

U.S.-Greece Consultations on Iran  
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ELIAMEP, Athens, Greece  
July 28, 2008

Thank you very much. Thank you for hosting me. Thank you all for taking time on such a very nice day to come and join with me here. I'm here in Athens because we're working very closely with the government of Greece dealing with what is a real security challenge for both of our countries, and for Europe as a whole, and for NATO as a whole. And that is the nuclear ambitions of Iran. We have together, the US and Europe, together with Russia and China, made a very important offer to Iran; we are now waiting to see if they are prepared to take that offer, but in the meantime we are working together on a dual track strategy of which this offer is a critical part, to get a diplomatic solution. What I'd like to do is to talk a little bit more in depth about that, and then also exchange views with you. Because one of the things that I'm aware of, is that Greece is a country close to the Middle East, closer to Iran than certainly the United States is, and I think many of you may have insights that I would be interested in learning as we develop our policy.

We see Iran's nuclear ambitions as a major challenge, not because a nuclear-armed Iran would necessarily ever use a nuclear weapon, but because we see Iran today as a major challenge in the Middle East: a major sponsor of terrorism, an opponent to the Middle East peace process, a country that is fomenting insurgency and violence, in places like Lebanon and Iraq. And we worry about how Iran's leadership would act if they actually had access to nuclear weapons.

Again, we're not worried they would necessarily use those weapons, but we are worried that they might feel much more emboldened in their regional aspirations, much more emboldened in their use of terrorism, and much more emboldened in trying to disrupt and prevent Middle East peace. And we're also worried about what countries around Iran [might do], in terms of also deciding to pursue nuclear weapons, or at least a nuclear weapons capability. And I think we all can agree that a nuclear arms race in the Middle East would be a very bad thing. The Middle East, as we all know, is dangerous enough without this. With a nuclear arms race, the Middle East could be that much more dangerous for both of our countries and for the region and for Europe as a whole.

So, our goal, and this is a goal we share with the government of Greece and other governments in Europe, is to get a diplomatic settlement, which means convincing the leaders in Iran to abandon their pursuit of those technologies they need if they want to build a nuclear weapon. Primarily this means uranium enrichment in the short term; in the longer term it means work on a heavy water reactor that would allow them to produce plutonium. These are capabilities that Iran does not need for a civil program. But these are capabilities that Iran needs if it wants to build nuclear weapons. So our goal is to convince the leadership in Iran to change course. And we're pursuing that goal through a dual track strategy that our countries share, and [pursuing it] together.

The first track is the offered negotiations. The second track is sanctions, isolation. And the two have to go hand in hand if we're going to be successful in our diplomatic endeavor. Let me talk first about the first track, the offered negotiations. Six weeks ago, Javier Solana went to Teheran and he delivered a very generous proposal on behalf of Europe, the United States, Russia and China. And this proposal build upon an earlier proposal in 2006, but also went beyond it. It went beyond it in terms of recognizing Iran's security concerns and seeking to address them. It went beyond in talking about what type of support could be provided to Iran's civil nuclear program. Here I should be clear: neither of our countries have any problem with Iran pursuing nuclear technologies for peaceful purposes. What worries us is their pursuit of sensitive technologies that they don't need for peaceful purposes but they could be diverted to build bombs.

So, this offer was put on the table. The cover note on that offer included signatures from six Foreign Ministers, and one of those was my Foreign Minister, Condoleezza Rice. And this was meant to send a signal to Iran which I think they understood. They understood that this was an offer, not just from Europe, not just from Russia, not just from China, but also from the US, that the US was prepared to sit down and enter into negotiations on the basis of this offer, if Iran does one simple thing, and that's to suspend its uranium enrichment activities.

Why is suspension so important? There are three reasons why suspension of uranium enrichment is important. First, it's a requirement of the Security Council. This was something that at first the IAEA Board of Governors called on Iran to do, and then when they refused to do it, the Security Council required them to do it. The Security Council required it as a means for Iran to regain international confidence. Particularly, again, since Iran does not need to enrich uranium for a civil nuclear program.

