After Baghdad
30/05/2012

- Neither side was willing to shift its red lines about enrichment and sanctions.
- There were divisions amongst the P5+1.
- After the talks, Iran has hardened its stance on its right to enrichment.
A positive outcome was that “in Baghdad, the Iranians, for the first time said, ‘we are ready to discuss with you the proposals put on the table’”, in reference to the P5+1 “first-step package” that addresses the major concerns about uranium enrichment. [Read]

The talks were “a complete failure”, according to an Iranian diplomat. Western demands were “too far beyond Iran’s red lines”, specially the reluctance to recognize Iran’s right to enrichment in exchange for halting production [Read]. This may be the reason behind Iran’s tough statements, with its nuclear chief “reversing the country’s previous statements [and saying] that the country would not halt its production of higher-grade uranium”. [Read]

The P5+1 proposals are seen as non-reciprocal: Iran can’t accept “to give diamonds in return for peanuts”. Iran should be given recognition of its rights to enrichment under the NPT, gradual lifting of sanctions and the normalization of the Iranian nuclear file at the IAEA and UNSC. [Read]

And if it is, who benefits? “Khamenei faces a critical choice in the months ahead: make a compromise to lessen tensions(...), or maintain a status quo that may set in motion the demise of his regime”. The sanctions are undermining Iran at home so much that its strategy of buying time may prove wrong: “Time, ultimately, is on the side of the United States, and not that of Khamenei’s regime”. [Read]
Iran announced it is going to build a new nuclear plant in 2014 while diplomats told AP that the IAEA has found traces of uranium enriched to higher levels than previous ones near Fordow. However, according to experts, this “is an embarrassment for Iran but not a sign of Iran moving to higher enrichments”.

International sanctions are having an effect on Iranian power-sharing: they’re emboldening the Revolutionary Guards’ stance by creating space for its economic arm to “conquer” the oil industry. Thus, “the generation of current and former IRGC members coming to power in Iran is not afraid of sanctions or isolation because these were the exact conditions under which they were forged”.

Iran’s economy seems to be doing better than some believe, and “it remains to be seen” whether the sanctions’ bite will impact negotiations. Iran’s government, like other governments under sanctions, may find ways of shielding itself from the worst economic effects.

Iranian media reactions to the talks are a mix of frustration and triumphalism, but all remark that Iran resisted an unfair proposal by the West. Kayhan, the hardline newspaper whose director is considered to be close to Khamenei, even suggests that “if the negotiations are to continue along this path (...) then our presence in Moscow will only help the enemy’s need for negotiations and, therefore, it is better not to participate”.

Reformist voices express similar opinions. Iran won’t abandon the right to enrich uranium granted by the NPT membership. So, if “the West continues to not acknowledge Iran’s rights under the NPT, Iran has no choice but to reconsider its membership in that treaty”. This would open the door to a security crisis in a region with two regional powers non-signatories of the treaty.