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**U.S. Department of State
United States Delegation to Vienna for the Iran Nuclear Negotiations
Media Note
Office of the Spokesperson
Washington, DC
November 17, 2014**

Acting Deputy Secretary of State Wendy R. Sherman, Former Deputy Secretary of State Ambassador William J. Burns, and the U.S. negotiating team will depart on November 17 for Vienna to participate in the comprehensive nuclear negotiations of the P5+1 and the European Union with Iran. The full delegation list follows.

The Honorable Wendy R. Sherman
Acting Deputy Secretary of State

The Honorable William J. Burns
Former Deputy Secretary of State
Mr. Jake Sullivan
Senior Advisor
Ambassador Brooke Anderson
Senior Advisor to the Secretary of State and the Under Secretary for Political Affairs on the Iran Nuclear Negotiations
Mr. James Timbie
Senior Advisor to the Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security
Mr. Robert Malley
Senior Director for Iran, Iraq and the Gulf States, National Security Council
Mr. Paul Irwin
Director for Nonproliferation, National Security Council
Mr. Adam Szubin
Director of the Office of Foreign Assets Control, Treasury Department
Mr. Richard Nephew
Principal Deputy Coordinator for Sanctions Policy, Department of State
Mr. Newell Highsmith
Deputy Legal Adviser, Department of State
Mr. Kevin Veal
Director of the Office of Nuclear Safeguards and Security, National Nuclear Security Administration, Department of Energy
Ms. Marie Harf
Deputy Spokesperson, Department of State
Mr. Alan Eyre
Persian Language Spokesperson, Department of State
Ms. Lindsay Coffey
Iran Public Affairs Officer, Department of State
Ms. Julia Jacoby
Special Assistant to the Acting Deputy Secretary of State
Ms. Jennifer Williams

Special Assistant to Ambassador William J. Burns

U.S. Department of State
Background Briefing on Upcoming P5+1 Talks on Iran's Nuclear Program
Special Briefing
Senior Administration Officials
Via Teleconference
November 17, 2014

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Thanks so much, Ernie, and welcome to the call, everyone, for hopping on today. This will be on background, attributable to senior administration officials. There's no embargo on the call. So again, no names, no titles, but on background. So folks know who will be speaking, shortly we'll hear some opening remarks from [Senior Administration Official One], who many of you know, and then we will open it up for questions. But again, in terms of attribution, we'll keep this on background.

So with that, I will turn it over to [Senior Administration Official One], and then we'll do some questions.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Thanks. Thank you all for joining today's call in advance of this round of the talks in Vienna. I'm sure many of you, like me, are soon to head to the airport if you're not already there.

As we all know, we're getting close to the November 24th deadline, and we are focused on whether we can get a comprehensive understanding concluded by that date. The Secretary of State John Kerry and the entire negotiating team were in Oman last week for trilateral discussions with the European Union and Iran, and then the Secretary departed and the rest of us stayed in Muscat for another day of meetings with the P5+1 political directors and Iran as well. The conversations were, as they've been previously described, tough, direct, and serious. Our experts have continued to be in constant communication with our partners and with Iran to keep hammering away at the technical issues that are part of these talks. We have continued to make some progress in the course of these negotiations, but we still have gaps to close, and we do not yet know if we will be able to do so.

I know much has been made in the press of whether we will take more time if we can't get this done by the 24th. I can tell you that extension is not and has not been a subject of negotiations at this point. Right now is the time for Iran to back up its words and the Supreme Leader's fatwa with credible and verifiable actions that they have not sought and have no intention to seek a nuclear weapon. Now we need a set of understandings to give the international community assurance that that is indeed the case now and for the future. We hope that this will be a week when decisions are made, and we understand they are difficult decisions all the way around.

In terms of schedule, I know that you all are also focused on whether Secretary Kerry will come to Vienna at some point, and I suspect that he will, probably not until later in the week. And it will be to check in on progress in the talks. He'll determine how long he stays once he is there, once we see where we are and can assess where the negotiations are.

