



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on October 28, 2013

UN Nuclear “Watchdog” Agency and Iran Continue Talks

Speaking during talks conducted in Vienna by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) — the UN’s nuclear watchdog — Iran’s Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said on October 28 that his country will offer a “new approach” toward settling the ongoing controversy over its nuclear fuel enrichment program.



[VOA News reported](#) that Araqchi expressed hope that a meeting of the minds with IAEA officials is within reach.

“It is time to take a new approach to resolve questions between Iran and the IAEA and look to the future for further cooperation in order to ensure the peaceful nature of Iran’s nuclear program, which is peaceful and will remain peaceful forever,” he said. “And we hope that the agency can play a very constructive role to ensure that the world will remain peaceful.”

The IAEA’s director general, Yukiya Amano, expressed his view that the talks presented an opportunity to move forward with negotiations. “Today’s meeting is a very important opportunity for us to discuss ways forward to address all the outstanding issues regarding Iran’s nuclear program,” Amano said. “These are longstanding and complicated issues. It is very important for all of us that we can show concrete progress.”

The UN Security Council has passed a number of resolutions imposing [sanctions on Iran](#), following a report by the IAEA’s Board of Governors charging Iran’s alleged non-compliance with its safeguards agreement. The first of these, UN Security Council Resolution 1696, which was passed on July 31, 2006, demanded that Iran suspend all nuclear enrichment-related and reprocessing activities and threatened sanctions against the country. Security Council Resolution 1737, which passed on December 23, 2006, demanded that Iran suspend enrichment-related and reprocessing activities and cooperate with the IAEA, imposed sanctions banning the supply of nuclear-related materials and technology, and froze the assets of key individuals and companies related to the program. Security Council Resolution 1747, passed on March 24, 2007, imposed an arms embargo and expanded the freeze on Iranian assets. Security Council Resolution 1803, passed on March 3, 2008, extended the asset freezes and called upon states to monitor the activities of Iranian banks, inspect Iranian ships and aircraft, and to monitor the movement of individuals involved with the program through their territory.

However, when Amano assumed his post at IAEA in 2009, he said there was no evidence in the IAEA documents that revealed that Iran was seeking to develop nuclear weapons, causing wonder that the IAEA would single out Iran, when several other nations actually possess nuclear weapons. These include not only the major powers, the United States, Great Britain, France, Russia, and China, but also India, Pakistan, North Korea, and Israel.

[Reuters reported](#) on October 28 that diplomatic observers of Monday’s Vienna talks were optimistic that Iran might soon offer some concessions, including the possibility that it might allow UN inspectors to visit its Parchin military base southeast of Tehran — which has long been a priority goal for the IAEA.



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The major powers (the United States, Russia, China, France, Germany, and Britain — known as the P5+1) have demanded an end to what they describe as “Iran’s higher-grade enrichment of uranium,” notes the Reuters report, adding that “refining uranium to 20 percent is sensitive as it is a relatively short technical step to raise that to the 90 percent needed for making a nuclear weapon.”

The above assertion was made word-for-word in another [Reuters report](#) a day earlier that quoted a statement made on October 26 by Alaeddin Boroujerdi, the head of the Iranian parliament’s national security and foreign policy committee, that “enrichment to 20 percent is continuing.”

Both reports insisted that increasing the enrichment of uranium from 20 percent to 90 percent “is a relatively short technical step,” and suggest that Iran is increasing its stockpile of 20-percent uranium.

There is disagreement, however, about how difficult it would be for Iran (or another nation) to enhance 20-percent enriched uranium to weapons-grade levels. There is also an apparent widespread unawareness that Iran is converting even much of its 20-percent uranium into fuel plates used for medical research. In his article, “[IAEA Report Shows Iran Reduced Its Breakout Capacity](#),” veteran journalist Gareth Porter states:

The reduction in the amount of 20-percent enriched uranium in the Iranian stockpile that could be used to enrich to weapons grade is the result of a major acceleration in the fabrication of fuel plates for the Tehran Research Reactor, which needs 20-percent enriched uranium to produce medical isotopes.

That higher level enriched uranium has been the main focus of U.S. diplomatic demands on Iran ever since 2009, on the ground that it represents the greatest threat of an Iranian move to obtain a nuclear weapon capability.

When 20-percent uranium is used to make fuel plates, however, it is very difficult to convert it back to a form that can [be] enriched to weapons grade levels.

Porter further charges that most media reports about Iran’s nuclear fuel enrichment programs are unnecessarily alarmist, writing:

When data in the Aug. 30 IAEA report on the “inventory” of 20-percent enriched uranium is collated with comparable data in the May 25 IAEA report, it shows that Iran is further from having a breakout capability than it was three months earlier....

But although that reduction of the stockpile of enriched uranium of greatest concern to the United States was the real significance of the new report, it was not conveyed by the headlines and leads in news media coverage. Those stories focused instead on the fact that production of 20-percent enriched uranium had increased, and that the number of centrifuges at the underground facility at Fordow had doubled.

“Nobody has put out the story that their stockpile is shrinking,” said Joe Cirincione, president of the Ploughshares Fund and a leading independent specialist on nuclear weapons policy, in an interview with IPS.

Despite the fact the Iran’s current nuclear enrichment program may pose little threat to other nations, the pressure on the Islamic republic shows little sign of relenting. An article in the [Jerusalem Post](#) on October 27 quoted a statement made by Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to his cabinet that day:

This [halting Iran’s nuclear program] is vital and important for the security of Israel and, in my



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view, the peace of the world. Then certainly we are willing to stand alone in the face of world opinion or changing fashion.

But in fact we are not alone because most, if not all leaders, those with whom I have spoken, agree with us.

There are those who say so fully and there are those who whisper and there are those who say so privately. But everyone understands that Iran cannot be allowed to retain the ability to be within reach of nuclear weapons.

Netanyahu also said that the debate about how much 20-percent enriched uranium Iran should be allowed to stockpile was “unimportant” because the standard of 20 percent was no longer a sign of whether Iran would have nuclear military capacity. “The importance of the issue became superfluous in the wake of the technological improvements that allow Iran to enrich uranium from 3.5 percent to 90 percent in a number of weeks,” Netanyahu asserted.

Netanyahu did not say whether he advocated restricting Iran’s stockpile of 3.5-percent enriched uranium as well.

[Israel is believed to possess a stockpile of nuclear weapons](#), and by the late 1990s, the U.S. intelligence community estimated that Israel possessed between 75 and 130 warheads. Israel is also believed to have second-strike abilities in the form of its submarine fleet and its nuclear-capable ballistic missiles, which can be launched from hardened, nuclear-strike-resistant underground silos.

During the 2012 presidential campaign, [candidate Ron Paul](#) said in an interview with CNN’s John King: “There is no evidence whatsoever that the Iranians have or are on the verge of getting a nuclear weapon, according to our own military people, our own CIA, according to the UN.”



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