA in Vienna on Friday, the first such encounter since Rouhani took office as president.

In Washington, meanwhile, doubts have been raised about the ability of President Barack Obama to make good on any deal to ease the punishing economic blockade that has been imposed on Iran in exchange for the country’s government ceding to US demands on its nuclear program. The most significant sanctions have been implemented through congressional legislation and would have to be repealed by Congress, where the Israel lobby and its implacable hostility to any agreement with Iran exert major influence.

A group of 10 Republican senators have made public an open letter calling on Obama to “increase pressure on Iran” and “not pursue diplomatic half-measures.” The letter stresses that while the US president was unable to gain congressional support for a military strike on Syria, “we are united in our determination to prevent an Iranian nuclear weapon.”

The letter suggests that no deal would be acceptable outside of one that stripped Iran of its uranium “enrichment

or reprocessing capabilities” and essentially brought about regime-change.

The turn by the Obama administration toward negotiations with Iran comes barely one month after it prepared to launch a military assault on Syria and was forced to pull back in the face of overwhelming popular opposition.

This was expressed first in the vote by the British House of Commons at the end of August to reject a motion in support of war, and then by the vocal and widespread popular hostility in the US to another military intervention in the Middle East. Obama faced the prospect that the US Congress would reject his request for an authorization for the use of military force.

It was under these conditions that the US administration grabbed onto the Russian proposal for the chemical disarmament of Syria.

Now the Iranian negotiations have overshadowed the diplomatic maneuvers surrounding Syria. It may well prove that both were part of a bid by the US administration to play for time, using the argument that the “diplomatic path” had been tried and had failed to prepare for military aggression once again.

There is, however, a definite logic to US efforts to achieve a rapprochement with Iran, which before the 1979 revolution was a key US client state and pillar of reaction in the region.

The Iranian government is clearly anxious to secure an easing of sanctions, fearful that rising inflation and mounting unemployment, particularly among young workers, can unleash social struggles that will challenge the Islamist regime as well as its principal base among Iran’s capitalists and merchants.

US tactical considerations were spelled out in an article entitled “Negotiating with Iran: The Strategic Case for Pragmatism and Real Progress” by Anthony Cordesman, the Middle East and national security analyst for the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

While Cordesman advises the US government to be “extraordinarily careful in dealing with Iran” and warns that negotiations could serve as a “delaying tactic” to facilitate the country’s supposed pursuit of nuclear weapons, he also provides a grim estimate of potential unintended consequences of military action against the country.

“Iran may well face a series of preventive strikes—triggered by Israel or planned by the United States—that will destroy far more than its nuclear facilities,” he writes. “This may or may not actually halt the Iranian nuclear effort.”

He warns that, as demonstrated in Syria, “no one can predict how much support the United States will really get from any of its allies,” not to mention from the American public. Iran could retaliate against US interests in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon and threaten the flow

of oil exports from the Persian Gulf, Cordesman writes.

On the other hand, he argues that the US and Iran could find “common strategic interests” on a wide number of questions, ranging from the stability of Afghanistan to counterterrorism and petroleum development.

The Iranian press is far more frank than the American in evaluating the real “strategic interests” underlying the US-Iranian talks. The Tehran daily *Arman* writes: “China and Russia will not be happy about any possible improvement of relations between Iran and the West... It is likely that Arab countries in the region will not approve of the reduction of problems between Iran and the USA either... We should pay attention to this important issue, as many countries will not support us and we should be guided by our national interests.”

Another daily, *Hamshahri*, relates the turn toward negotiations with Iran to the apparent leading role taken by Russia in bringing about an agreement on Syria and heading off a US war on that country. “Maybe at this juncture in time, by pushing Russia aside, the United States wishes to indicate that it can enter into direct interaction and negotiation with Iran,” the newspaper states. “This will enable it to show that Russia’s seat in the Middle East is not as strong and powerful as interpreted...”

The paper goes on to assert that Iran “not only has no need for regional and eastern [i.e., Russian and Chinese] mediators; it can itself be a regional mediator for the current conflicts.”

What these analyses make clear is that Washington’s entry into negotiations in relation to both Syria and Iran represents not a turn toward peace or renunciation of the predatory strategic aims of US imperialism. Rather, it is a tactical turn aimed at furthering US hegemony over the strategic regions of the Persian Gulf and Central Asia and preparing for a far more dangerous confrontation with Russia and China.

Whether this “path of diplomacy” produces the results desired by the US ruling establishment, or whether it uses it to prepare a fresh pretext for war against Syria and Iran remains to be seen.



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