

## **On 9th day, John Kerry says Iran nuke talks could go either way**

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**Vienna:** Nine days into marathon nuclear talks, US Secretary of State John Kerry today said the diplomatic efforts "could go either way," cutting off all potential pathways for an Iranian atomic bomb or ending without an agreement that American officials have sometimes described as the only alternative to war.

"I want to be absolutely clear to with everybody: We are not yet where we need to be on several of the most critical issues," Kerry told reporters outside the 19th-century Viennese palace that has hosted the negotiations.

World powers and Iran are hoping to clinch a deal by Tuesday, setting a decade of restrictions on Iran's nuclear program and granting Iran significant relief from international sanctions.

Kerry met for three-and-a-half hours today with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, as top diplomats from the five other negotiating countries planned to return to Austria's capital later in the evening.

"It is now time to see whether or not we are able to close an agreement," Kerry said, after hobbling on crutches through 97-degree heat to a podium set up in a city square.

While "genuine progress" had been made and the sides "have never been closer, at this point, this negotiation could go either way. If the hard choices get made in the next couple of days, and made quickly, we could get an agreement this week," Kerry said. "But if they are not made, we will not."

The talks had appeared to be moving forward. Yesterday, diplomats reported tentative agreement on the speed and scope of sanctions relief for Iran in the accord, even as issues such as inspection guidelines and limits on Iran's nuclear research and development remained contentious.

Tuesday's deadline is the latest that has been set for a comprehensive pact that would replace the interim deal world powers and Iran reached in November 2013.

That package was extended three times, most recently on June 30, and Kerry appeared to be partly addressing critics of the diplomacy in the US who've argued that President Barack Obama's administration has been too conciliatory over the course of the negotiations.

Obama and US officials say that is untrue. But they've also fiercely defended their overtures to Tehran and their willingness to allow the Iranians to maintain significant nuclear infrastructure, on the argument that a diplomatic agreement is preferable to military conflict.

Speaking at the same time as Sunday news shows aired in the US, Kerry said that "if we don't have a deal, if there's absolute intransigence with the things that are important, President Obama has always said we would walk away."

- AP