

The road to finalizing a nuclear deal with Iran

by **Seyed Hossein Mousavian** (</profiles/m/seyed-hossein-mousavian.html>) October 18, 2013 | 8:00AM ET

Commentary: Potential for historic agreement depends on Obama's will to resist pro-Israel hawks and end sanctions

[View comments](#)



Iran's and world powers' delegations sit prior the start of two days of closed-door nuclear talks on October 15, 2013 at the United Nations offices in Geneva. Fabrice Coffrini/AFP/Getty Images

On Tuesday and Wednesday, representatives from the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council (UNSC) and Germany — the so-called P5+1 — held a first round of talks in Geneva with negotiators from the new Iranian administration over the country's nuclear program. Since 2006, Iran has been subject to severe sanctions to force its compliance to international demands about its uranium enrichment program.

More than a week ago, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry asked (<http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/iran-at-saban/posts/2013/10/11-geneva-nuclear-talks-iran-einhorn>) for "a set of proposals from Iran that will fully disclose how they will show the world that their program is peaceful." While U.S. expectations for Iran's response were low, Tehran, surprisingly, presented a new, "very comprehensive" (<http://news.yahoo.com/iran-eyeing-ministerial-meet-p5-1-geneva-talks-073435170.html>) proposal that demonstrated tremendous potential for a diplomatic breakthrough. U.S. and European officials in Geneva called (<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2013/10/15/uk-iran-nuclear-talks-idUKBRE99E05Z20131015>) the Iranian offer "very useful." A joint statement issued by delegation leaders described (<http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/10/16/serious-progressandafamiliarroadmapseenatirannucleartalks.html>) the talks as "substantive and forward looking."

A decade of nuclear negotiations failed because the U.S. was not ready to respect the rights of Iran to enrich uranium for civilian use under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). America's stance changed in Geneva. "We found the Iranian presentation very useful," White House press secretary Jay Carney said (<http://news.yahoo.com/world-powers-iran-brace-second-day-nuclear-talks-022501206.html>) after four rounds of talks ended on Wednesday evening. "The Iranian proposal was a new proposal with a level of seriousness and substance that we had not seen before."

Four major reasons accounted for the change in dynamics between Iran and the U.S. this time, compared with previous, unproductive discussions:

First, President Hassan Rouhani's victory in the June 15 election transformed international anxiety about Iran's hard-line stance, represented by former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, into hopefulness for a warmer relationship between Tehran and the world. "We are at a different point in this with a new government in place, and we're having a level of conversation that is different from what we had had in the past," said (<http://news.yahoo.com/world-powers-iran-brace-second-day-nuclear-talks-022501206.html>) U.S. State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki.

Second, based on direct talks between Iran and the U.S. prior to Geneva, Washington became convinced that Tehran was willing to take the necessary measures to ensure international confidence in its stated policies. Iran had claimed that it planned a peaceful nuclear program in conformity with the NPT, and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's 2005 fatwa had banned the production, stockpiling and use of weapons of mass destruction — a commitment President Barack Obama cited (http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/transcript-president-obamas-speech-at-the-un-general-assembly/2013/09/24/64d5b386-2522-11e3-ad0d-b7c8d2a594b9_story_4.html) in his Sept. 24 address to the U.N. General Assembly. In the absence of direct talks confirming Iran's commitment to these goals, the Geneva negotiations would not have yielded such progress.

Third, members of the UNSC recognized that increasing sanctions and pressures would be counterproductive and lead to Iran increasing its capacity for uranium enrichment. The International Atomic Energy Agency has reported that before UNSC sanctions were imposed in 2006, Iran had about 3,000 centrifuges, was enriching at a level of 3.5 percent and had stockpiled several hundred kilograms of enriched uranium. Today it has 18,000 centrifuges, is enriching uranium at a level of 20 percent and has amassed more than 8,000 kilograms of enriched uranium. Uranium for civilian nuclear reactors requires an enrichment level of only 3 to 5 percent; weapons-grade uranium requires a much higher level.

Fourth, Tehran received encouraging signals from the U.S. and Europe that they were open to recognizing Iran's right to uranium enrichment under certain conditions. Despite the insistence (<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2013/10/15/iran-presents-plan-at-geneva-nuclear-talks/>) of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, echoed by 10 leading U.S. senators, that Iran must end all enrichment, the White House had already concluded that the "zero enrichment policy" was dead, and asked Congress (http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-250_162-57607447/white-house-asks-congress-not-to-disrupt-iran-nuclear-talks/) not to disrupt its diplomatic efforts. Mark Fitzpatrick, a former State Department official on nonproliferation issues, recently said (<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2013/10/15/us-allies-skeptical-ahead-iran-nuclear-talks/>), "It's pretty clear that Iran will have to be allowed some degree of enrichment, but the enrichment has to be limited." This sentiment now represents the U.S. position.

