

Kerry says deal not imminent as Iran, US energy chiefs join talks

Written by John Hallam

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<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/02/us-iran-energy-chiefs-join-nuclear-talks.html>

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Geneva — The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Ali Akbar Salehi and US Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz joined Iran nuclear negotiations here for the first time Feb. 21, raising expectations that talks had reached a critical point. US Secretary of State John Kerry, however, sought to tamp down expectations that Iran and six world powers were close to finalizing a preliminary political agreement, telling reporters that there were still significant gaps.

Summary □ Print Iran atomic energy chief Ali Akbar Salehi and US Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz joined Iran nuclear negotiations in Geneva, but US Secretary of State John Kerry tamped down expectations that a deal could be imminent.

Author Laura Rozen Posted February 21, 2015

Salehi, the MIT-educated head of the AEOI and former Iranian foreign minister, joined this round of nuclear negotiations “so that all the technical issues can be resolved at the highest level,” a senior Iranian official told nuclearenergy.ir, a semi-official account for Iran’s nuclear negotiating team, led by Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

“It was our idea to bring Dr. Salehi ... and the Americans are bringing their secretary of energy as his counterpart,” the senior Iranian official said.

Also joining the Iranian delegation at this round of negotiations in Geneva is Hossein Fereydoun, the brother of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and a former Iranian diplomat in New York who is close with Zarif, Iranian officials said.

The expanded high-level Iranian delegation raised expectations for a possible outcome at the meeting, one month ahead of a March 24 deadline for reaching a political agreement on a final nuclear deal, or risk the US Congress passing new Iran sanctions legislation. But Kerry sought to lower expectations that gaps had been sufficiently narrowed to expect any imminent agreement.

The presence of Moniz “is a reflection of the fact that these talks are very technical, and because we are pushing to try to come to agreement on some very difficult issues,” Kerry told reporters at a

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press conference in London Feb. 21.

"I would not read into it any indication whatsoever that something is about to be decided as a result of that," Kerry said. "There are still significant gaps. There is still a distance to travel."

Iranian officials similarly explained the rationale for AEOI chief Salehi's presence.

The technical issues in the talks are very complicated and Iran's negotiators thought it would be useful for Salehi to come, a former Iranian official, speaking not for attribution, told Al-Monitor.

The former official said he thought the division of labor among the high-level Iranian officials was that Salehi would focus on the technical issues, Zarif and Kerry, expected to meet here Feb. 22-23, would focus on the sanctions issue, and Fereydoun would facilitate communication and coordination on the Iranian side.

Salehi's presence could help advance decision-making on complex technical issues needed to reach an eventual agreement, analysts said.

Salehi "is there to bolster their technical work and it suggests that they are intensifying discussions on technical issues," Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, told Al-Monitor Feb. 21.

The technical issues to finalize include "how to reduce the plutonium output of the Arak reactor, how they develop a very complex formula for reducing enrichment capacity. ... How to develop limits on research and development on advanced centrifuges: what are the parameters," Kimball said.

"It appears that they're finalizing the remaining differences on enrichment capacity," said Ali Vaez, senior Iran analyst at the International Crisis Group.

Laura Rozen
Back Channel

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<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/02/the-existential-chronicles-go-on/385722/>

The 'Existential' Chronicles Go On

"The most frustrating part of watching this debate unfold is how many people don't seem to get the elementary fact that stopping Iran from getting nuclear weapons is impossible. What is possible is discouraging them from wanting to get them or wanting to use them."

James Fallows Feb 21 2015, 2:37 AM ET

Secretary of State John Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif meeting in Geneva last month (Rick Wilking/Reuters)

Yesterday I argued that it was time for Americans to drop or ignore the words "existential threat" when thinking about Iran and its nuclear potential. The words have become a slogan or incantation taking the place of thought. Now, response:

(1) A slew of readers have written in with variants of this sentiment:

The populated stretch of Israel from Haifa to Tel Aviv is about 55 miles as the crow flies. One or two nuclear weapons delivered in minutes by Iranian ballistic missiles and Israel would cease to exist, even if the Israelis were able to make a retaliatory strike.

Sure seem like an existential threat to me.

OK. That is "existential" if (a) by the same logic you acknowledge that South Korea is living with an "existential" threat now yet has not seemed terrified or terrorized by it, or motivated to preemptive attack; and (b) you assume that the leadership of Iran is literally suicidal, since any attack on Israel would bring a devastating, nuclear-armed counterattack. The current Iranian government does many destructive things. I have asked "existential" readers for evidence of

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suicidal moves on Iran's part, and am still waiting.

(2) From a veteran of the news business:

In dropping nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, U.S. policymakers knew that the impact would be felt, almost solely, by Japanese citizens. Aside from all else, today's geographic and demographic realities rule out the possibility of a nuclear attack on, say, Tel Aviv, impacting solely, or even mostly, Israeli Jews.

