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A Matter of Principle: WUPR Interviews Iranian Ambassador Seyed Hossein Mousavian

Posted by [Sonya Schoenberger](#) in [Uncategorized](#) on April 24, 2012 3:56 pm / [no comments](#)

Inside nuclear Iran

With international pressure mounting and after a decade of U.N. (ambitious) questions about Iran's capabilities and intent remain:

A decade of rising tensions

2002
 2003
 2004
 2005
 2006
 2007
 2008
 2009
 2010
 2011

2002: U.S. says Tehran has built a uranium enrichment facility and heavy water plant without telling the U.N. International pressure builds and Iran agrees to inspections.

2003: Inspections go to Iran and say it has failed to comply with Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; after meeting with France, Germany and Britain, Iran says it will stop enriching uranium.

2004: A.Q. Khan, the father of Pakistan's nuclear bomb, is reported to have sold nuclear weapons technology to Iran.

2005: EU threatens to stop trade and economic negotiations; Mahmoud Ahmadinejad becomes Iran's president; Iran resumes nuclear fuel research.

2006: U.N. Security Council demands that Iran suspend its nuclear activities and later votes for sanctions; Iran calls resolution illegal.

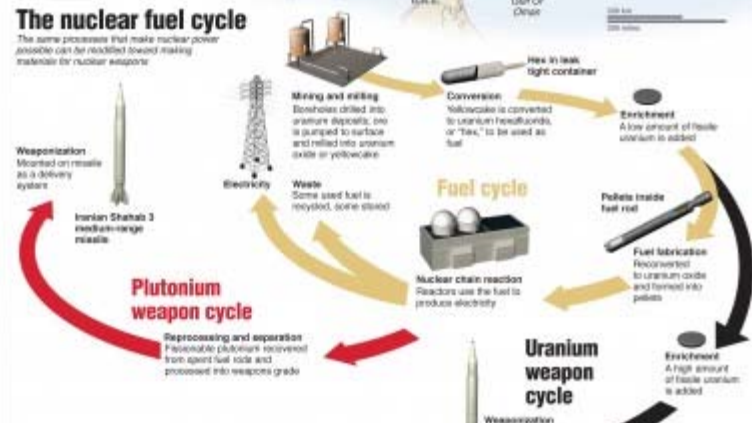
2007: Iran says it has halted entry to inspections; Security Council approves new arms and financial sanctions.

2008: Security Council adopts Iran sanctions resolution; Iran sees-fires long- and medium-range missiles.

2009: IAEA says Iran has enough low-enriched uranium to convert and make one weapon; Iran agrees to talk with world powers.

2010: Talks begin in Geneva between Iran and an EU official representing the U.S., Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China.

2011: Talks fail to gain any momentum; IAEA report says Iran has started on developing a nuclear weapon design, as well as testing and other research relevant for nuclear arms.



The country and people

- Area: 1,648,195 sq. km.
- Capital: Tehran
- Population: 77.4 million (July 2011 estimate)
- Median age: 29.9 years (2011 estimate)
- Life expectancy: 73 years
- Ethnicity: Majority are Persian, and the national language is Persian (Farsi)
- Religion: 99% Shiite Islam; Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian or Bahai 2%; Sunni 1%
- GDP: \$220 billion (2009 at work)
- Oil: 3rd largest exporter
- Government: Islamic republic
- Supreme leader: Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (since 1989)
- President: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (since 2005)

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Over the past few months, [the media has been abuzz with fears, threats, and uncertainties regarding the Iranian nuclear program](#). Nuclear technology was first introduced to Iran by the United States in the 1960s, and today Iran retains the right to a peaceful nuclear program under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Suspicious surrounding the Iranian nuclear program were thrown into the limelight after the publication of a November, 2011 International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report, which suggested possible military dimensions to the Iranian program. The international response to the possibility of an Iran with weapons of mass destruction was immediate and persistent. Bloggers made predictions of nuclear Armageddon, politicians imposed sanctions and discussed draconian measures, and the salivating media catered to and fostered public misconceptions and prejudices. The Iranian nuclear "crisis" continues to make headlines, and the conversation about how best to address the situation has proven both polarizing and contentious.



