

How to Engage with Iran

Interview with Il Manifesto

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Ambassador Mousavian

- 1. Your comment on the recent EU decision to ban oil imports from Iran (and to freeze the Iranian Central Bank assets in Europe): the European foreign ministers generally said the oil embargo is a "peaceful and legitimate measure" to press Iran to negotiate. Other commentators see it rather as an act of confrontation. Do you think Iran will be compelled to change its nuclear policy by these or other sanctions?*

The Europeans have made a grave strategic mistake and should have played a constructive role in engaging Iran. This destructive action has shattered the foundations of European-Iranian relations in the past century. Sanctions of any kind would hurt Iran's economy and ordinary Iranians, but would not compel Iran to forgo its legitimate nuclear rights under the NPT, which includes enrichment. Sanctions have been imposed on Iran since the revolution in 1979 and the balance sheet today shows that Iran has advanced greatly in the fields of nuclear, chemical, biological and missile technologies.

- 2. The oil embargo comes amid threat by Iran to close the Hormuz Strait, and reciprocal verbal hostilities on the matter. And amid growing rumors of an Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear installations. In the US, we see a debate on the "military option", some voices even suggesting a "regime change". Do you feel the risk of a military confrontation is becoming real?*

According to recent official statements by Iran's Foreign and Defense Ministers, Iran does not threaten to close the Strait of Hormuz. The risk of a military strike is real but I am confident the United States is not after a military strike as they are well aware that the consequences would be catastrophic and would drag the international community into an unmanageable chaos. The Israelis would not attack Iran without Washington's consent and any military strike on Iran would endanger the existence of Israel more than ever.

Nevertheless as long as the US policy is based on “all options on the table”, Iran’s policy would be the same. That is why the Strait of Hormuz would be one of the victims of any military strike against Iran.

3. The western public is often told that "Iran is building nuclear weapons and is a threat to the security in the region". Some in the west (and in Israel) say that even an Iran with "nuclear capability" is not acceptable. Did Iran reach the capability? Can you affirm that the Iranian policy did not change, that Iran does not want nuclear weapons?

I am confident that Iran does not intend to develop a nuclear weapon. Iran is a member of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and does not poses nuclear weapons. Furthermore, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has also confirmed on numerous occasions that Iran has not diverted its nuclear program towards a nuclear bomb while Israel is the only country in the Middle East who possesses nuclear weapons and defies requests made by IAEA and international community. Iran already has reached the capability and is able to build nuclear weapons if it decides to do so. Nevertheless having the capability is not in violation of Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Other NPT member states, such as Japan, Germany, Brazil and Argentina have the capability to build nuclear weapons but have not come under any international scrutiny. In a blatant act of double standards, the US and the West forged strategic relations with nuclear weapons states that are not members of the NPT, such as India, Pakistan and Israel.

The fact is that the West’s contradictory standards on nuclear and weapons of mass destructions are a disaster for the future of worldwide nonproliferation. The extent of pressures, hostilities and sanctions imposed on Iran by the West far exceeds those placed on North Korea. While Iran is a member of NPT and does not possess nuclear bomb, North Korea has withdrawn from the NPT and has nuclear weapons. Faced with this reality, the West is actually telling Iran that while you have paid the cost more than North Korea, why not have the deterrence too?

4-What are the chances for a new start in dialogue between Iran and the Security Council powers? Given the current situation, do you see a chance for re-starting a dialogue on new bases?

The Iranians have voiced their readiness for talks based on mutual respect, even in the midst of increased sanctions, threats and isolation of Iran. Recently Iran's Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi said Tehran is ready to resume talks with the six world powers as soon as both sides agree on a venue and date for negotiations. The past negotiations have failed because the P5+1 have not been ready to recognize the legitimate rights of Iran under the

NPT, which includes enrichment. If the West corrects this unrealistic position and respects the rights of Iran under the NPT, Iran would be open for maximum transparency and confidence building measures. Furthermore the Iranians have recently offered to limit uranium enrichment to 20% in exchange for nuclear fuel rods, to be used at Tehran Research Reactor. This offer is still on the table and if the West's anxiety is over Iran's ability to enrich uranium to weapons grade, then this offer aims to assure them of non-diversion into a weapons program. More important is the "Russian Step by Step Plan" which covers all major demands of Iran, P5+1, UN Security Council and IAEA resolutions. This plan entails the implementation of Additional Protocol and Subsidiary Arrangement, addressing "Alleged Military Studies" and even a suspension for short period resulting in removal of sanctions and normalization of Iranian nuclear dossier. Iranian President Mr. Ahmadinejad and the Foreign Minister Mr. Salehi welcomed the plan and announced Iran's readiness to discuss the details. However the US and EU have rejected. This plan has the potential for a peaceful and realistic diplomatic solution.

5-You negotiated the 2004 agreements on the suspension of uranium enrichment works: in your opinion why did Iran denounce that agreement later? Is it because the change in the Iranian administration - or because the agreement itself was not moving forward?

From the start, the suspension of the enrichment was based on a voluntary, temporary and non-legally binding gesture, just for confidence building. Six-months prior to the Iranian presidential elections, when no one could imagine Ahmadinejad would become president, we told our European interlocutors that Iran would not tolerate indefinite suspension and if they are not capable to finalize a deal, Iran would defiantly re-start enrichment regardless of the consequences. The legitimate right of Iran for nuclear technology, including enrichment has been a redline for all administrations before and after the revolution and would remain in the future regardless of the amount of sanctions and pressures..

6- Following your arrest in 2007 – what was the reason for the arrest and why did you choose to leave Iran, if temporarily?

In April 2008, Iran's judiciary issued a verdict against me, issuing a two years suspended jail sentence and five years ban on having a diplomatic post. The legal case was over in April 2008 and I left the country on July 2009. I decided to use this time for academic pursuit and that is why I am currently a research scholar and lecturer at Princeton University. Since my arrest I have decided to be silent on reasons behind my arrest and I would continue to do so.