“The window for diplomacy with Iran over its nuclear program is cracking open,' Secretary of State John Kerry said.”

A few days before the negotiations, Robert Einhorn, until this May a member of the U.S. nuclear negotiating team, addressed Iran's demand that its right to enrichment be recognized. Einhorn articulated (<http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/iran-at-saban/posts/2013/10/11-geneva-nuclear-talks-iran-einhorn>) the conditions under which the U.S. and fellow P5+1 nations would respond positively to that demand:

If Iran wants P5+1 acceptance of its enrichment program, it will have to accept limits on enrichment capacity (numbers, types, and locations of centrifuges), limits on enriched uranium stocks (amounts, enrichment levels, chemical forms, and locations), and extensive monitoring by the International Atomic Energy Agency (including the Additional Protocol and real-time surveillance of key installations). These measures would be essential in addressing P5+1 concerns about "breakout" — the ability of Iran suddenly to abandon enrichment constraints, evict IAEA inspectors, and move rapidly to producing enough weapons-grade uranium for one or more nuclear weapons.

A day before the Geneva talks, William H. Luers and Thomas R. Pickering, two former U.S. diplomats who have participated in informal efforts to engage Iran for the last several years, added (<http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2013/10/14/looking-to-diplomacy-with-iran/>) further details:

Iranian officials have suggested that they would be willing to negotiate on fundamental aspects of their nuclear program, including a lower level of enrichment (cessation of enrichment to 20 percent, which is closer to weapons-grade), limits on the number of centrifuges, the number of facilities, the amount of material produced by each centrifuge, and eventually new safeguard rules and new arrangements for the heavy water reactor project ... not using the advanced centrifuges it has installed, and pushing back the planned start (<http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2013/10/14/looking-to-diplomacy-with-iran/>) date for the heavy water reactor at Arak ... if the P5+1 will, in response, agree to recognize an Iranian nuclear program with some uranium enrichment and also agree to lift all sanctions.

The details of Iran's proposal, titled "Closing an unnecessary crisis, opening new horizons," (<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4440950,00.html>) unfortunately remain confidential. Abbas Araghchi, Iran's nuclear negotiator, reiterated this during the talks. However, two days before Geneva, Kerry acknowledged (<http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/kerry-eu-foreign-policy-chief-ashton-hold-talks-20557258>) that "the window for diplomacy with Iran over its nuclear program is cracking open."

Thanks to the Geneva talks, the P5+1 and Iran both know exactly what elements must appear in a final agreement. Iran, for its part, will provide the maximum level of transparency and assurances that its nuclear program will remain peaceful. In exchange, it will gain relief from international sanctions and recognition of its right to enrichment under the NPT.

The next round (<http://news.yahoo.com/world-powers-iran-brace-second-day-nuclear-talks-022501206.html>) of talks is set for early November. The following principles are essential to closing a final deal:

1. The NPT must serve as a framework for Iran's nuclear ambitions.
2. Both parties should ensure that the agreement is reciprocal in the confidence-building measures it demands from either side and that it comprehensively details the step-by-step process necessary to end the crisis.
3. Iran must agree to a binding commitment not to acquire or manufacture nuclear weapons in compliance with the NPT and the fatwa issued by Ayatollah Khamenei. Such a commitment would include measures for transparency and for eliminating the possibility of breakout, as determined by the IAEA.
4. P5+1 must agree to a binding commitment to eliminate sanctions, recognize Iran's right to enrich uranium for civil purposes and cooperate with Iran on other peaceful nuclear technologies based on the NPT.

These ongoing talks have the potential to become a historic moment for the U.S., Iran and the international community. However, to ensure their progress, President Obama must do two things. First, he must resist pressure (<http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/>) from hawkish members of Congress, Israel and lobbying groups such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs and United Against Nuclear Iran. And second, he must include significant sanctions relief in the final agreement with Iran. While Iran and the international community are ready for a final deal, the question remains whether Obama has the will to buck the hawkish pro-Israel lobby and the political capital to end sanctions.

Opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of Al Jazeera America.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION



Post a new comment

POST

0 Comments

[RSS \(http://comments.us1.gigya.com/comments/rss/6311261/ajam/0fd519a9-4d11-4a4a-b298-50459069ae501382096173753\)](http://comments.us1.gigya.com/comments/rss/6311261/ajam/0fd519a9-4d11-4a4a-b298-50459069ae501382096173753) | [Subscribe](#)

On TV Now

News

9:00am ET / 6:00am PT

VIEW FULL SCHEDULE

Find Al Jazeera America on your TV

GO



PEOPLE

[Hassan Rouhani \(/topics/topic/people/Hassan-Rouhani.html\)](/topics/topic/people/Hassan-Rouhani.html)

TOPICS

[Nuclear weapons \(/topics/topic/issue/nuclear-weapons.html\)](/topics/topic/issue/nuclear-weapons.html)

[US-Iran Diplomacy \(/topics/topic/issue/us-iran-diplomacy.html\)](/topics/topic/issue/us-iran-diplomacy.html)

RELATED NEWS

[Syrian refugees make home in an abandoned Lebanese building \(/articles/2013/10/18/syrian-refugees-makehomeinabandonedlebanesebuilding.html\)](/articles/2013/10/18/syrian-refugees-makehomeinabandonedlebanesebuilding.html)

[Shia death toll rises in latest wave of Iraq attacks \(/articles/2013/10/18/shia-death-toll-risesinwaveofiraqattacks.html\)](/articles/2013/10/18/shia-death-toll-risesinwaveofiraqattacks.html)

[Wildfires destroy homes in Australia \(/articles/2013/10/18/wildfires-destroyhomesinaustralia.html\)](/articles/2013/10/18/wildfires-destroyhomesinaustralia.html)

[Syrian farmers recreate their country village in Lebanese city \(/articles/2013/10/18/syrian-farmers-refashiontheirvillageinlebanesecity.html\)](/articles/2013/10/18/syrian-farmers-refashiontheirvillageinlebanesecity.html)

OUR SHOWS

- [America Tonight \(/watch/shows/america-tonight.html\)](/watch/shows/america-tonight.html)

- [Real Money with Ali Velshi \(/watch/shows/real-money-with-alivelshi.html\)](/watch/shows/real-money-with-alivelshi.html)

- [THE STREAM \(/watch/shows/the-stream.html\)](/watch/shows/the-stream.html)

- [Consider This \(/watch/shows/consider-this.html\)](/watch/shows/consider-this.html)

- [Fault Lines \(/watch/shows/fault-lines.html\)](/watch/shows/fault-lines.html)

-
- [TechKnow \(/watch/shows/techknow.html\)](/watch/shows/techknow.html)
-
- [Inside Story \(/watch/shows/inside-story.html\)](/watch/shows/inside-story.html)
-
- [Al Jazeera America Presents \(/watch/shows/al-jazeera-america-presents.html\)](/watch/shows/al-jazeera-america-presents.html)
-



[NEWS \(/\)](#)

[VIDEO \(/WATCH.HTML\)](/WATCH.HTML)

[SHOWS \(/WATCH/SHOWS.HTML\)](/WATCH/SHOWS.HTML)

[SCHEDULE \(/WATCH/SCHEDULE.HTML\)](/WATCH/SCHEDULE.HTML)



[\(HTTP://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/ALJAZEERAAMERICA\)](http://www.facebook.com/aljazeeraamerica)



[\(HTTP://WWW.TWITTER.COM/AJAM\)](http://www.twitter.com/ajam)



[\(HTTPS://PLUS.GOOGLE.COM/+ALJAZEERAAMERICA/POSTS\)](https://plus.google.com/+aljazeeraamerica/posts)



[\(HTTP://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/ALJAZEERAAMERICA\)](http://www.youtube.com/aljazeeraamerica)

[About \(/tools/about.html\)](/tools/about.html)

[Our Mission, Vision and Values \(/tools/vision-mission-values.html\)](/tools/vision-mission-values.html)

[Leadership \(/tools/Leadership.html\)](/tools/Leadership.html)

[Code of Ethics \(/tools/code-of-ethics.html\)](/tools/code-of-ethics.html)

[Careers \(/tools/careers.html\)](/tools/careers.html)

[Contact Us \(/tools/contact.html\)](/tools/contact.html)

[Press Releases \(/tools/pressreleases.html\)](/tools/pressreleases.html)

[Advertise With Us \(/tools/advertise.html\)](/tools/advertise.html)

Visit Al Jazeera English (<http://www.aljazeera.com>)

Newsletter (</tools/newsletter.html>)

RSS (<http://america.aljazeera.com/content/ajam/articles.rss>)

Subscribe to YouTube Channel (<http://www.youtube.com/aljazeeraamerica>)

Privacy Policy (</tools/privacy.html>)

Terms of Use (</tools/terms.html>)

Request Al Jazeera America (</tools/getajam.html>)

FAQ (</tools/faq.html>)

Community Guidelines (</tools/community-guidelines.html>)

Sitemap (</tools/sitemap.html>)

© 2013 Al Jazeera America, LLC. All rights reserved.

CHANGE THE WAY YOU LOOK AT NEWS and THERE'S MORE TO IT are Trademarks of Al Jazeera America, LLC.

>