

Iran Nuclear Negotiations: What's Next After Moscow?

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June 28, 2012

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Iran Nuclear Brief

Analysis from the "Solving the Iranian Nuclear Puzzle" Briefing Series

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By GREG THIELMANN
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On June 19, Iran concluded the third round of talks on its nuclear program in as many months, this time in Moscow, with senior officials of the six powers – the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia, and China. Although there were strong incentives for the six to secure limits on Iran's most worrisome stockpiles of enriched uranium and for Iran to avoid an impending tightening of economic sanction, no breakthrough was achieved by the end of the latest round. But neither did diplomatic dialogue come to an end. The sides reached agreement to meet again at a technical level within two weeks in Istanbul, to be followed by renewed contact between the senior negotiators. The following analysis looks at why these talks have been so difficult and what can be expected going forward.

HIGHLIGHTS

- After seven a seven-year hiatus, Iran is finally discussing at a senior political level constraints on its nuclear program.
 - However, three rounds of negotiations between the six powers and Iran have revealed "significant gaps" in the substance of the sides' positions according to Catherine Ashton, chief of the six power delegation, leaving the future of the talks uncertain.
- Pressure is building to find a way out of the Iran nuclear crisis:
 - With continuing enrichment of uranium at ever higher levels and inadequate monitoring of Iranian nuclear activities, the time Iran would need to break out of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), if it chose to do so, is shrinking.
 - With UN Security Council sanctions in place and unilateral sanctions escalating, Iran is paying an increasingly steep economic and diplomatic price.
- Israel, the region's only nuclear weapons state, continues to threaten a military attack unless Iran accepts strict limits on its nuclear activities before entering a "zone of immunity" from such attacks.
 - Prodded by Israel and the U.S. Congress in an election year, the Obama Administration has painted a bright red line across any Iranian move to actually build a bomb.
- With no decision yet in Tehran on building nuclear weapons and no Iranian capability to quickly achieve an operational nuclear arsenal, there is still time for a negotiated solution – but the time is limited.
- If both war and Iranian nuclear weapons are to be prevented, the parties will have to compromise and concentrate initially on addressing the most urgent issue – stopping and reversing the production and stockpiling of 20 percent-enriched uranium.
 - Realism rather than maximalism will need to be the hallmark of positions advanced in order to

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Presentations from earlier briefings in the ACA "Solving the Iranian Nuclear Puzzle" series are available from the ACA [here](#).

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