



Iran Agrees To Draft Deal On Uranium Supplies

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Iran has tentatively agreed to a draft proposal aimed at easing concerns over its nuclear program, Iranian officials and the U.N. atomic watchdog agency said Wednesday after three days of intense negotiations.

The draft deal, reached in Vienna, would strip Tehran of three-quarters of the radioactive fuel it would need to make a nuclear weapon. If approved, the majority of Iran's declared stockpile of low-enriched uranium would be shipped to Russia to be processed for a medical research reactor.

International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohammed ElBaradei said representatives from Iran, Russia, the United States and France have signed off on the draft, which must be formally approved by all parties — something he hopes will happen by Friday.

"I have circulated a draft agreement that in my judgment reflects a balanced approach to how to move forward," ElBaradei told reporters.

Iran's chief delegate, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, praised the draft, saying it was "on the right track," while emphasizing that senior Iranian officials in Tehran still had to sign off on it.

"We have to thoroughly study this text and also [need] further elaboration in capitals," Soltanieh told reporters.

ElBaradei said the draft agreement "is a very important confidence-building measure that can defuse a crisis that has been building for years and open the way for negotiation."

He gave no further details of the draft but expressed hope that it could open the way for normalization of relations between Iran and the international community.

"Everybody who participated at the meeting was trying to look at the future, not at the past, trying to heal the wounds," EIBaradei said.

But Iran's cooperation has proved elusive in the recent past. Although the Vienna deal is meant to build on a similar agreement struck in Geneva on Oct. 1, Tehran has expressed reluctance to follow through on the earlier pact.

Echoing that concern, EIBaradei said he would "cross my fingers" that all parties agree by the Friday deadline.

Iran says it is enriching uranium to provide fuel for a future network of nuclear reactors. But enriched uranium can also be used to make the fissile core of nuclear warheads.

In Paris, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner hinted at the details of the deal, which apparently requires Tehran to hand over 2,600 pounds of low-enriched uranium. It's an amount thought to account for the lion's share of Iran's stockpile and it exceeds the minimum 2,205 pounds thought to be needed to produce enough weapons-grade uranium for a bomb.

If Iran accepts the deal "it must be before the end of the year, there must be at least 1,200 kilograms [2,600 pounds turned over] — on that we won't back down," Kouchner told reporters in Paris.

"The Iranians are the quintessential bazaarees. They never stop bargaining," Paul Pillar, a former senior U.S. intelligence officer now at Georgetown University, told NPR. "It is never exactly clear when you've got a final agreement and I think we're seeing some of that here."

The announcement of the draft comes on the same day that Vice President Biden met with Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk in Warsaw to discuss a revamped defense shield aimed largely at countering the threat from ballistic missiles from Iran and other so-called rogue states.

The Obama administration scrapped a Bush-era plan that would have put 10 missile interceptors in Poland and a radar base in the Czech Republic. Instead, the president has proposed a reconfigured system that envisions putting the U.S. Navy's

Standard Missile-3 on ships and land-based versions in Europe.

Biden, who was on the first stop of a three-nation trip to Eastern Europe aimed at reassuring Washington's allies in the region of its support, praised Warsaw for its readiness to accept the revamped plan.

"We appreciate [that] Poland has stepped up and agreed to host an element of the previous missile defense plan, and we now appreciate that Poland's government agrees with us that there is now a better way ... with new technology and new information, to defend against emerging ballistic missile threats," Biden said.

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