Within the background of the Iran nuclear negotiations is action taken by the United States Congress. Senators Bob Corker, Robert Menendez, Lindsey Graham, and Tim Kaine introduced bipartisan legislation on February 27, 2015 requiring congressional review of any comprehensive nuclear agreement with Iran. The Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act of 2015 would mandate the president submit the text of any agreement to Congress and prohibit the administration from suspending congressional sanctions for 60 days. During that period, Congress would have the opportunity to hold hearings and approve, disapprove, or take no action on the agreement.

As mentioned in the previous “Iran Nuclear Talks” Spotlight, the next round of nuclear negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 nations (i.e., the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Russia, China, and Germany) was scheduled to take place in Lausanne, Switzerland on March 15, 2015. Those talks were conducted over a seven-day period and concluded on March 21 amid differing views on how much progress the negotiators had made.

On March 21, Secretary of State John Kerry, stated in remarks to the press “over the past few days, I’ve had lengthy negotiations with the Iranian team about the steps that Iran must take to demonstrate that its nuclear program now and ongoing in the future is exclusively for peaceful purposes. Over the past months, the P5+1 have made substantial progress towards that fundamental goal, though important gaps remain.” Iranian President Hassan Rouhani painted a more optimistic picture of the ongoing negotiations. According to the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), the official news agency of the Islamic Republic of Iran, President Rouhani said, “negotiations are proceeding and some differences have been removed and new common points of views have been created which would serve as a basis to clinch the final deal but there are still some differences.”

The round of nuclear talks resumed on March 26 and hoped to meet a self-imposed March 31, 2015 deadline for an initial political deal. Just hours after the White House issued a public threat to walk away from the drawn-out talks if they failed to make significant headway by the original March 31 midnight deadline, Secretary Kerry made an eleventh hour decision to stay in Switzerland because there had been enough progress to merit at least another day of talks. However, difficult issues were still holding up an agreement. As reported by Margaret Brennan of CBS News, the two sides were still arguing over how much nuclear fuel Iran would be allowed to produce in the future and also how to verify the fuel was being used only for peaceful purposes. Another challenge reported by the same CBS News report was the parties were struggling with whether and when to lift the U.N. sanctions that had cut Iran off from global markets.
Finally, in the evening of April 2, Secretary Kerry made the following statements during his remarks to the press: “We, our P5+1, EU partners, and Iran have arrived at a consensus on the key parameters of an arrangement that, once implemented, will give the international community confidence that Iran’s nuclear program is and will remain exclusively peaceful. And over the coming weeks, with all of the conditions of the 2013 Joint Plan of Action still in effect from this moment forward, our experts will continue to work hard to build on the parameters that we have arrived at today and finalize a comprehensive deal by the end of June.”

The “parameters” Secretary Kerry noted above are the key parameters of a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran’s nuclear program that were decided in Lausanne, Switzerland on April 2. These elements form the foundation upon which the final text of the JCPOA will be written between now and June 30, 2015 and reflect the significant progress that had been made in discussions between the P5+1, the European Union, and Iran. Important implementation details are still subject to negotiation, and nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.

Secretary Kerry further stated, “and today, I can tell you that the political understanding with details that we have reached is a solid foundation for the good deal that we are seeking. It is the foundation for a deal that will see Iran reduce its stockpile of enriched uranium by 98 percent for 15 years. It is a deal in which Iran will cut its installed centrifuges by more than two-thirds for 10 years. It is a deal that will increase Iran’s breakout time, which was confirmed publicly today to be two to three months, and that is the time that it would take Iran to speed up its enrichment in order to produce enough fissile material for one potential nuclear weapon. And that will be expanded now, under this deal, to one year from those two to three months.”

In addition, Secretary Kerry said, “I’d like also to make one more point very, very clear because it has been misinterpreted and misstated, misrepresented for much of this discussion: There will be no sunset to the deal that we are working to finalize – no sunset, none. The parameters of this agreement will be implemented in phases. Some provisions will be in place for 10 years; others will be in place for 15 years; others still will be in place for 25 years. But certain provisions, including many transparency measures, will be in place indefinitely into the future. They will never expire. And the bottom line is that, under this arrangement, the international community will have confidence that Iran’s nuclear program is exclusively peaceful, providing, of course, that the provisions are adhered to. And if they aren’t, we have provisions that empower us to deal with that.”

Subsequent to the April 2 milestone in Lausanne, some significant statements and/or events have occurred which can impact the June 30 deadline for completion of the final text of the JCPOA.

On April 9, Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, challenged two of the U.S. bedrock principles in the nuclear negotiations, declaring that all economic sanctions would have to be lifted on the day any final agreement was signed and that military sites would be strictly off limits to foreign inspectors.

On April 14, the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations voted unanimously on the passage of the bipartisan Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act of 2015, which requires congressional review of any final agreement with Iran. The Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act of 2015 contains provisions in three key areas: (1) Congressional Review, (2) No Suspension of Congressional Sanctions During Review Period and (3) Congressional Oversight and Iranian Compliance.
Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said during a visit to Madrid, Spain on April 14 that the Iran nuclear negotiations are to resume on April 21 at the deputy level.

References:


