

Russia Praised for Role at Iran Talks

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VIENNA — China and the U.S. praised Russia's role in nuclear talks with Iran on Wednesday, while Iran's foreign minister said his country and six world powers are in "50 to 60 percent agreement" on the shape of a deal.

In rare comments to the press, a senior Chinese official at the talks held in Vienna said the powers — the U.S., Russia, China, France, Britain and Germany — and Iran "demonstrated a sense of urgency" ahead of the July 20 expiration of their interim accord.

"Everyone is aiming at that [meeting the deadline]," the official, Wang Qun, told reporters after the two-day meeting in the Austrian capital.

"Every party seems to be very sincere and very genuine in their efforts," he said.

The powers want Iran to curb its nuclear activity, which Western nations fear aims to give Tehran the capability to manufacture an atomic bomb. Iran denies that and wants them to lift crippling economic sanctions.

The official, who heads the Chinese Foreign Ministry's arms control department, also said

Russia was playing a positive role in the negotiations despite mounting tensions between Moscow and Western governments over the crisis in Ukraine.

"This is actually definitely helpful to the overall result of the dialogue," he said.

A senior U.S. official said the Russian delegation played its usual "constructive, focused role" at the talks.

China, Iran's top oil customer and a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, has opposed unilateral sanctions on Tehran such as those imposed by Washington and the European Union, and has called repeatedly for talks to resolve the decade-long dispute.

The talks paused until May 13 amid stern warnings from Iran's supreme leader, whose message has varied over the past months between support for the discussions and accusations of bad-faith negotiating on the part of the U.S. and its allies.

Material from The Associated Press is included in this report.

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