Ambassador Mousavian served as Iranian Ambassador to Germany in the 1990s and spokesman for Iran's team in nuclear negotiations with the European Union and IAEA from 2003 to 2005.

In response to the controversy surrounding the Iranian nuclear program, the Iranian Culture Society and Global Zero, a student chapter of the international disarmament organization, brought Ambassador Seyed Hossein Mousavian to campus on April 4th. Ambassador Mousavian served as Iranian Ambassador to Germany in the 1990s and spokesman for Iran's team in nuclear negotiations with the European Union and IAEA from 2003 to 2005. He is currently a Visiting Scholar at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs.

During his interview with WUPR, the ambassador spoke candidly about his views on everything from reasonable concessions Iran should make in negotiations and the national pride surrounding Iran's nuclear program to the reasons the Iranian government is so suspicious of inspectors. He also addressed the Israeli threat of a preemptive strike on Iranian nuclear facilities and spoke about the ways in which a long history of sanctions has shaped Iran's development towards military self-sufficiency.

WUPR: You maintain that Iran's nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only. When one reads the news these days, though, the headlines address not whether Iran's nuclear program has military dimensions but rather how the global community can deal with a rogue Iran bent on acquiring nuclear weapons. Do you believe that the current situation is being misrepresented by the media, and, if so, what information do you wish the average American understood?

Amb. Mousavian: I am convinced there is no nuclear weapons dimension to the Iranian nuclear program. The Iranian nuclear program is 99% political issue and 1% technical issue. There is consensus between the US, Israel, and even Europeans that: First, Iran doesn't have a nuclear bomb; Second, Iran has not decided to make nuclear bomb; and Third, even if Iran decides to make a nuclear bomb today, it would take some years. These three issues are a matter of consensus between politicians, security, and intelligence services of the US, Israel, Europeans, and all Western countries.

The issue which has been discussed actually came out after the IAEA November, 2011 Report about possible military dimensions [to the Iranian nuclear program]. The questions or the ambiguities are not related to the current program, but are about Iranian intentions [regarding] programs in the mid 1980s, early 1990s. It is

about past activities, not current activities. What [IAEA Director General] Amano, successor of ElBaradei, raised in the 2011 IAEA report [about possible military dimensions to the Iranian nuclear program]...was nothing new, nothing new. It was more just for political propaganda. All experts world-wide wrote that there was nothing new: it was the old issues. I believe, having been either directly or indirectly working on this file for ten years, talking with the IAEA, Europeans, and Westerners, that if there were a political compromise between Iran and the US, the file in Vienna would be closed within a week. This is just a political issue.

WUPR: What do you think was the political motivation behind the release of the report?

Amb. Mousavian: Look...In 1960s, 1970s when Shah was in Iran, although Shah was a brutal dictator with no democracy and no human rights, he was a US ally, and so the US proposed that Iran be a nuclear country. The proposal was presented in the 1960s in the Atoms for Peace Program.

WUPR: And is this after or before the Non-Proliferation Treaty [of 1967]?

Amb. Mousavian: Even before. Then, the US proposed for Iran to have 23 nuclear power plants by the year 2000. After Non-Proliferation Treaty, in 1976 the Gerald Ford issued a directive for Iran to have a full nuclear fuel cycle, including enrichment. In 1967, Americans made the first Iranian nuclear sites: Tehran research reactors. And it was completely clear for all that the Shah was after a nuclear bomb. There is a 1974 report from CIA to the President (Nixon, at the time) that says if the Shah were alive in mid 1980s, Iran would have a nuclear bomb. Therefore, not only was there no objection [to Iran becoming a nuclear weapon state], but it was the proposal of the US for Iran to be a nuclear country, [and the use provided] all facilities: nuclear power plant, research, enrichment—everything.

