

U.S. and Iran Open Diplomatic Track

Sept. 30—In his public announcement of the short phone conversation between President Barack Obama and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani—the first contact between an American President and an Iranian leader since 1979—Obama announced that he had directed Secretary of State John Kerry to pursue active diplomacy with Iran, and added:

“I do believe that there is a basis for a resolution. Iran’s Supreme Leader has issued a fatwa against the development of nuclear weapons. President Rouhani has indicated that Iran will never develop nuclear weapons. I have made clear that we respect the right of the Iranian people to access peaceful nuclear energy in the context of Iran meeting its obligations. So the test will be meaningful, transparent, and verifiable actions, which can also bring relief from the comprehensive international sanctions.”

The U.S. President’s announcement came following a week in which the Iranian President and his foreign minister engaged in a number of public appearances with leading U.S. institutions and media outlets, where they put forward their own ideas for reaching a deal on the so-called nuclear issue with the United States. At the same time, a session of the UN negotiating team for Iran, the so-called P5+1 (the U.S., France, Great Britain, Russia, China, and Germany), held Sept. 26 in New York City, resulted in the scheduling of the next session with Iran for Oct. 15 in Geneva.

A meeting between Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif after the P5+1 meeting apparently led to an outline of a set of specific confidence-building steps to be taken by both sides, according to a senior U.S. intelligence source. The source reported that, while the contents of the Kerry-Zarif talks will be kept secret, some details are known. Kerry conveyed that the United States does not intend to carry out regime change in Iran. The United States is prepared to lift sanctions on a reciprocal basis for every step that Iran takes toward verifiably ending any nuclear weapons program. Zarif indicated that Iran would be prepared to provide details about their pre-2003 weaponization program, which has been completely shut down since

then. The United States would begin by lifting certain sanctions that cut off the flow of oil revenues to the Iranian government, and would take other measures that could immediately increase Iranian oil exports by 500,000 barrels per day.

Previous talks between Iran and the U.S. have been sabotaged from both sides. The Iranian side's opposition has roots in both ideological fanaticism, and in reactions to the repeated false accusations and vehement hostility from the West. On the U.S. side, sabotage has been carried out through both the murderous tightening of sanctions, and the refusal to admit Iran's right to nuclear enrichment, as part of its right to peaceful nuclear energy.

Thus, the open discussion by the U.S. of the potential for incrementally lifting sanctions, in response to Iranian actions on its nuclear program, and of Iran's inherent right to enrichment, represents a significant shift. For his part, Zarif not only reiterated Iran's commitment not to seek nuclear weapons, but also agreed that issues such as shutting down the Fordo reactor, expanding inspections, and renouncing 20% enrichment would be on the table.

Another indication of the seriousness of what both sides have called a slight thaw in a 35-year chill, is the fact that both the U.S. and France are discussing the possibility of Iran participating in the expected Geneva II conference on resolving the Syria crisis. Iran's involvement has long been advocated by the Russians.

There was immediate opposition in both the U.S. and Iran. The loudest protest has come from (de facto British puppet) Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who met in Washington with Obama today, and who is expected to stamp his feet during his address to the UN General Assembly on Oct. 1. But even Netanyahu does not have unanimity within his government, as a commentary by his Finance Minister Yair Lapid on Sept. 25 showed. Lapid criticized Netanyahu for demanding that the Israeli delegation walk out during the Iranian President's address to the United Nations.

In the U.S., the war faction is also blustering, but the actions of institutions such as the Council on Foreign Relations and the Asia Society, in hosting the top Iranian spokesmen, indicate that the momentum for negotiations is picking up steam. Whether Obama could be compelled to abjure the war path, is not at all clear.

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