I know that, as always, you want detail. I understand that, and you will understand that I will give very little, because we are at a very, very difficult point in this negotiation. We all knew that tough decisions – the toughest decisions – would not be taken till the end, and that is likely to be the case, if they can be taken at all.

With that, I'll be glad to take your questions.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Great. Ernie, if you could remind people how to ask a question?

OPERATOR: Be happy to. Ladies and gentlemen, any questions that you'd like to ask at this time, please press * then 1 to place yourself in queue. We will go to the line of Indira Lakshmanan, and would you please state your affiliation?

QUESTION: Yes, from Bloomberg News. Thank you so much for doing this. Can you hear me?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Yep.

QUESTION: Okay, thanks. So listen, I wanted to ask about the reports of an eight-page proposal or recommendation given by the U.S. delegation or Secretary Kerry himself in Oman to the Iranian side, and there've been reports from the Iranian side that that proposal would bring the talks back to zero. And yet at the same time, we're seeing a – some more optimism in the Iranian press than we're seeing on the rest of the P5+1 side. So I want to ask you if you can square that for us a little bit. What was in that eight-page recommendation to the extent you can say, and why are we seeing different levels of expectation on the two sides?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Well, I'm not going to talk about any particulars of the negotiation, which will not come as any surprise to you. And there was not a piece of paper that the Iranians walked away with. There were discussions of detailed parameters that were, in fact, parameters agreed to by the P5+1. We have stayed quite united in our efforts with the negotiations with Iran.

As to why we're hearing a variety of voices, I think we hear a variety of voices in every country about this negotiation, and Iran is no different. You'd have to ask them for their assessment of why there are differences. But certainly here we have people who very much believe we should get an agreement or a deal, an understanding with Iran; others that believe there's no way to, nor should we. So I think throughout the world, there are a wide range of views.

The view that is consistent, however, is that – from the international community and certainly the P5+1 – is – and as the President of the United States has said – we have to make sure that Iran cannot obtain a nuclear weapon, that all the pathways to fissile material for a nuclear weapon are shut down, and that the international community has the assurances it needs over time that Iran's program is exclusively peaceful.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Great, thanks. Let's go to Lou Charbonneau of Reuters next, please.

OPERATOR: And your line is open.

QUESTION: Thanks. Thanks, [Senior Administration Official Two], and to the senior Administration official. So I understand that you said you haven't discussed the idea of an extension, but what we're hearing from a number of countries involved in the talks, that while everyone is sincerely working to get some kind of agreement before the 24th, there's a sense that it's simply not going to be possible and that a very possible scenario is some kind of outline of an agreement, a framework agreement, or another interim agreement; that no matter what comes out of this, you still have to work in the months ahead to fill in the blanks, as it were, even if you do get a deal. So I wonder if you could give us a sense of how far along you are on those issues that have been the most difficult ones from the very beginning.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Well, I think we will not know how far we're going to get and whether we can get to a comprehensive agreement – a joint comprehensive plan of action until we get to the 24th of November. We have had very detailed discussions on every subject that would be part of such a plan of action, and so there are not new things that have to get put on the table, just understandings that have to be reached.

As I said, there are areas where we have made progress, and I'm very glad for that, but there are still areas in which there are very serious gaps that have to be addressed. Whether they can be in this time frame remains to be seen. We have tried to be open to ideas as long as it meets the metric that the President has laid out, that all the pathways to fissile material for a nuclear weapon are shut down, that we get the assurances we need that Iran is not seeking or – and will not obtain a nuclear weapon. There are many ways to those metrics, and that is what we are seeking to do here.

I think that this is obviously an understanding or joint comprehensive plan of action where the details matter enormously, so even if we come to a general understanding of some of the largest parameters, we will not be able to announce that we have reached a joint comprehensive plan of action without also knowing the details. So we are trying to make as much progress – and in fact, it is still possible to do it all. Difficult, but possible.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Great, thanks. The next question is from David Sanger of the New York Times.