The day Iran revolted against its dictator, the US alliance was removed, and after hostage taking problem (American embassy diplomats were taken as hostages in 1980), hostilities mounted extremely between Iran and the US. And then we had the Iran-Iraq war, and the US was supportive of the aggressor, Saddam Hussein. After this period, you see objections on the part of the US to Iran having nuclear technology. When Iran had a king, the US ally, it was permitted to have everything with the full support of the US. That's why I believe the issue is completely political. Also, countries like India, Pakistan, and Israel have strategic relationships with the US even though they are not member of the NPT. But even they possess nuclear bombs. Iran is a member of the NPT and does not possess nuclear weapons. Can you compare? This is a political issue.

WUPR: Do you think that Iran will stay a member of the NPT for a long time?

Amb. Mousavian: Yes.

WUPR: What concessions is the Iranian government prepared to make in negotiations? And do you think that complete transparency is a feasible goal?

Amb. Mousavian: I believe the concession Iran should and would make is the face-saving solution: 100% transparency and an open fuel cycle with the maximum level of cooperation with the IAEA and with all commitments, and [a promise] that Iran in the future [would] not divert its nuclear capability towards nuclear weapons and would not become a nuclear weapons state. They would make all of these concessions if the legitimate rights of Iran [to nuclear power] were recognized under the NPT... and if sanctions were lifted and the nuclear file normalized by the United Nations Security Council and the IAEA.

WUPR: I know that in the past Iran was presented with the option of shipping its uranium overseas to be enriched, but declined the offer. Is that something it would consider again under any circumstances?

Amb. Mousavian: Iran never considered such a proposal. [You are referring to] a proposal made the first time by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Kislyak in 2004, when I visited Russia. In a meeting in Moscow, he told me that the Russia was prepared to receive Iranian production of UF_4 UF_6 (precursors of usable uranium), do the enrichment in Russia, and then sell you it back to Iran. This proposal was rejected because this was exactly the same plan to deprive Iran from enrichment. Even the Russians were not prepared to have a joint venture on Russian soil with Iran. They said that they would not make such a joint venture with Iran; they would make a trading company with Iran. And this trading company would buy Iranian UF_6 and sell back enriched uranium. And Russians said that there should not be enrichment activities in Iran. We immediately rejected this, even under President Khatami (known as a relative moderate). And then under Ahmedinejad, Larjani also rejected [this proposal], because Iran will not forgo its nuclear rights at any price.

WUPR: Just as a matter of principal?

Amb. Mousavian: It is a matter of principle: this is the right of Iran under the NPT. It is a matter of consensus. It is a matter of national pride. Also, there are a lot of logical implications of this know-how for the country in other sectors like medicine and agriculture; this has huge implications in other parts of economy and technology. While Iran had an enrichment consortium with France to have its uranium enriched on French soil in the 1970s, right after the revolution, France declined to continue the cooperation. Therefore, Iran can no longer trust enrichment to other countries, because any day they decide, they can cut it.

WUPR: Is the nuclear program a great source of pride for the average Iranian citizen?

Amb. Mousavian: Yes. 95% of Iranians support nuclear technology. 55% oppose nuclear bombs. 35% support nuclear bombs. But 78% support for Iran to have the maximum level of transparency with no limitation in order to maintain the rights of the nation.

WUPR: Since you assert that Iran's program is purely peaceful, how can you explain the Iranian government's actions to restrict IAEA access to some sites, and why does the government prohibit its nuclear scientists from being interviewed by IAEA officials?

Amb. Mousavian: It's because, first of all, the IAEA is asking Iran is to implement additional protocol. They want more inspection, more access. Throughout time, from 2003 to 2005, we implemented additional protocol, we implemented Subsidiary Arrangement Code 3.1, and we even suspended enrichment. And Europeans were not capable to deliver their commitments to recognize our rights and normalize relations. And that's why Iran decided to stop further access beyond the normal access the IAEA has in many countries. And the second issue is more cooperation and more access leads to more assassinations of scientists and more leaking of Iranian information about military and nuclear activities to foreign media by the IAEA, which should be responsible to keep everything secret for IAEA members.

