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Iran Dismisses Israeli Strike Threat, Ex-Nuclear Negotiator Says

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Former Iranian nuclear negotiator Hossein Mousavian, shown in 2006, on Tuesday said Tehran has judged threats of a unilateral Israeli attack on its nuclear facilities to lack credibility (AP Photo/Vahid Salemi).

WASHINGTON -- A former high-level Iranian nuclear envoy on Tuesday said leaders in Tehran have discounted the possibility of Israel acting alone to attack their country's atomic facilities, despite persistent threats by Tel Aviv to launch a strike to prevent the country from acquiring a nuclear-bomb capacity (see [GSN](#), June 4).

"Wrong or right, [the Iranian] understanding is the Israelis would never be able to attack Iran without [a] U.S. green light," said Hossein Mousavian, now a visiting scholar at Princeton University. "They believe that the major threat is the U.S. as [a] major international power."

President Obama earlier this year led a high-profile U.S. push to convince Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government that Washington is ready to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions through military force should a strategy of intensified sanctions and diplomatic engagement fail to resolve the longstanding impasse (see [GSN](#), March 6). Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak has repeatedly suggested his nation could launch a strike within months, before Iran can render key atomic assets invulnerable to force by transferring them to less vulnerable sites (see [GSN](#), March 20).

Military action would probably preclude any steps toward improved U.S.-Iranian ties "at least for a decade," said

Mousavian, who served from 2003 to 2005 as Iran's spokesman in nuclear negotiations with the European Union.

Tehran insists its atomic activities are purely peaceful, despite Israeli and U.S. suspicions to the contrary.

The former official echoed warnings by Iranian officials against challenging the nation's "rights" under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty to uranium enrichment for peaceful purposes (see related [GSN](#) story, today). The enrichment process can produce civilian nuclear fuel as well as bomb material.

Washington and partner governments have been particularly concerned about Iran's enrichment of material to 20 percent. While Tehran says it needs the material for a medical research reactor, skeptical nations say the operation could be a key step toward production of weapon-grade material, which has an enrichment level of roughly 90 percent.

"If the red line for the West is enrichment, I'm not optimistic for any kind of solution," Mousavian, author of a new book on the Iran nuclear standoff, said during an appearance at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "If they are going to concentrate ... on transparency measures, Iran will be 100 percent open to every measure for transparency and confidence building."

Iran and Western powers must pursue "a parallel negotiation" on trust-building measures not directly tied to the nuclear standoff, Mousavian stressed, citing Afghanistan, Iraq and counternarcotics issues as potential realms for collaborative action.

The benefit of seeking closer relations with the United States "is a matter of consensus" across Iranian political factions, but supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei believes Washington "is after regime change" rather than improved ties, the former envoy added.

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