QUESTION: Hi, thanks very much for doing this. I wanted to see if you could talk us through two different tradeoffs, even if you can't do it in relation to the specifics of the negotiations. So one of them is, we've all read – I've written a little bit about and others have as well – a proposal under which Iran might move a good deal of its fuel outside of the country. I was wondering if you can tell us a little bit, if you can arrange for that, how that affects some of the other moving parts. You always make the point that this is a Rubik's Cube, and obviously that would be a big element of the cube to move.

And the second part that we're all trying to figure is how this correlates with both what the IAEA is doing and what I think you've referred to in the past as doing additional protocol plus. And some of us are trying to figure out how we explain to readers what "plus" means.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: So I'm not going to detail either one, David.

QUESTION: I'm shocked. (Laughter.)

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: I know you're shocked. I know you're shocked. All I can say is that, as you all know, the complexity of this negotiation is really quite something. And we are very grateful when anyone around the table can offer assistance to try to help move through one or another of the elements. And of course, that creates some space for making progress on some other part of this puzzle. And I would say that all of the P5+1 colleagues have brought something to the table. And obviously, what's most important is what Iran brings to the table. But I think that everyone has tried to work in a constructive manner on the P5+1 side to contribute whatever is possible to get to a joint comprehensive plan of action. And Iran has come with an idea or two as well, but we believe that further movement is necessary.

In terms of the IAEA, all I want to say about that is that all of us, including, of course, Cathy Ashton, have stayed in close touch with Director General Amano. We want to make sure that whatever we do does not compromise the independence of the IAEA, is consistent with the objectives that the IAEA is seeking in its responsibilities, and that any joint comprehensive plan of action obviously we will rely on the International Atomic Energy Agency, as we have in the Joint Plan of Action. And so we have tried to have very close consultations while being very mindful of their independence.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Great, thanks. Next question is from Margaret Warner of PBS.

QUESTION: Hi, chief Administration official. (Laughter.) Thank you for doing this. Secretary Kerry has said really it's up to – it's a political decision that Iran has to make. Is that how you see it, that it's really – gets back to the Iranian leadership's decision about whether they want to do it and move forward, or are there also still political decisions, put loosely, that the American side has to make? In other words, is it a matter of will or technical details?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Oh, it's probably some of both, Margaret. There are some fundamental decisions that have to get made, and I'm sure they can only be made by the Supreme Leader and the President of Iran, just as here in the United States decisions have to be taken not only by the Secretary of State, but by the President of the United States. And we have stayed in close consultation with the United States Congress as well, because we have three branches of government and the Congress has been an important player in this entire process and helped to get Iran to consider these negotiations, and indeed were critical to achieving the Joint Plan of Action. We also have partners all over the world with whom we consult because the decisions made here not only affect the United States and the P5+1, but in quite profound and fundamental ways the security – the peace and security of the world.

So we understand the tremendous responsibility that all of us who are part of this negotiation bear. The stakes are quite high, very important – take everybody's political will, everybody's expertise. Our national labs have been simply spectacular in helping us to work through technical details, see if there are any technical solutions to some of the very difficult and thorny problems here. We have had people all over our government, from the UN, of course, to every – virtually every major department of this government help us see if we cannot come to an understanding that ensures that the President's metrics are met and that we have an understanding that is also scientifically defensible and durable.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Great, thanks. Our next question is from Barbara Slavin of Al-Monitor.

QUESTION: Thank you, Senior Administration Official. Nice to be able to ask a question. I am hearing from some folks in Iran that there is beginning to be an acceptance of the notion of suspension rather than revocation of sanctions, and that this understanding is not just pertaining to EU or U.S. sanctions but also to UN sanctions. Can you say anything about how you've tried to explain to Iran the need to suspend rather than lift outright sanctions, and whether you feel you're getting through to them?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Well, I think, Barbara, the only thing I'll say about that, because I really don't want to go into the back and forth of the negotiations – I'll leave that inside the room – is that any understanding that we reach, any joint comprehensive plan of action has to be durable over a period of time, because we didn't get into this circumstance in a year; we're not going to resolve it in a year's worth of activities by anybody; and that in that confidence building that will come as there's compliance on all sides with any joint comprehensive plan of action, it's going to take some time. And so one therefore needs to, as we did in the JPOA, J-P-O-A, there was action and then there was release. And that comes over time, not just in one instance.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Great. I think we have time for just a few more before we head to the airport, at least.

