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Iran nuclear: Kerry and Zarif meet at the UN



Mr Kerry (L) and Mr Zarif (R) met on the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York

The highest-level talks on Iran's nuclear programme for at least six years have been held at the United Nations in New York.

US Secretary of State John Kerry met Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

Diplomats from China, Russia, Britain, France and Germany were also present at the talks.

They agreed to hold substantive talks on the issue in the Swiss city of Geneva, beginning on 15 October.

The tone and spirit of the meeting was "extremely good," British Foreign Secretary William Hague said afterwards.

New Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has said he wants to reach a deal on the nuclear dispute in three to six months.

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Analysis



James Reynolds BBC Iran correspondent

In recent years, the travelling brigade of nuclear negotiators has seen much of the world. Air miles aside, they have achieved almost nothing of substance. Diplomats have held talks in Geneva, Istanbul, Baghdad, Moscow, and Almaty. The most recent meeting was in Kazakhstan's biggest city in April 2013.

At times it has been hard to describe the nuclear talks as actual negotiations. More accurately, they have often resembled parallel monologues. But the P5+1 is meeting a new Iranian team.

Iran's newly appointed Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, replaces Saed Jalili as chief negotiator. Mr Zarif will report directly to Iran's President Hassan Rouhani - himself a former nuclear negotiator.

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But the Americans have said there will be no major concessions until the Iranians take concrete steps to reassure the world they are not seeking nuclear weapons.

Iran reaches out

Earlier, President Rouhani told the UN General Assembly that no country should possess nuclear arms.

Iran has been negotiating over the nuclear issue since 2006 with the P5+1 - the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, plus Germany.

Since Mr Rouhani's election in June, Iranian officials have reached out to the West, saying they want to address concerns over Iran's nuclear programme.

On Tuesday, Mr Rouhani told the General Assembly that he was prepared to engage in "time-bound and results-oriented" talks.

On Thursday, he called for stricter controls on nuclear weapons as part of a global effort to eventually rid the world of them.

"No nation should possess nuclear weapons, since there are no right hands for these wrong weapons," he said, speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement at the General Assembly.

'Moderate course'



Hassan Rouhani: "The indefinite possession of nuclear weapons cannot be tolerated"

The P5+1 have asked Iran to halt production and stockpiling of uranium enriched to 20% - a step away from achieving a nuclear weapons capability.

They also demanded Iran shut down the Fordo underground enrichment facility.

In return, they offered to ease the sanctions that have severely affected Iran's economy.

US President Barack Obama has welcomed the new Iranian president's more "moderate course".

He told the UN on Tuesday that the US wanted to resolve the nuclear issue peacefully, but was determined to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.

Mr Rouhani has said he is fully empowered by Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei to negotiate on the issue.

The BBC's Bridget Kendall, who is at the UN, says President Rouhani has signalled a sharp departure from the foreign policy and the tone of his predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, whose bombastic pronouncements at the UN in the past resulted in walk-outs.

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Iran wants nuclear deal in months, says

President Rouhani



Iran insists its uranium enrichment work is for nuclear energy only

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani says he wants to reach a deal with world powers on Tehran's nuclear programme in three to six months.

He told the Washington Post he saw a resolution of the issue as a "beginning point" in easing US-Iran relations.

Mr Rouhani said he was fully empowered by Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, to negotiate on the issue.

On Thursday, Iran will hold talks with the P5+1 group of world powers on Tehran's uranium enrichment programme.

In a rare encounter between US and Iranian officials, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif will meet US Secretary of State John Kerry as well as diplomats from the UK, France, Russia, China and Germany in New York.

On Tuesday, Mr Rouhani told the UN General Assembly that he was prepared to engage in "time-bound and results-oriented" talks on the nuclear issue.

Iran has been negotiating with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, plus Germany, since 2006 about its nuclear programme.

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“Start Quote



After resolution of the nuclear issue there are no impossibilities in term of advancing other

things forward. Everything is possible after the settlement”

President Hassan Rouhani

The West suspects Tehran is trying to develop a nuclear weapon, a claim strongly denied by Iran.

'Everything is possible'

Asked about a timeframe for resolving the nuclear issue, [President Rouhani told the Washington Post](#): "The only way forward is for a timeline to be inserted into the negotiations that is short.

"The shorter it is the more beneficial it is to everyone. If it's three months that would be Iran's choice, if it's six months that's still good. It's a question of months not years."

Despite years of hostility between the US and Iran, Mr Rouhani said that if he and President Barack Obama got together they would both be "looking at the future".

"The notes and letters and exchanges between us are in that direction, and they will continue," he said.

"We need a beginning point. I think that is the nuclear issue."

He added: "After resolution of the nuclear issue there are no impossibilities in term of advancing other things forward. Everything is possible after the settlement."