And in the end, while the US and Israelis are always talking about a military strike, Iran is extremely suspicious that when they [IAEA inspectors] are talking about access to everywhere, they don't mean the nuclear issue but they want to collect info about the location and capability of the military in order to provide the US and Israelis with good information to attack Iran. That's why they are very careful, and very suspicious about these types of inspections. And this is the reason I believe we need a broad package on nuclear issues and on Iran-US relations.

WUPR: Do you think that the Israeli threat to attack is credible? If so, what would the ramifications be for the US, Iran, and Israel?

Amb. Mousavian: Ramifications would be catastrophic. Already, US invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan was disaster for US, costing trillions of dollars. After 10 years, they really have failed. They are forced to leave Iraq and Afghanistan while the security is far beyond worse than the period before the Americans invaded: no economy, no security, no stability, nothing. In ten years, the lives of thousands of Americans, trillions of dollars, and 200,000 civilians in the region have died. They are leaving while the Taliban is there. The security situation is a disaster. Already they have failed. But if they invade Iran or attack Iran, the consequences would be tenfold. You cannot compare the potential of Iran to Afghanistan or Iraq.

And I believe it would be the real threat for the existence of Israel if they attacked Iran. Whether this is credible or not, I think Netanyahu from the beginning was going to make a credible threat in order to convince USA, the UK, and the EU to go for crippling sanctions of oil and central bank. And he knew without credible threats for nuclear strike, they would not compel Europeans and Americans to go for such sanctions. This is my general understanding. And the other issue, policy, is that of Netanyahu is going to divert national public opinion from the real issue of Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The third is to keep Iran as primary threat of region, while Iran doesn't have nuclear bomb and Israel has a nuclear bomb. And the fourth is its [Netanyahu government's] own failure regarding social and economic activities inside Israel. They have an election [approaching], and Netanyahu will divert Israeli public opinion from dysfunctionality [*sic*] he has had and from the big social and economic problems in Israel. How can he divert the domestic public opinion? Iran is the best victim. I think these are the main reasons [behind his threat]. Israel knows they cannot attack—they are too smart to attack Iran.

WUPR: Iran is one of the most heavily sanctioned nations in the world. Over its development, how has this impacted Iran's role in global politics? And do you think these sanctions, today and in the past, have been effective and justified?

Amb. Mousavian: There have definitely been a lot of negative ramifications for the Iranian economy. But at the same time, there are some positive ramifications, because sanctions forced Iran to become self-sufficient. Actually, today, Iran is the most self-sufficient, powerful, and capable country in the production of conventional military weapons. No one in the region is like Iran. We are building and producing tanks, airplanes, artillery—everything. The reason behind this is the sanctions during the war. Because Iran was sanctioned, it was not able to get the tanks from the US, Europe, or Russia. So Iran made them.

Sanctions and pressures made today's Iran *capable* (emphasis added) of nuclear and conventional arms. Besides chemical and biological weapons, Iran today has the capability to make a nuclear bomb, chemical weapon, or biological weapon if it so decided. But, because this is not Iran's policy, Iran is not after weapons of mass destruction. The Iranian missile power today makes the world afraid. The reason they're frightened is a result of the sanctions imposed during the war. And therefore, sanctions have dual ramifications. One negative, of course, for Iran's economy and for the quality of life of its people and financial transactions and foreign investment. And the positive side [to sanctions is that they] make the nation capable to resist, to be independent, and to be self-sufficient.

WUPR: Do you think the fact that Iran is so strong in conventional weaponry is a compelling reason that it would never develop a nuclear weapon?

Amb. Mousvain: [Iran doesn't need nuclear weapons because without them it is the most powerful nation in the region. The Iran-Iraq War] proved to the region and the international community the power of nation that could resist the whole world for 8 years. And they didn't give up one inch of their land. This is really a great nation: thousands of years of civilization, very powerful ideology. That's why I believe Iran is already the most powerful nation in the region. And the US needs to finally compromise with Iran on the issues and

disputes that they have. Iranians need to seek together to compromise. Iran is a regional power, and the US is an international power. As a key regional power and a key international power, they need to compromise. Otherwise the region will not be able to have security and stability. If the two key powers are going to confront each other, the consequences will be felt on a regional scale.

Bio

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