

Iran Nuclear Deal Closer as Kerry Set to Arrive in Geneva (1)
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(Updates with comment from Obama in third paragraph.)

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Nov. 8 (Bloomberg) -- Iran and world powers edged closer to breaking the decade-long stalemate over the Islamic republic's nuclear program, saying an initial accord is possible when they convene for a second day of negotiations in Geneva.

Secretary of State John Kerry plans to make a visit to the Swiss city today in an effort to help narrow differences in the talks, according to a U.S. official who asked not to be identified because the plans weren't public. A framework has been agreed on and negotiators will try to fill in details at today's session, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said in an interview.

"Our job now is to test how serious they are about resolving this conflict, or this dispute, through peaceful means, through diplomacy," President Barack Obama said yesterday in an interview with NBC News. "We don't have to trust them. What we have to do is to make sure that there is a good deal in place from the perspective of us verifying what they're doing."

Iran has been offered "limited, targeted and reversible relief" from sanctions in return for concrete and verifiable concessions on its nuclear work, White House spokesman Jay Carney said in Washington.

Zarif said any concessions Iran makes at this stage will be reversible if there's no reciprocal move from the U.S. He called on Obama to resist pressure for additional sanctions in Congress, where legislators were deciding whether to introduce a measure to tighten the curbs.

First Step

The accord sought in Geneva would be intended as a first step toward a comprehensive deal to remove the specter of another Middle East war. The U.S. and Israel say they're willing to use force to stop Iran getting nuclear bombs, which Iran denies seeking. Hassan Rouhani's election as Iran's president in June and his pledge to restore an economy squeezed by the sanctions has given new momentum to diplomacy.

Iran has signaled it's willing to make compromises,

shelving a demand for immediate recognition that has the right to enrich uranium, and saying it may be ready to limit its stockpile of uranium enriched to 20 percent purity.

Efforts toward an accord have run into opposition that leaders on both sides are seeking to assuage.

Some U.S. lawmakers, with support from Israel, are pushing for sanctions to be tightened, not eased. While the Senate Banking Committee is preparing to discuss legislation imposing new curbs on Iran, its chairman, Democratic Senator Tim Johnson of South Dakota, said that no timetable has been set.

Persuading Congress

Obama sent Vice President Joe Biden, Kerry and Treasury Secretary Jacob J. Lew to Congress last week to persuade legislators such efforts should be put on hold.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said yesterday that any deal easing the pressure on Iran would be "a mistake of historic proportions." U.S. allies among Arab monarchies in the Persian Gulf, led by Saudi Arabia, also have signaled reservations.

A group of 79 former U.S. military officials and diplomats, including three former ambassadors to Israel, expressed backing for the pursuit of a diplomatic solution, calling it an "ambitious and transformative course" toward a more peaceful Middle East in an open letter to Obama.

Iranian conservatives have criticized Rouhani and Zarif for taking too soft an approach. In a speech on Nov. 3, the eve of anti-American rallies in Iran to mark the anniversary of the 1979 takeover of the U.S. embassy, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei sent a message of support for the negotiators. He said they're "sons of the revolution," carrying out a mission that he endorses.

Nuclear Inspectors

International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors who monitor Iran's 17 declared nuclear facilities are due to fly to Tehran next week. They're seeking access to sites that they've been barred from visiting, to investigate a possible military dimension to Iran's nuclear program.

"Iran has to understand that significant sanctions relief cannot happen if it's not going to cooperate with the IAEA and solve these basic concerns," David Albright, a founder of the Institute for Science and International Security in Washington,

said on a conference call yesterday.

The Geneva meetings between the Iranian delegation and officials from the U.S., China, France, Germany, Russia, the U.K. and the European Union, were scheduled to end today.

Zarif's deputy, Abbas Araghchi, said an agreement may require extending them into a third day, or holding another round of talks. Araghchi and U.S. negotiator Wendy Sherman had a separate meeting yesterday that lasted about an hour, according to a State Department official who asked not to be named in line with department policy.

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