President Obama has welcomed the new Iranian president's more "moderate course".

He said the US wanted to resolve the nuclear issue peacefully, but was determined to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.

On Wednesday, Mr Zarif met French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius on the sidelines of the General Assembly.

He said they "had a good discussion about the start of nuclear talks and the talks that will take place tomorrow".

Iran's economy has been badly affected by years of sanctions imposed by the UN and Western countries over the nuclear issue.

18 September 2013 Last updated at 23:11 GMT

Iran's Rouhani dismisses nuclear weapons fears



President Hassan Rouhani: "We have never sought or pursued a nuclear bomb and we are not going to do so" - Clip courtesy NBC

Iran's new President Hassan Rouhani has said that his country would never build nuclear weapons.

Mr Rouhani also told US broadcaster NBC he had full authority to negotiate over Tehran's controversial uranium enrichment programme with the West.

And he described a recent letter sent to him by US President Barack Obama as "positive and constructive".

Earlier, Iran reportedly freed 11 political prisoners including noted human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh.

The eight women and three men are said to also include the reformist politician Mohsen Aminzadeh.

In his election campaign earlier this year, Mr Rouhani promised to free political prisoners. He also pledged a more moderate and open approach in international affairs.

He is due to visit New York next week for a meeting of the UN General Assembly.



Iran insists its nuclear programme is solely for energy needs

The BBC's Iran correspondent James Reynolds says Mr Rouhani's decision to speak to a major US news organisation shows the importance to his government of reconciliation with Washington.

Iran is under UN and Western sanctions over its controversial nuclear programme. It says it is enriching uranium for peaceful purposes but the US and its allies suspect Iran's leaders of trying to build a nuclear weapon.

In an extract released ahead of the interview's full broadcast, the Iranian president says: "It could be subtle and tiny steps for a very important future."

The White House said on Wednesday that there had been an exchange of letters between President Obama and President Rouhani.

"In his letter the president indicated that the US is ready to resolve the nuclear issue in a way that allows Iran to demonstrate that its nuclear program is for exclusively peaceful purposes," said White House spokesman Jay Carney.

"The letter also conveyed the need to act with a sense of urgency to address this issue because, as we have long said, the window of opportunity for resolving this diplomatically is open, but it will not remain open indefinitely," he added.

The moves come a day after Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, gave the strongest sign yet of Iran's potential flexibility in future talks with the West.

In a meeting with Revolutionary Guards he said: "I don't oppose diplomacy. I am in favour of showing a champion's leniency. A wrestler may give way for tactical reasons, but should remember who is its opponent and enemy."

The head of Iran's nuclear agency told reporters in Tehran on Wednesday that he expected "a breakthrough" this year in settling the nuclear issue with the West.



Iran has not officially confirmed the release of

Nasrin Sotoudeh and Mohsen Aminzadeh

"We are very optimistic about the process that has started to resolve the nuclear issue," said Ali Akbar Salehi.

Earlier on Wednesday, Nasrin Sotoudeh's husband, Reza Khandan, said she had been dropped off at their home by prison officials on Wednesday evening.

He said she had been unaware that she was about to be released.

"I am happy that she joined us, particularly as our younger child is starting school for the first time," he told AP news agency.

"We are very happy but we will be happier if other prisoners are freed."

She was arrested in 2010 and jailed for six years on charges of acting against national security.

Ms Sotoudeh - winner of the European Parliament's 2012 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought - is a well-respected and outspoken human rights lawyer known for taking on high-profile political cases.

Hunger strike

During her captivity in Tehran's Evin jail, she went on hunger strike to protest against her prison conditions as well as sanctions imposed on her family.

Mohsen Aminzadeh, a former deputy foreign minister under President Mohammed Khatami, was jailed in 2010 for organising protests and spreading propaganda against the system.

He was a prominent supporter of the defeated presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi.

Analysts say that since President Rouhani's election, there have been growing calls for the release of political prisoners.

According to an investigation by the UK's Guardian newspaper, there are close to 800 political prisoners and prisoners of conscience in Iran.

They include journalists, lawyers, human rights activists, bloggers, feminists, Christian priests, Sunni clerics, the entire leadership of the Bahai faith in Iran, and others.

5 September 2013 Last updated at 15:34 GMT

Iran's Rouhani shifts responsibility for nuclear talks



Iran insists its nuclear programme is for peaceful ends

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani says the foreign ministry will take charge of nuclear negotiations with the West.

The move will give him more direct control over the talks, which have until now been conducted by the Supreme National Security Council.

The council is appointed by and answerable to the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei.

Correspondents say the change could herald a less hardline Iranian stance in the talks.

The change had been rumoured for several weeks.

