

Russia Says Iran Ready to Discuss Nuclear Gestures

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Russia said Wednesday that Iran appears ready to agree to specific steps to end a standoff over its nuclear program but warned that additional U.S. sanctions would undermine efforts to ensure Tehran does not develop atomic weapons.

Speaking in Moscow at a meeting between Iran and six global powers began in Baghdad, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said expert-level meetings had indicated Tehran, often accused by Western states of playing for time, was now prepared for serious negotiations.

"We got the clear impression from these preliminary contacts that the Iranian side is ready to seek agreement on concrete actions within the framework of an approach based on the principles of gradual, reciprocal steps," Lavrov said.

Russia advocates a "step-by-step" approach, under which Iran would take measures to ease concerns that it is seeking nuclear weapons in exchange for relief from sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council as well as by Western nations.

Moscow opposes any new sanctions on Iran, and Lavrov suggested that U.S. President Barack Obama should veto additional punitive economic measures approved by the U.S. Senate on Monday if they reach his desk for signature.

The proposed U.S. sanctions "are aimed not at combating possible risks of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction but in essence at the economic strangulation of Iran," he said.

"I hope this excess by the American lawmakers will be met with a ... responsible approach by the U.S. administration and the U.S. president," Lavrov said, warning that the sanctions would undermine unity among the nations leading diplomacy with Iran — the United States, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany.

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