They have one reactor under construction, at Bushere, with the help of Russia. We support that. Russia has already provided the fuel for that reactor; they do not need to enrich uranium for the reactor at Bushere. They have no other reactors under construction. They have plans to go with other reactors, but those reactors will not come on line for at least a decade and so, it makes absolutely no sense that Iran is rushing to enrich uranium for nuclear power plants it does not have. And in fact that only compounds our concern that they want the ability to enrich uranium because it can also be used to produce highly enriched uranium for nuclear weapons. So the Security Council required a suspension. We think it's important for our negotiating posture that we support that. We cannot let Iran ignore the Security Council requirement, and have us ignored as well.

Secondly, we think it's important that Iran suspend uranium enrichment because they're working to master the technology to enrich uranium. And with that technology our concern is that they could build new centrifuges and install them in a location that we don't even know about. And in fact, their current work at Natanz, their declared centrifuge facility in violation of Security Council resolutions, gives them both the technology and the cover to pursue a covert nuclear enrichment capability. So we think we need to deny them, we need to see through suspension to try to deny them, that technology and cover for a covert program.

Third, we think suspension is important because we want a clear signal that they're prepared to negotiate seriously. In the past Iran has used negotiations to buy time to continue forward with their program, to try to take off international pressure. Before we start negotiations, before the US joins those negotiations, we need a clear signal of good will and seriousness of intent. And suspension is what would provide that.

So, the one track of our dual track strategy is to try to get Iran into negotiations. We put a major offer on the table. A week ago, in Geneva, Javier Solana went to receive the response and Secretary Rice sent her Political Director, Under Secretary Bill Burns with him, again to send a clear signal: that we are ready to be part of the negotiations, that we support this offer. The response, unfortunately, was disappointing. I was not present in Geneva, but I was told afterwards that Dr. Jalili, who is the Iranian negotiator, gave a long, rambling discourse on Iranian history and culture. Now, we respect Iranian history and culture, but that was not the purpose of the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to hear whether or not Iran was ready to seriously pursue this offer. And in fact we've given them a route to negotiations, that's meant to help them to get into the negotiations.

We've suggested that the negotiation process could start with a freeze for a freeze. This is the idea of their freezing the installation of additional centrifuges for uranium enrichment. And at the same time the Security Council would freeze additional sanctions; that we put no additional sanctions in place. This would provide a six-week period for a pre-negotiation. For Dr. Solana and for the Iranians to start talking about what the nature of an agreement would look like. And once those six weeks were out, we would then transition into a suspension for a suspension, meaning Iran would suspend all of its uranium enrichment activities and the Security Council would suspend existing sanctions, and then negotiations could begin. So, we've given Iran an opportunity for negotiations, we've given them a route into the negotiations they haven't taken yet. And Dr. Solana a week ago [on July 19] gave them an additional two weeks so we can see if they're serious.

In the meantime, there's a second track to our dual track strategy and that second track is the sanctions track. The Security Council has already passed a number of resolutions imposing sanctions. The US and Europe have individually put additional sanctions in place. We welcome the fact that Europe last month sanctioned a number of individual entities, a bank; the US did something similar. We welcome the fact that Europe right now is looking at additional measures it could take to implement [UN Security Council] resolution 1803.

It's important that the Iranian leadership understand that the second track, the sanctions track, continues in parallel to the negotiations track. Because we believe that only faced with the prospect of increasing sanctions and increasing isolation will Iran be prepared to actually start serious negotiations rather than just using them to buy time. I think if we're going to be successful in this endeavor we need to continue to show the very good unity that there has been between the US and Europe in this regard.

I'm very pleased to report from where I sit in Vienna the US and European Union countries are [together] like this. This is not always the case in our relationships, but this is one where our relationship is like this. I think because of that we've been able

to bring in Russia with us, we've been able to bring China with us -- not always as fast or as far as we'd like, but in a very significant way. We've been able to bring other countries with us. And we've been able to try to demonstrate to Iran that this is not some type of dispute between Iran and the US, but this is actually a dispute between Iran's leadership and the rest of the world. And I think that type of signal is critically important if we're going to be successful in getting a diplomatic solution.

Let me stop at that point and I'm interested in hearing your thoughts and engaging in a bit of a discussion with you.