That is, in addition to incurring a devastating retaliation on Iran itself, Iranian leaders would know that in attacking Israel they would kill millions of mainly-Muslim others at the same time.

(3) From reader Robert Levine:

What I've never understood about Netanyahu's position is what he thinks the alternative might be. Pretty clearly he's been told that Israel does not have the ability to knock back Iran's ability to make nuclear weapons more than a few months, or he probably would have tried that a long time ago.

Any military action by the U.S. would be without allies other than Israel, and would permanently shatter any diplomatic track. And surely he's aware that such action would be of a "rinse and repeat" in order to keep Iran from moving forward—which, after an attack on their soil, they would inevitably do. The only permanent solutions would be invasion and occupation—or bombing them back to the Stone Age. Neither seems likely, much less wise. I'll bet Netanyahu sees at least the "likely" part.

The bottom line is that there is no practical way to prevent Iran from building nuclear weapons if it wants to, and that military action would make it more far more likely that they would want to. The most frustrating part of watching this debate unfold is how many people don't seem to get the elementary fact that stopping Iran from getting nuclear weapons is impossible. What is possible is discouraging them from wanting to get them or wanting to use them. The second is solved by deterrence, which already exists, as you point out.

(4) From a reader with extensive experience outside the U.S.:

One of my pet peeves has always been this reflex in the U.S. media, politicians, and Beltway Wise Men types to constantly see history as a series of repeating events ... there is always a Munich 1938 happening somewhere or a new Hitler on the rise somewhere, etc., etc.

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Is this something that is specific to the U.S. only or have you observed it in other countries and regions over the course of your career? I have family in Canada, U.K., Austria, Switzerland, Australia, Dubai, India, and Pakistan, and trust me, when we discuss politics or when I peruse the dailies or new sources over there, I rarely come across somebody arguing on the basis of these shoddy analogies.

Was just curious if in your experience, this "malady" is specific to the U.S. or if you've seen it in other places too?

My main answer is to direct readers to the elegant book by (my one-time professors) Ernest May and Richard Neustadt, *Thinking in Time*, about the use and misuse of historic analogies.

(5) "Why America's Obsession With Iran's Centrifuges Could Give Tehran the Bomb." Joseph Cirincione writes in *Defense One* about the practicalities of Iranian motivations, and capabilities, which matter much more than generalities on the "existential" risk. (Note: *Defense One* is part of the Atlantic Media empire.)

(6) From another reader with extensive professional experience in the Middle East:

If Israel were governed by referenda, the following three propositions would pass (with decreasing majorities):

1. Israel should be a Jewish State.
2. Israel should be a liberal democracy
3. Israel should retain control of the West Bank in perpetuity.

The problem is that Israel can have any two of the above, but not all three. Of Jewish Israelis, 20 percent would pick 1 and 2. Fifty percent don't bother themselves about these things, so long as life in Tel Aviv goes on as usual. Thirty percent would pick 1 and 3. The latter group's problem is they cannot say so in polite American society as it implies either apartheid or ethnic cleansing. In so far as Bibi has any principles at all, he (like his ally Naftali Bennet) is in the third group.

So what does he really think about Iran? An existential threat? Hardly; the man is an opportunist, not a fool. Good domestic politics? Certainly. But above all, it is an opportunity to kick the can down

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the road. If we Americans focus on Iran, we will not focus on the fact that all too many Israelis, and especially the present government very much want to pick options 1 and 3. And, who knows? Maybe in the context of another disastrous war, the American establishment might just be persuaded to look the other way as that choice's implications play themselves out?

Pretty cynical, I agree. But then cynicism is a valuable corrective in assessing the actions of cynical people.

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<http://www.breitbart.com/video/2015/02/21/buchanan-iran-isnt-going-to-get-a-nuke/>

Buchanan: Iran Isn't Going to Get a Nuke

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Buchanan: Iran Isn't Going to Get a Nuke
Breitbart Non-Syndicated

by Ian Hanchett 21 Feb 2015 160

Columnist Pat Buchanan said that Iran is not developing nuclear bombs or intercontinental ballistic missiles, and "we are going to prevent them from getting a nuclear weapon" on Friday's "McLaughlin Group."

After fellow panelist Mort Zuckerman argued that "it takes the United States, and several others to tell Iran 'we are not going to allow you to develop nuclear weapons'...they are allowing them to, in fact" Buchanan interjected "they are not. There is no bomb program going on, according to our intelligence...I don't believe there is an intercontinental ballistic missile being developed by Iran."

Zuckerman responded "it doesn't have to be intercontinental to go from

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Iran to Israel,” Buchanan then said “they’ve got those already,” to which Zuckerman remarked “exactly, and they can put nuclear weapons — they can put weapons on those.”

Buchanan concluded, “we are going to prevent them from getting a nuclear weapon. That’s what the talks are about. It’s either talk or go to war.”

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