

# International talks begin on Iran's nuclear program

Peter Symonds  
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International talks are due to start today in Geneva between Iran and the so-called P5+1 grouping—the US, Britain, France, China, Russia and Germany—over Iran's nuclear programs. While expectations of a breakthrough were raised by new Iranian President Hassan Rouhani at the United Nations last month, the US has already made clear that it expects major Iranian concessions for the talks to proceed.

On Sunday, Secretary of State John Kerry ruled out any agreement that did not meet US demands, declaring that “no deal is better than a bad deal.” He was speaking in a televised address to the pro-Israeli lobby group, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), which, like the Israeli government, has bitterly opposed any compromise with Tehran.

Kerry told the AIPAC meeting: “Right now, the window for diplomacy is cracking open. But I want to tell you that our eyes are wide open, too ... While we seek a peaceful resolution to Iran's nuclear program, words must be matched with actions.”

For more than a decade, the US has been exploiting unsubstantiated claims that Iran is planning to build a nuclear weapon as the pretext for isolating it diplomatically and economically, as well as threatening a military attack. Under the Obama administration, the US-led sanctions regime has halved Iranian oil exports and cut the country off from the world banking and financial system. Iranian leaders have repeatedly denied any intention of constructing a nuclear arsenal.

Kerry's remarks to AIPAC have been echoed in numerous comments in the Western press. An editorial in the *Washington Post* was entitled, “Iran's commitment to disarmament must be tested before sanctions lifted.” In a similar vein, a *Financial Times* editorial headlined, “Iran must show it means business,” damped down expectations, saying,

“Western excitement over Mr Rouhani has gone a little far.”

Ten Democrat and Republican senators wrote to Obama yesterday, declaring that negotiators should consider a “suspension-for-suspension” agreement, under which Iran would suspend all uranium enrichment. In return, Washington would not suspend all sanctions on Iran, but only new penalties under consideration in the US Congress. The senators also insisted that the US maintain “a credible military threat”—that is, keep its military forces in place and ready to attack Iran.

The Obama administration has already put the onus on the Iranian delegation at today's talks to present its proposals to end the current impasse. What the US and its allies will be demanding is indicated by their proposal at the last failed round of P5+1 negotiations, in Kazakhstan in April. Iran was offered a “confidence building” plan that proposed to suspend 20 percent uranium enrichment in Iran, ship the existing stockpile of 20 percent enriched uranium out of the country, and shut down the Fordow enrichment plant. The US only regarded this proposal as an interim step towards the closure of all Iran's enrichment plants, the mothballing of its heavy water reactor at Arak that is due to be completed next year, as well as more intrusive UN inspections throughout its nuclear programs.

Iran has insisted all along on its rights under the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty to conduct all aspects of the nuclear fuel cycle for peaceful purposes. Its Natanz enrichment plant is dedicated to producing 3.5 percent enriched uranium, to fuel its existing power reactor at Bushehr and future plants. More than half of its 20 percent enriched uranium has been transformed into fuel plates for the Tehran research reactor that produces medical isotopes. The International Atomic

Energy Agency (IAEA) regularly inspects all of Iran's nuclear facilities, confirming that it has no uranium enriched to 90 percent—that is, weapons-grade level.

Today's P5+1 talks will be considering not just an interim plan, but an “end game”—that is, what ultimately both sides are prepared to concede. As far as the US is concerned, that will not be much. Former Obama National Security Council official Gary Samore told the *New York Times*: “The US is looking for an agreement that limits Iran's overall enrichment, defined in terms of numbers and types of centrifuges and stockpile of low enriched uranium, in exchange for substantial sanctions relief.”

Speaking on state television on Sunday, Iranian nuclear negotiator Abbas Araghchi declared that his country would not give up its right to enrich uranium, and would not agree to shipping existing stockpiles out of the country. “Enrichment and transfer of uranium are our red lines,” he said. “We will never give away any of our rights, which are set under international treaties.”

Iran Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the final say over foreign and security matters, has given qualified support to President Rouhani's diplomatic initiatives. These are seen as a means of easing the sanctions regime, ending the current economic crisis and forestalling social unrest. The comments by Araghchi reflect the strict limits that Khamenei has placed on any concessions.

Rouhani himself is well aware of Iran's bitter experiences over the last decade of nuclear negotiations. He was Iran's chief nuclear negotiator with Washington's European allies when Iran suspended uranium enrichment between 2003 and 2005 and allowed more intrusive IAEA inspections while a comprehensive counter-offer was prepared. When the European package was finally announced, it contained virtually nothing but vague promises in return for Iran shutting its nuclear facilities. One Iranian negotiator branded the proposal as “too ridiculous to be called an offer.”

The fate of those talks underscores the fact that the US has exploited Iran's nuclear programs all along as a convenient excuse to pursue its objective of regime change in Tehran. The US has never reconciled itself to the ousting of its ally, Shah Reza Pahlavi, in the 1979 Iranian revolution. Over the past three decades, Tehran has on more than one occasion sought a rapprochement

with Washington while the US has continued to regard the Iranian regime as the chief obstacle to its economic and strategic ambitions in the Middle East.

Whatever the immediate outcome of the next two days of talks in Geneva, US imperialism will continue to ruthlessly pursue the objective of establishing its untrammelled domination of the energy-rich region. Just over a month ago, the Obama administration was on the point of launching a devastating air war against Iran's ally, Syria, which undoubtedly included contingency plans for dealing with Iran if it became involved in any way. As negotiations proceed, the US continues to maintain its “credible military threat” against both countries.



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