"Too soon for progress’ as
Iran nuclear talks kick off

Tehran holds bilateral negotiations on sidelines with US, EU • PM: Don’t ease up on sanctions now • Iran presents PowerPoint presentation to Western leaders

By MICHAEL WILNER
in Washington
and TOVAH LAZAROFF

The United States and Iran held a bilateral meeting about the latter’s nuclear arms program on the sidelines of Tuesday’s six-party talks in Geneva, which sought to prevent Tehran from producing such weapons.

The two countries first crossed the “bilateral Rubicon” during the UN General Assembly, which marked the first high-level meeting between the two countries since 1979.

Still, on Tuesday the US and Europe warned against expectations for a quick diplomatic solution to the two-day parley.

"We certainly want to make clear that no one – despite the positive signs that we've seen – no one should expect a breakthrough overnight," White House press secretary Jay Carney said as he described the first day of the two-day gathering.

“Although we appreciate the recent change in tone from the Iranian government on this issue, we will be looking for specific steps that address core issues.”

The Iranian delegation presented the six world powers in Geneva on Tuesday with a PowerPoint presentation they hoped would allay international concerns enough to ease some of the economic sanctions against their country.

In light of a conciliatory tone of Iran, diplomats from the US, Russia, China, France, the UK and Germany entered the talks with a sense of optimism, even as they remained cautious at the end of the day.

The negotiations focused on highly technical issues beyond the knowledge of most diplomats in the room, State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki told reporters on Tuesday as she described the Iranian presentation.

"I don’t think we characterize it as a breakthrough at this stage," Psaki said, telling reporters to expect a more expansive assessment of their progress after the round of talks end on Wednesday.

"Having technical discussions for the first time at this level is certainly where things stand," she added.

The Iranians came into talks publicly expressing hopes for a diplomatic framework and timelines moving forward, but did not provide the P5+1 with a proposal before talks began.

On the sidelines of the talks, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif held a bilateral meeting with EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton.

Undersecretary of state for political affairs Wendy Sherman and members of the US delegation held an hourlong bilateral meeting with Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and his staff on Tuesday, a senior State Department official said.

"The discussion was useful, and we look forward to continuing our discussions in tomorrow's meetings with the full P5+1 and Iran," the official said.

An official characterized the tone of the meeting as “optimistic.”

Araghchi cautioned it was too early to say whether the Islamic Republic had made significant concessions.

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ANALYSIS

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Without such a deal in the next two days, sources tell The Jerusalem Post to expect Senate action "in short order" over the next six weeks, with Senate leadership on board for a full vote on harsh new legislation by the end of the year.

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Progress on Tuesday. "It's too soon to judge," he said when asked whether the two sides were any closer to resolving a stalemate that has hindered the risk of a new Middle East war.

Michael Mann, a spokesman for Ashton, said while "it was useful to hear from the Iranian side what they envisage... We do need to hear more detail from the Iranian side."

Mann told BBC Persian television there is still an awful lot of work to be done. We have had a certain amount of information from the Iranian side, and we will hope to get more detail from them tomorrow.

Earlier in the day, he tweeted that for the first time, very detailed technical discussions continued this afternoon between the [six powers] and Iran on the Iranian nuclear program. A senior administration official told journalists on Thursday that the White House believed the US needs to put time on the clock for negotiations to succeed.

"It really takes not just one of us sitting here, but it takes a whole army, virtually, of technicians to figure out a whole variety of things," the official said.

"Now the question is, will both sides agree to sit down again, the Roshan team, follow up with their words with actions?" Paki said. "That is the conversion happening on the ground."

National Security Council spokeswoman Bernadette Meehan told The Jerusalem Post that US-led sanctions had compelled Iran to the negotiating table in Geneva.

"This administration continues to enforce a comprehensive set of international sanctions against the Iranian regime," Meehan said.

"There is no doubt that our efforts to apply economic pressure on Iran through sanctions have gotten us where we are today - to have the opportunity to test Iranian intentions to seek an enduring diplomatic solution."

The senior official told reporters that any sanctions relief would have to be "proportional to what Iran puts on the table," adding that Iran was likely to quibble with the definition of "proportional" in this context.

Before the meeting, Ashton said, "I hope that what we will have here is a very productive two days, an opportunity to explore both the proposals and ideas that we have put on the table, but also ideas that are coming from Iran. We have come here with cautious optimism, but a real sense of determination.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu spent his day in Israel continuing to warn the international powers not to accept anything less than the full dismantling of Iran's nuclear program and removing enriched uranium from the country before agreeing to ease sanctions against Tehran.