Analysis

Bozorgmehr Sharafedin BBC Persian

Iran's new president is sending clear messages to the West that he is keen to solve deadlock in the nuclear talks. He has reshuffled top officials dealing with Iran's controversial atomic programme and appointed seasoned Western-educated diplomats who are known for being pragmatic technocrats.

That was why many were eagerly awaiting who would be appointed by the president as the Secretary of the National Security Council to lead the nuclear negotiations. But Hassan Rouhani surprised many by saying that the foreign ministry would take over future talks with world powers. That means Mr Rouhani believes Iran's nuclear stand-off with the West is simply a diplomatic rift that should be solved under his direct supervision.

The former President of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, was widely blamed for the way he handled the nuclear issue, but he said repeatedly that nuclear policies were decided by the National Security Council and ultimately by the Supreme Leader. Now by bringing the negotiations directly under his supervision, Hassan Rouhani is making a big gamble. If the talks fail again, he alone will shoulder the responsibility.

Western countries fear Iran wants to develop nuclear weapons - a claim it denies.

Since 2007, Iran's delegation at nuclear negotiations has been led by Saeed Jalili, who was seen

as highly loyal to Mr Khamenei.

Mr Jalili also stood as a presidential candidate at this year's election, on a platform perceived as espousing an aggressive policy abroad and limited political openness at home.

The move makes it likely that Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif will take over responsibility for talks.

Mr Zarif has experience living in and negotiating with the West, having previously been Iran's envoy to the UN, and is viewed as a political moderate.

'Lack of progress'

Last week, [a report from the UN's nuclear agency](#) said Iran had further boosted its capacity for uranium enrichment.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said Tehran has now installed more than 1,000 advanced centrifuges at its Natanz enrichment plant.

The IAEA says it will resume talks with Iran on 27 September - the first such negotiations since Mr Rouhani was elected.

In June, IAEA director general Yukiya Amano complained of a lack of progress during 10 rounds of negotiations between Iran and the so-called P5+1 - the US, UK, France, Russia, China plus Germany - despite intensified discussions.

The country has been the target of four rounds of UN sanctions and numerous UN Security Council resolutions calling on it to cease enrichment work amid fears it aims to develop nuclear weapons.

Iran has refused to obey, saying it intends to enrich only for power station fuel or other peaceful purposes.

28 August 2013 Last updated at 16:00 GMT

Iran has boosted nuclear capabilities, says IAEA



Iran has reportedly been making fuel assemblies for its Arak research reactor

Iran has further boosted its capacity for uranium enrichment, according to [a report from the UN's nuclear agency](#).

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) says Tehran has now installed more than 1,000 advanced centrifuges at its Natanz enrichment plant.

It comes as the IAEA says it will resume talks with Iran on 27 September - the first such negotiations since President Hassan Rouhani was elected.

The West fears Iran wants to develop nuclear weapons - a claim it denies.

The IAEA's quarterly report says there has not been much growth in the production of the most sensitive nuclear material - uranium enriched to 20%.



The Natanz facility is at the heart of disputes with the UN Security Council
Concerns

However it says Iran has installed 1,008 advanced IR2m centrifuges at its Natanz plant compared with almost 700 in May.

It also says the Islamic state has begun making nuclear fuel for its planned Arak heavy-water research reactor, although it has postponed the commissioning of the reactor beyond the planned first quarter of 2014.

The report again raised concerns about the Parchin site, a suspected nuclear weapons development facility that investigators have been unable to fully inspect.

It also says the IAEA has still not got answers on outstanding issues about Iran's nuclear programme, "including those related to possible military dimensions".

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Analysis

Kasra Naji BBC Persian

That Iran is racing ahead with its nuclear programme despite crippling international sanctions and the election of a relatively moderate president should come as no surprise.

Although many in Iran have pinned their hopes on Hassan Rouhani to improve the political atmosphere, it is generally understood he cannot change Iran's nuclear course without a green light from hardline Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

And there are no indications yet he has changed his mind.

Interestingly Iran has kept the stockpile of its 20% enriched uranium below 240kg - the red line Israel has said it will not tolerate Iran crossing.

Mr Rouhani has said he wants to start negotiating with world powers as soon as possible with a more transparent nuclear programme.

But it is clear that his vision is already facing problems at home. He has not been able to nominate the chief nuclear negotiator - arguably the most important member of his team. It seems Ayatollah Khamenei may have his own ideas about who might occupy this post.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has pledged to pursue "serious" talks with the West to ease tensions - and economic sanctions - over its controversial nuclear programme.

Lack of progress

Commentators point out that much of the latest technological developments will have taken place before Mr Rouhani took office on 3 August.

The country has been the target of four rounds of UN sanctions and numerous UN Security Council resolutions calling on it to cease enrichment work amid fears it aims to develop nuclear weapons.

Iran has refused to obey, saying it intends to enrich only for power station fuel or other peaceful purposes.

