# Officials signal possible deal in Geneva on Iran's nuclear program

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With negotiations in Geneva between Iran and the P5+1 group (the US, Britain, France, China, Russia, and Germany) over Iran's nuclear program set to enter their second and final day today, Washington has signaled that a limited, initial confidence-building deal could be reached.

US President Barack Obama told NBC News yesterday evening that there is "the possibility of a phased agreement" with Iran on the nuclear talks. In exchange for halting its nuclear program, Obama said Iran could receive "very modest relief" from crippling US sanctions that have devastated Iran's economy.

Speaking to CNN yesterday evening, anonymous top US officials outlined broad outlines of the deal being offered in Geneva. The US would agree to unfreeze some of the tens of billions of dollars in Iranian oil revenues currently frozen in overseas banks and potentially allow some international trade in precious metals and petro-chemicals with Iran. In exchange, Iran would stop enriching nuclear fuel to 20 percent; render most of its existing stock of such fuel unusable; agree not to use high-speed IR-2 centrifuges; and agree not to activate an uncompleted plutonium reactor at Arak.

US officials stressed that such a deal was not done, but that it could occur if Iran agreed to US demands. They all emphasized that the sanctions on Iran's oil exports would remain in force and that any sanctions relief would be "reversible."

Senior diplomats are now gathering in Geneva, apparently in an attempt to negotiate the deal. US officials announced last night that Secretary of State John Kerry is interrupting his Middle East tour to travel to Geneva. Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, who is leading the Iranian negotiating team in Geneva, also cancelled a scheduled trip to Rome to continue attending the Geneva talks.

Zarif signaled that Tehran is seriously considering the US proposal. "I believe it is possible to reach an understanding or an agreement before we close these negotiations [Friday] evening," he said.

Zarif said that negotiators "expect to make a breakthrough," though he declined to give further specifics: "We are at a very sensitive stage of negotiations, and it is best if these negotiations are done at the negotiating table rather than on live television. But I can tell you that we are prepared to address some of the most immediate concerns that have been raised, and we expect reciprocally our concerns to be met by the P5+1."

Such an initial deal, if it can be reached, would only be a temporary deal to create a diplomatic framework in which to reach a more long-term agreement on Iran's nuclear program, and negotiate a broader diplomatic settlement between Washington and Tehran. The US government has long stated that it will not allow Iran to place itself in a position where it could potentially build a nuclear bomb, and that it is prepared to launch a war to prevent Iran from achieving what Washington has termed "nuclear capability."

The possibility of such a war was made very clear in September, when the US nearly launched a war against Syria—a key ally of Iran, whose military has sent troops to Syria to assist Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in a war against US-backed, Al Qaeda-linked forces.

US officials again made clear this week that Washington is still threatening war, if it fails to reach a broad diplomatic settlement with Tehran. US lead negotiator Wendy Sherman told CNN that "we have to do everything we can to reach a diplomatic solution. There are other options, but a diplomatic solution is the best option, and we all have to do everything we can as quickly as we can to see if in fact we can achieve just

that."

Speaking yesterday, Zarif signaled that Tehran aims to begin negotiating such a broad political settlement. He said that he hoped to begin work today on a "joint statement" to address a longer-term agreement, "that we all try to reach within a limited period of time, hopefully in less than a year." Zarif suggested that Iran is looking to maintain a full-cycle nuclear program sufficient to run a civilian nuclear energy industry, but short of what is required to make a bomb. "There won't be a suspension of our enrichment program in its entirety. But we can deal with various issues, various issues are on the table," he said.

Tehran has repeatedly vowed that it does not and will never seek nuclear weapons and has said it is ready to accept far more intrusive International Atomic Energy Agency oversight of its nuclear program as part of both an initial and a final agreement relating to its nuclear program.

Whatever the progress of the talks in Geneva, massive obstacles remain to the implementation of an agreement between Washington and Tehran, which would itself be a reactionary deal to boost the influence of US imperialism at the expense of the Middle Eastern working masses.

Washington has signaled that, in order to reach a deal, it will require not only to establish control of Iran's nuclear program, but also to establish effective US hegemony over Iran's domestic and foreign policy. It intends to extract deep economic concessions at the heart of the Iranian economy, including more US investment to control Iran's oil industry, and force Iran to cut off any support to regional forces opposing Israel, such as the Lebanese Hezbollah militia. In recent weeks, Washington has said it would welcome Iran's participation in a Geneva II international conference on Syria, but only if Tehran accepts the statement issued by the first Geneva conference, which the US interprets as mandating "regime change."

Such neo-colonial demands are in profound conflict with popular sentiment in Iran and the region. While there is support in the Iranian working class for ending US sanctions against Iran, there is also deep opposition to US imperialism, which was the main foreign power behind the bloody regime of the Shah, toppled during the 1979 Iranian revolution.

Hundreds of thousands of Iranians joined a mass protest in Tehran on Monday, marking the 34th anniversary of the occupation of the US embassy by Iranian students during the 1979 revolution.

Moreover, any attempt to shift US policy away from a policy of constantly threatening war with Iran faces powerful opposition from US allies in the region who are hostile to Iran, such as Saudi Arabia and Israel. Both countries insist that the US cannot leave Iran with any nuclear capacity.

Significantly, reports yesterday indicated that Saudi Arabia is moving to acquire nuclear weapons—a step the Saudi regime has repeatedly warned that it would take if it believed Iran would acquire nuclear weapons.

Senior NATO, US, and Pakistani officials have told the BBC that Saudi Arabia has concluded an agreement allowing it to obtain nuclear weapons from Pakistan, if necessary. Former Obama administration counter-proliferation advisor Gary Samore told the BBC: "I do think the Saudis believe that they have some understanding with Pakistan that, in extremis, they would have claim to acquire nuclear weapons from Pakistan."

Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu has also repeatedly denounced any deal between Iran and the major powers that does not force Iran to end all uranium enrichment.

He reiterated this position during Kerry's visit to Israel on Wednesday: "I believe that as long as they continue their goal to enrich uranium to get nuclear weapons, the pressure should be maintained and even increased because they're increasing enrichment."

Yesterday Netanyahu issued an even more categorical rejection of the Iran-P5+1 talks in Geneva.

"Israel understands that there are proposals on the table in Geneva today that would ease the pressure on Iran for concessions that are not concessions at all. This proposal would allow Iran to retain the capabilities to make nuclear weapons," he said. "Israel totally opposes these proposals. I believe that adopting them would be a mistake of historic proportions. They must be rejected outright."