He repeated his message during a meeting with the prime minister of Malta, Joseph Muscat, and at a special ceremony in the Knesset to mark the 40th anniversary of the Yom Kippur War.

In the evening, he traveled to the Golan Heights, where he spoke with Deputy Chief of Staff Maj.-Gen. Gadi Eisenkot and OC Northern Command Maj.-Gen Yair Golan.

"Today also marks the start of talks between Iran and the major powers, the P5+1, the prime minister said. "I think that it would be an historic mistake to give Iran discounts and ease up on it without having to dismantile the nuclear capability that it is building. Iran is now on the ropes, and it is possible to use the sanctions at full strength in order to achieve the desired result. I hope that the international community does this, and I call upon it to do so."

He added to Iran if he talked about the lessons learned from the Yom Kippur War and appeared to send them a warning that Israel would not be prepared to use force if necessary.

"I think that we have three main lessons from this war: The first lesson is not to deride the enemy. The second is to move in advance on a preemptive strike against an immediate, grave, and present danger, a third lesson is the importance of buffer zones, Netanyahu said.

In the Knesset, he added that although a preemptive attack was not always necessary, "there are situations in which the international reaction to such a step is not equal to the price in blood that we will pay if we absorb strategic attack and have to respond later, maybe too late."

The prime minister said that "preemptive war is one of the hardest decisions a government has to make, to try to prove what would happen if there was no action."

In an unusual move earlier in the day, the Security Cabinet issued a lengthy statement on the importance of maintaining sanctions. The cabinet noted it "requests a statement from the cabinet to renew sanctions, to prevent new infrastructure projects in Iran, and to push the Post 'Don't Monday.' But enrichment suspension remained, while military threats remain on the table.

The US legislation would no longer allow the White House to exempt companies in all sanctions programs from financial prosecution for buying Iranian oil. A similar resolution would empower the National Security Council through new sanctions on Iran to be imposed to as low as $20 billion in blocked funds. Raisi also warned, "The US has been so empowered to craft foreign policy as it has regarding Libya, to work in concert with the Obama administration to pass historic financial penalties."

"Congress has been an important supporter of efforts to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon," National Security Council spokeswoman Bernadette Meehan told The Post.

"Should a deal be reached with Tehran, the president could lift a majority of the sanctions currently in place, without congressional approval."

"We will continue our close consultation with the Congress, as we have in the past, so that any international deal is discussed with the American people."

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such a dire position that it will be willing to give up its regional dominance and a deterrent against attack? Nor has the regime been able to withstand international sanctions and pressure on the way to the breakout into much worse economic situation than Iran. It had an estimated GDP of $400 billion in 2011, per capita GDP of $1,800, and exports of around $56b. Iran is light years ahead economically. It had an esti- mated 2012 GDP of $1.01b, per capita GDP of $13,300, and exports of around $56b."

As for the and, a report on Iranian politics at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, "Iran is not willing to negotiate that he does not like the comparison with North Korea, as he has been frequently and improperly by a dictator, it is less a one-man show because the Supreme Leader, ayatollah Ali Khamenei needs the backing of various factions, and because the US never gets by buying their loyalty.

"The Iranian Revolution- ary Guard is as well "Iran, not the Guard," said Javadfar, adding that its members are not ready to pull the elite.

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not rushing to a deal.

“They are playing the same game they always do, taking advantage of the West’s incredibly deep-seated need to believe: First they fire off a whiff of what sounds vaguely – and only to the completely untrained ear – like moderation, then, after the unbelievably gullible international community gets all excited, they begin back-tracking, rephrasing, imperceptibly – or even perceptibly – changing their tune, which isn’t that hard, because they never really offered anything substantial in any definitive fashion in the first place,” said Maghen.

The West fails for the same negotiating ploy every time, he said. “It truly boggles the mind.”

In a lecture at a conference held by the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies last week at Bar-Ilan University, Maghen implied that cultural differences give Iran the advantage in negotiations.

“Iran knows that in the West people say what they think, while in the Middle East, they say the opposite,” he said. “The US has no chance with the Iranians, once they start talking they have already lost.”

And speaking to the Post he asked, even if Iran does rush for a deal, “What kind of deal do you think you are getting? Remember the most recent ‘deal’ that Bashar Assad ‘rushed’ into?”

Maghen said that the deal saw Assad forking over all of his chemical weapons for destruction – how do they know that he has revealed to them all the stockpiles? They have Bashar’s word, and Putin’s!

“That is the kind of deal that the West will be able to broker with Iran, if at all, and if I were [President Hassan] Rouhani or Khamenei, I would ‘rush’ to it as fast as my legs could carry me,” Maghen said.