

## **China agrees to consider U.N. steps to press Iran**

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After months of resisting the idea of new Security Council sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program, the Chinese government appears to have taken a step closer to supporting them, agreeing to enter negotiations over the language of a new resolution to intensify international pressure on Iran.

"They have agreed to start," said Bernard Kouchner, the French foreign minister, in an interview here. "Talking about the substance is a new step forward."

The five permanent members of the Security Council, along with Germany, have been discussing the idea of sanctions since at least last December but have made little headway in the face of a set Chinese stance that further diplomacy is required.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said Wednesday that all the permanent members of the Security Council, which includes China and Russia, were now "unified" on the issue and that "a great deal of further consultation" would occur in the coming weeks.

The agreement was reached on Wednesday in a conference call of political directors from the six-country group that negotiates with Iran: the United States, Britain, France, Russia, China and Germany.

"There was substantive discussion of the elements of a resolution, for the first time today," said a senior American official who was not authorized to speak publicly on the matter. The next step, he said, would be when Chinese diplomats at the United Nations begin to hammer out a text.

Brazil has a rotating seat on the Council and had previously expressed opposition to new sanctions. Speaking at the same news conference as Mrs. Clinton on Wednesday, Celso Luiz Nunes Amorim, Brazil's foreign minister, said that his nation favored diplomacy over sanctions but was open to "any discussions."

Mrs. Clinton suggested that the two approaches — sanctions and diplomacy — were not mutually exclusive. "Action in the Security Council is part of negotiation and diplomacy that perhaps can get the attention of the Iranian leadership," she said.

President Obama said in Washington this week that he hoped to have new sanctions in place by sometime this spring. But aside from the Chinese now agreeing to discuss the substance of a sanctions resolution, there is no more specific timetable in place, Mr. Kouchner noted.

"There is no date, there is nothing precise, but we are speeding up," he said. "It will be done; I don't know when."

China had voted in favor of three previous rounds of sanctions aimed at persuading the Iranians to negotiate over their nuclear program, which Iran maintains is merely for peaceful purposes. But the International Atomic Energy Agency as well as numerous Western governments believe that Iran could be pursuing an atomic bomb.

Repeated negotiations with Iran over enriching its uranium outside the country have failed. The United States began circulating a rudimentary text in February of possible resolutions that would take aim at the country's financial services, arms industry and the Revolutionary Guards Corps, but until this week China had called the step premature.

In previous rounds of sanctions, it took two to four months for all sides to agree on the text of new sanctions. Mr. Kouchner said he expected that a new round would be equally difficult.

"The good surprise is that they accept to talk," he said.

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