Scott Peterson of the Christian Science Monitor.

QUESTION: Hi, thank you very much for taking my question. What – how would you characterize any adjustments or just kind of the general attitude of the Iranians over the last one or two months as we've gotten closer to this deadline? Have you detected a greater flexibility or not, a greater creativity or not?

And on the other side too from the negotiating team on the U.S. side, what adjustments do you think have also been required in these last – in this last month or two as you get close?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: I think the best way to describe them is the way I've described them already in my opening remarks – tough, direct, serious. I think that's true for all of us. We all understand what we're doing here. We all understand the responsibility of what we are doing here. This is difficult. If it weren't difficult, it would have been solved a long time ago. We have made more progress than anyone would have expected in first halting the advance of Iran's program and creating a space and time so we can see if we can come to an agreement and understanding around a

joint comprehensive plan of action that resolves all of the outstanding issues and meets the metrics that the President has set out.

But these are tough discussions. They are very direct. We know each other well enough to be quite direct. They are very serious. Everyone approaches this with seriousness. And it sort of doesn't work to say, "Well, were you flexible this week and inflexible next week?" There is an ebb and flow in any negotiation, and that is true in this one as well.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Great. The next question is from Carol Morello of The Washington Post.

QUESTION: Thank you very much for doing this. I don't want to over-parse your language. I just wanted to ask you what exactly you meant when you said you were focused on a comprehensive understanding concluded by the 24th. Is that distinct from a deal? Is that in any way different --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: No, no, no, it is a deal. The reason for that is just legalese. It is a deal. It is an understanding. The best to describe it is a joint comprehensive plan of action, exactly what it will be titled should we reach it.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Great. Thanks, Carol. And the final question will be to Barak Ravid of Haaretz. Are you on the line?

QUESTION: Hi, thanks for doing this. Prime Minister Netanyahu said a few days ago that he has reports that the P5+1 are on the way for a bad deal with Iran. So first if you can comment on that.

Second, did you speak in the last few days with your Israeli colleagues to update them on what's going to happen in this last round of talks?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: I will say that, of course, we have stayed in close consultation with Israel, as we have stayed in close consultation with the Gulf states, as we have stayed in close consultation with partners and allies and interested parties all around the world. There are many, many countries, I know, that Helga Schmid with the European Union just today was briefing the 28 political directors of the European Union. So we all stay in very close consultation. And I went up and briefed in a classified setting leadership and ranking of the House, and one of my colleagues will be briefing the Senate tomorrow along with some other members of our Administration, as I did with House last week. So consultation is critical, because as I said, this understanding has a profound impact or the joint comprehensive plan of action will have a profound impact on not just on the P5+1 but on peace and security in the world.

In terms of the Prime Minister's comments, I will let the Prime Minister -- of course, he is the leader of his country and will say whatever he thinks is appropriate. I am absolutely sure that if the President of the United States believes that we have reached a deal, reached a joint comprehensive plan of action, it will be a good one. The President will not do anything but to ensure that all the pathways to fissile material for a nuclear weapon are shut down, that Iran cannot obtain a nuclear weapon, and that it is in the security interests of the United States. And as the President said, he would not do anything that he did not believe was not in the security interests of Israel and our other partners around the world. At the end of the day, the Prime Minister, of course, as the leader of his country and responsible for Israel's security, will make his own judgment.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: And I would just add to that that the Secretary speaks to Prime Minister Netanyahu very regularly.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Yep.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: He spoke to him today and also called him from the

plane when we left Muscat to brief him out on the discussions he'd had there. So at all levels have remained in close touch.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Yeah.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: For folks who jumped on late, that concludes the call. This is all on background as Senior Administration Officials, no names and no titles, no embargo. We will keep people posted throughout the next week when we're in Vienna, and you all know how to get a hold of us.