It already has about 18,000 centrifuges for uranium enrichment in operation but they are of the older IR1 type. The new IR2m machines are said to be faster and more effective.

Uranium enriched to 90% is required for a nuclear weapon.

Iran's talks with the IAEA were apparently held up by the country's presidential elections in June.

No negotiations between the two have taken place since the last quarterly report in May.

In June, IAEA director general Yukiya Amano complained of a lack of progress during 10 rounds of negotiations between Iran and the so-called P5+1 - the US, UK, France, Russia,

China plus Germany - despite intensified discussions.



6 August 2013 Last updated at 15:34 GMT

Iran's new leader Rouhani urges 'serious' nuclear talks

[Comments \(463\)](#)



President Rouhani: "The Iranian nation's intent is to interact respectfully with the whole world"

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Iran election

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- [Profile: Hassan Rouhani](#)
- [Glasgow student days](#)
- [Can Rouhani break nuclear impasse?](#)

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani has called for "serious and substantive" negotiations with the international community about its nuclear programme.

At the first news conference since his inauguration on Sunday, Mr Rouhani said he was confident both sides' concerns could be resolved in a short time.

But a solution could be reached solely through "talks, not threats", he added.

The US has said Mr Rouhani's presidency presents an opportunity for Iran to resolve the world's "deep concerns".

"Should this new government choose to engage substantively and seriously to meet its international obligations and find a peaceful solution to this issue, it will find a willing partner in the United States," it added.

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Analysis

Siavash Ardalan BBC Persian

President Rouhani's message to the US government was that if it wished to engage directly with Iran, it needed to distance itself from "pressure groups" inside Congress who were "bewildering" it. He repeatedly pushed the narrative that pro-Israeli lobby groups were pushing the White House into a corner with regards to its sanctions policy.

Mr Rouhani was short on details about how he intended to resolve the nuclear issue. He said suspending uranium enrichment was not on the agenda, but easing Western concerns over Iran's nuclear programme was, leaving open the possibility of more rigorous IAEA inspections.

He did not answer a question about who would have the final say over such issues. The Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, can choose to marginalise Mr Rouhani, as he did with former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

For now, the president can enjoy the platform and decide what questions he is asked. Surprisingly, no journalists from hard-line newspapers got their turn.

- [Key quotes: Rouhani news conference](#)

Western powers suspect Iran is seeking to develop nuclear weapons, but Tehran insists its nuclear programme is entirely peaceful.

Iran has repeatedly rejected demands by the so-called P5+1 - the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany - to halt uranium enrichment.

US behaviour 'contradictory'

Addressing domestic and international journalists in Tehran on Tuesday, Mr Rouhani stated that Iran's uranium enrichment programme was peaceful and legal and would continue. But he also said he was determined to resolve the long-running dispute.

"We are ready - seriously and without wasting time - to engage in serious and substantive talks with the other sides. I am certain the concerns of the two sides would be removed through talks in a short period of time.

"However, demands outside any legal framework or illogical and outdated demands will not be useful. We should deal with the issue through a realistic approach."

But he stressed that Iran's rights must be preserved, adding: "The basis of our agenda should be talks, not threats."

Mr Rouhani said the US still did not have a thorough and proper understanding of what was happening in Iran, and that it had not responded in an "appropriate and practical" manner after June's presidential election.

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Hassan Rouhani

- Born in 1948
- Islamic activist prior to Iran's 1979 Revolution
- Influential figure in Iran-Iraq War
- MP (1980-2000)

- National security adviser to the president (1989-97, 2000-05)
- Chief nuclear negotiator (2003-05)
- Regarded as a centrist politician but favoured by reformists
- [Iranian voices](#)
- [Profile: Hassan Rouhani](#)

"[Washington's] behaviour and words are contradictory," he said, adding that there was a "war-mongering group" there opposed to talks which was taking orders from a foreign country - presumably a reference to Israel.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov welcomed Mr Rouhani's call for negotiations.

"We absolutely agree with what he said. Resolving this, like any other issue, must be not on the basis of ultimatums, but based on a respectful attitude to a partner," he told reporters in Rome.

Earlier, Mr Lavrov's deputy said a new round of talks between Iran and the P5+1 must not be delayed and should take place by mid-September.

On Sunday, Mr Rouhani presented to Iran's parliament, the Majlis, a new cabinet dominated by technocrats who had previously served under a moderate former President, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

Mr Rouhani also vowed at Tuesday's news conference that his government would be accountable and act transparently.

He said he would keep his promise to "report on the progress made and the achievements, as well as the shortcomings and failings".

"Without the people's support, the government will have no chance of meeting its long-term goals," he warned.

Mr Rouhani has inherited a range of problems from his predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, including high inflation, diminishing revenues and foreign reserves, possible food shortages, as well as sanctions.