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Mounting opposition leaves only two leaders in favor of the UN-brokered plan for Iran to send most of its enriched uranium to Russia and France for further processing: US President Barack Obama and Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu, who Friday praised the proposal "to have Iran withdraw its enriched uranium, or a good portion of it, outside Iran as a positive first step." He commended the US president's efforts to deal with Iran's nuclear program

But Saturday, European leaders struck the opposite note. In Vienna, European officials called the new Iranian ultimatum for a balance between sending uranium abroad and receiving a fresh supply as "unacceptable."

In Brussels, European leaders began drafting a communiqué expressing "grave concern" over Iran's nuclear enrichment activities and persistent failure to meet its international obligations.

The "counter-proposal" incorporating this ultimatum, which was conveyed by Iran's nuclear negotiator to the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna Friday, cancels out the whole point of the plan offered, to reduce the level of uranium stocks usable by Iran for making a nuclear bomb. Tehran also called for more negotiations before Tehran delivered its final response.

Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, rotating presidency of the European Union, told AP that Iran's approach of "back-and-forth talks" were reminiscent of its "same old tricks."

Saturday, president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad issued a veiled warning: "We hope the negotiations continue and evil powers don't indulge in mischief because the Zionist regime and other domineering powers are unhappy with the talks," he said in an Iranian state TV interview: "Today, Westerners know that without engaging Iran, they cannot rule the world, because Iran… rules world public opinion."

Within hours, fellow hardliners in Tehran chipped in: Deputy parliament speaker Aledin Boroujerdi said the second time this week: "We are completely opposed to the proposals. We have deep mistrust of Westerners."

Qazem Jalili, a member of the Iranian parliament's foreign affairs and security committee (who is related to Iran's nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili) dismissed the world powers' proposal as "completely out of the question."

Netanyahu's words of praise for president Obama when he met Middle East peace envoy George Mitchell Friday followed an informal message from Washington asking Israel's political, military and intelligence spokesmen to align their conduct and statements on the Iran issue with the UK, France and Germany.

The Israeli prime minister made no reference to Iran's negative response to the compromise it was offered in the framework of Obama's engagement policy. Nor did he indicate where this left Israel.

That Iran's counter-proposal was a resounding "no" to an initiative backed by the world's powers and the UN was far from clear in secretary of state Hillary Clinton's tortuous remarks Friday: "We are working to determine exactly what they are willing to do, whether this was an initial response that is an end response or the beginning of getting to where we expect them to end up," she said, urging: "The process must play out."

She may be in denial, but Tehran's rebuff will certainly play out in Obama's other diplomatic initiatives.

After being badly mauled in Pakistan over US drone attacks on Taliban bastions and US policy in general, Clinton arrives

in Jerusalem Saturday, Oct. 31, to administer yet another push for getting Israel-Palestinian peace talks restarted.

When he met her earlier in Abu Dhabi, Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas made it clear that he stood by his precondition for talks: Israel must halt settlement construction on the West Bank and Jerusalem. Netanyahu, whom she meets Saturday night, will probably agree to negotiations without preconditions.

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