



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on April 10, 2012

Mixed Signals Out of Iran Prior to Nuclear Talks

The world waits with bated breath for international talks to begin on Friday between Iran and the United States, Britain, France, China, Russia, and Germany in the hopes that the discussions will help put an end to speculation on the possibility of an all-out war in the Middle East. While some ponder whether anything but total destruction of the Iranian nuclear facilities will put Israelis' minds at ease, there is some hope that [compromise](#) is possible after Iran's nuclear chief gave indication that Tehran's envoys may bring a compromise to nuclear talks.



Nuclear talks will [resume](#) this week in Turkey between Iran and six world powers, reported the U.N. nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency.

"We have agreed with Iran to launch a new round of talks in Istanbul on 14 April," said International Atomic Energy Agency spokesman Michael Mann in a statement. "We are very pleased that these talks, which will address the international community's concerns on the Iranian nuclear programme, are going ahead after more than one year since we last met."

Originally the countries could not agree on where to hold the talks, as Iran asserts Turkey is not a neutral site given its stance on the crisis in Syria, Iran's closest ally, and Turkey's support for a NATO shield to block Iranian missiles. Eventually, however, Iran agreed to meet in Istanbul.

With the talks scheduled to begin on Friday, Fox News reported that Iran's nuclear chief signaled the possibility that the compromise will involve a stop to producing its highly enriched uranium without completely abandoning its ability to make nuclear fuel. Iran would stop production of its 20-percent enriched uranium, which is the level of enriched uranium necessary for a medical nuclear reactor, but continue to enrich uranium to 3.5 percent enriched uranium for the purposes of power generation.

Whether that is a generous enough compromise, however, remains uncertain. Fox News writes:

But the proposal described by Iran's nuclear chief, Fereidoun Abbasi, may not go far enough to satisfy the West because it would leave the higher enriched uranium still in Tehran's hands rather than transferred outside the country.

Iran contends that it does in fact have a right to enrich uranium under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation treaty in order to create nuclear fuel.

The enrichment question is virtually the key issue in this debate, however. Though uranium must be enriched to more than 90 percent in order to be used for a nuclear weapon, there have been concerns that Iran's enrichment of uranium to 20 percent-levels indicates it could create nuclear weapons capabilities.

But according to Abbasi, Iran does not seek to enrich beyond 20 percent. "The job is being carried out based on need," he said. "When the need is met, we will decrease production and it is even possible to



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completely reverse to only 3.5 percent” enrichment levels.

Still, it remains unclear whether Abbasi’s assertions will be the official stance of the Iranian regime, but Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar has indicated that he has hopes that the international talks will lead to progress. “We will honestly try to have the two sides conclude with a win-win situation in which Iran achieves its rights while removing concerns of five-plus-one group,” he said.

But Iran’s Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi was quoted as saying that Iran would not accept preconditions for the discussions. “Setting conditions before the meeting means drawing conclusions, which is completely meaningless, and none of the parties will accept conditions set before the talks,” the Iranian parliamentary news agency quoted the Minister as saying, according to *Reuters*.

Yukiya Amano, director general of the IAEA, states that there are indications that Iran is misleading the world on its nuclear ambitions. “Iran is not telling us everything. That is my impression. We are asking Iran to engage with us proactively, and Iran has a case to answer,” said Yukiya Amano.

Israel has made similar assertions; therefore, whether the potential compromise offered by Iran is sufficient enough to assuage Israeli concerns is debatable. “Containment is not a policy option from the Israeli perspective,” says Col. Sam Gardiner, a retired U.S. Air Force Colonel and war game specialist. “The more it becomes a serious policy option for the United States, the more Israel will be pushed to take matters into its own hands.”

The *New York Times* [reports](#) that one demand from the Obama administration would be “a halt in the production of uranium fuel that is considered just a few steps from bomb grade, and a stop to the shipment of existing stockpiles of that fuel out of the country.”

Likewise, Western powers are expected to demand the immediate closure and dismantling of a recently completed nuclear facility under Fordo mountain.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated last month that Israel reserved the right to defend itself from the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran. Netanyahu said on Sunday “One, stop all enrichment of uranium, both 20% and 3%. Two, move all enriched material out of Iran’s territory; it is possible to give them alternative material for peaceful purposes. Three, dismantle the illegal facility in Qom.” “Naturally, we will monitor the talks to see that Iran does not use them in order to deceive the world and continue with its nuclear program,” Netanyahu said.

But Israel may be in less of a position to be unbending, according to the military journal *Jane’s Defense Weekly*, which conducted a study that determined an Israeli-led attack on Iranian nuclear facilities would be more difficult than anticipated. The study conducted in the journal indicates that Israel would be forced to implement high-risk choices, such as long range missile bombardment or a special forces raid on the ground. The study concludes that Israel would face “substantial difficulties” in launching such missions. “The significant distances involved and hardened features of Iran’s nuclear facilities make any ‘massive surprise’ aerial attack a very high-risk operation for Israel to undertake on its own,” *Jane’s* concluded in a recent study.

The study explains that despite Israel’s powerful air force, it would face difficulties mounting the type of complex strikes needed to cause significant impact to Iran’s nuclear plants, as they are well protected.

There have no responses from any of the Western powers to the assertions made by Abbasi or Salehi.

Meanwhile, oil prices fell more than 1 percent on Monday as a result of revived talks on Iran’s nuclear program. *Reuters* explains, “The resumption of talks that collapsed more than a year ago tempered the



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level of worry at least about an immediate supply disruption or conflict in the region.”

“If there are some good vibrations from the Iranian talks and they don’t immediately break down, the markets will have hopes that the European Union may lighten the sanctions on Iran, at least on the insurance front,” said Olivier Jakob from Petromatrix. “At the moment, the sanctions are having a much stronger impact than anticipated, mostly through insurance, which could lead to a full interruption of Iranian oil flows,” he added.



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