

# Iran, U.S. Need Direct Talks to Break Deadlock, Mousavian Says (Vienna)

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VIENNA — Iran and the United States should begin direct talks about security issues in parallel to international negotiations designed to ensure the Persian Gulf nation isn't developing nuclear weapons, says Seyed Hossein Mousavian, the former spokesman for Iran's nuclear negotiating team.

Current and former diplomats met at a forum today in Vienna to discuss ways to break the deadlock between Iran and world powers over Tehran's nuclear program and regional security. Iranian negotiators will meet their Chinese, French, German, Russian, British and U.S. counterparts on May 23 in Baghdad.

"Hostility between Iran and the U.S. has to be addressed," said Mousavian, a researcher at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. "There should be a parallel process that deals with issues like regional security."

Iran hasn't had normal diplomatic relations with Washington since the 1979 Islamic revolution overthrew the U.S.-backed shah. The U.S. has joined the so-called E3+3 group of countries seeking greater transparency for Iran's atomic program along with guarantees that it isn't building nuclear weapons. Diplomats described their last round of talks on April 14 in Istanbul as "constructive" and agreed to continue talks.

"We need to get through a period of confidence building that really puts the issue to rest," Germany's International Atomic Energy Agency Ambassador Ruediger Luedeking said Thursday on a panel in the Austrian capital. "One cannot underestimate the importance of transparency."

Israel has threatened to use force and the European Union and the U.S. have imposed curbs on oil to deter Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. Iran, the second-biggest producer in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, insists its nuclear program is peaceful and says evidence being used against it has been forged.

"International inspectors will get access to Parchin, but they won't find anything," Mousavian said in an interview, referring to the military complex that IAEA inspectors want to visit. The U.S. should take seriously Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's Feb. 23 speech calling possession of nuclear weapons a crime, he said.

IAEA inspectors reported in February that Iran tripled the amount of 20 percent-enriched uranium it is producing each month and had stockpiled about 240 pounds (109 kilograms) of the material. The country may be ready to begin testing a new plutonium-producing reactor by September, according to Frank von Hippel, the former assistant director for U.S. national security in the White House who is now co-chairman of the International Panel on Fissile Materials.

"With the buildup of its stock of 20 percent low-enriched uranium, the break-out time is getting shorter," Hippel said in Vienna. Iran could produce enough material for a bomb in less than six months even using its stockpile of less pure material, he said.

Khamenei's pledge never to possess nuclear weapons "is definitely genuine," according to Mousavian, who added that neither the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or the supreme leader's words forbids atomic research that may be used in weapons systems.

"The NPT forms a key basis for what must be serious engagement on Iran's nuclear program," read a joint statement issued separately today by the five nuclear-weapons countries recognized under the treaty. "We expect that subsequent meetings of the E3+3 and Iran will lead to concrete steps toward a comprehensive negotiated solution which restores international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear program."