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Iran Agrees to Re-open Negotiations with the West **By: Greg McBride**

Iranian Foreign Minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, has announced that Iran is open to a discussion with the permanent members of the Security Council, suggesting Turkey as a possible venue. Turkey has stated that it is willing to play host to these negotiations, which Iranian officials have claimed they are prepared to start "very soon." As of yet, members of the Security Council have not agreed to participate although they have been attempting to resume negotiations for quite some time.

Turkey and Iran have pursued increasing diplomatic and trade ties in recent years. Several other NATO countries have criticized Turkey for breaking ranks and pursuing their own side deals to remove nuclear fuel from Iran. Despite any disagreements that have come up as a result of these bilateral negotiations, Turkey may still be the best choice to moderate future peace talks. As NATO's only member state with a majority Muslim population, it has historically served as a bridge between east and west, both geographically and ideologically. In this sense, Turkey is the most logical host as neither Iran nor any western state would hold an explicit home field advantage.

It has been over a year since the first round of negotiations between Iran and the Security Council failed to bring about a diplomatic solution to the nuclear issue. During these discussions, western governments wanted Iran to remove half of its nuclear fuel in exchange for medical grade isotopes. However, talks were abandoned after no common ground could be found on this front. Since this impasse, western countries have imposed tougher financial sanctions on Iran, an action that Turkey has opposed.

Tehran's decision to reopen negotiations is not completely unexpected, although it is not clear if the sanctions have played a role in bringing about this change of opinion. For their part, American officials have remained confident that the imposition of sanctions against Iran has been more effective than initially expected.

While this may be true, Iran's position may have more to do with the United States' and Israel's refusal to rule out a preemptive strike as a means of undermining Iran's nuclear ambitions. With the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq and Afghanistan on the horizon, this option may appear more likely than it did in the recent past. This realization may have led Iran to consider other policy options.

Still, despite international pressure, Iran remains publicly defiant about the nature of the proposed talks. President Ahmadinejad has repeatedly said that his country will not specifically discuss Iran's nuclear program, but rather a worldwide reduction in nuclear arsenals.

It is unclear whether or not this new round of discussions will bring about a diplomatic resolution to this pressing security issue. However, with the help of Turkey, negotiations could get back on track.

Further Reading: [Turkey to Host Iran talks 'Soon'](#), [Iran Offers talks with World Powers but without Key Nuclear Demands](#), [Iran ready to hold Nuclear talks in Turkey](#), [Iran Pushes for Nuclear talks in Turkey](#).

Canada in Afghanistan: What Comes After 2011?

By: Chelsea Plante

Bowing to pressure from the United States and other NATO allies, the Harper government acknowledged at a security forum in Halifax that hundreds of Canadian troops could remain in Afghanistan years after its combat mission officially ends in 2011. On Sunday November 7, Defense Minister Peter MacKay said Ottawa is looking at the possibility of keeping a considerable number of troops "behind the wire" to help train the Afghan army and local police in the war-torn country.

New Expectations

Ottawa has repeatedly claimed that the mission in Afghanistan would become solely civilian after the withdrawal of combat troops next year. Prime Minister Stephen Harper said in January, for example, that Canada's role there would become "strictly civilian after 2011", insisting that Canada has done its fair share during its eight years in Afghanistan and that the troops will leave as scheduled.

Despite this, there are new expectations that most, if not all, of Canada's team of Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) trainers will remain in Afghanistan post-2011. Although most of the training Canada does now is in the southern province of Kandahar, working on 'hands-on' activities alongside Afghan army soldiers, if they stay, they would likely move to the capital Kabul, where NATO operates a training centre. "This is out of Kandahar, behind the wire", Mr. MacKay told reporters of the possibility of providing trainers beyond 2011, "that's the type of training that's been contemplated". MacKay also said that Ottawa is not prepared to say how many troops might stay, but was quick to mention that NATO has identified a shortfall of about 900 troops to conduct training, with roughly 400 Canadian soldiers carrying out training now. "We've been crystal clear in saying that the combat mission will end in July," said MacKay, "but training is an option, and something we've [already] been very good at, quite frankly".

Getting Close with the Liberals?

Until now, the Conservative government has only said that Canada's diplomatic and development efforts would continue. The shifting position of the Harper government moves it much closer to the opposition Liberals, who have pushed the government to commit to training and other non-combat roles as the 2011 withdrawal deadline approaches.

Bowing to International Pressure

Fearing a sense of looming departure will vitalize Taliban leaders and get in the way efforts to force insurgents to negotiate, the United States and Britain have been lobbying NATO allies to send a message that Western nations are not rushing to withdraw next year.

At the forum in Halifax, Republican Senator John McCain of Arizona and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, both of whom sit on the Senate Armed Services Committee, urged Canada on Saturday to keep its troops in Afghanistan following 2011 in a training role. Even in a limited capacity, keeping troops there would clearly please the United States. McCain continued to say that the United States "respects the Canadian government's domestic as well as foreign policy needs, but we would really, really appreciate if the Canadian government and people could see their way clear to continue a presence at least in the training area...something that is a vital part of any success of counterinsurgency strategy."

NATO officials have said that they are not officially involved in pressing countries to extend their commitments, although NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has made it clear there is a need for trainers. On November 4, while visiting a Canadian development project in

Kandahar province, the Secretary-General remarked that it's "the right time and a country such as Canada, with a proven record in Afghanistan, has exactly the trainers NATO is looking for."

Regardless of Afghanistan, Canada has an obligation to NATO, and at the end of the day it's a question of our own security. "We cannot allow Afghanistan, once again, to become a safe haven for terrorists," the Secretary-General continued, "and so it is in Canada's interest to ensure a peaceful and stable Afghanistan."

Although the Conservatives have for the first time shown an interest in trainers, there are still a number of questions that need answering prior to the NATO Summit in Lisbon this month. If there is going to be a Canadian military presence on the ground after 2011, how many trainers will be provided? For how long? Who else is training? What are the training targets? What kind of mission is this? And until these kinds of questions can be answered, it remains uncertain where Canada will be after 2011.

Further Reading: [Canada's Afghan Mission Might be Extended, Canada Considering Staying in Afghanistan, Ottawa Talks of Extending Afghan Mission, Canadian Troops May Stay to Train Afghans, Tories Scramble on Afghan Plans, Ignatieff Says](#)

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