

Iran's Next President and The Third Nuclear Strategy

By: [Seyed Hossein Mousavian for Al-Monitor Iran Pulse](#) Posted on **June 10**.

فارسی

The [Iranian presidential election](#) is set for June 14, and the candidate selected will take office in August. The world is eager to know the new president's nuclear policy.

About This Article

Summary :

US President Barack Obama and Iran's next president should expand the nuclear talks to include regional security matters, including Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.

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Posted on: June 10 2013

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During Khatami's presidency, Iran's diplomacy was called nuclear engagement and based on two conditions the government set for itself: maintaining Iran's right to peaceful nuclear technology, including enrichment, and ensuring that the nuclear file not be referred to the UN Security Council.

The ongoing Iranian nuclear issue dates back to early 2003, when Mohamed ElBaradei, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), visited the nuclear facilities at Natanz and officially announced that Iran was among 10 nations that had attained enrichment technology and capability. After that, during the tenures of Presidents Mohammad Khatami and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran and the world embarked on two approaches to nuclear diplomacy with varying costs and benefits.

After ElBaradei's assessment of Iran's nuclear program, the IAEA Board of Governors

passed a resolution in September 2003 demanding the suspension of its enrichment activities and access to facilities beyond the scope of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), setting a 50-day deadline for Iran to comply. At the time, there was considerable ambiguity within the international community regarding the nature of the Iranian program. The [United States](#), challenged by the Islamic republic's resolve since 1979, found the nuclear issue a golden opportunity for putting the Iran file before the Security Council. By doing so, it could label Iran a threat to international peace and security, pave the way for international sanctions and isolation and possible military attack.

Faced with these concerns and in an attempt to reassure the international community, Iran agreed to the maximum level of transparency and cooperation with the IAEA through provisional implementation of the Additional Protocol and Subsidiary Arrangement Code 3.1. This confidence-building policy temporarily, voluntarily and partially suspended enrichment and allowed for political negotiations with the EU3 — France, Germany and the United Kingdom — and Russia. The Iranian supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, signed off on all these measures.

Through this approach, Iran succeeded in a number of diplomatic and technical achievements related to its nuclear activities. During the Khatami presidency its accomplishments included the following:

1. Iran mastered enrichment technology, while insisting on recognition by the international community of its right to nuclear technology.
2. After extensive inspections, the IAEA confirmed that Iran's nuclear program had not since the revolution been diverted toward nuclear weapons development.
3. Within a year of the September 2003 resolution and after six further resolutions, the IAEA Board of Governors decided to remove Iran's file from its quarterly session's agenda.
4. Iran managed to expand its relations with the major powers — China, the European Union, and Japan — and the United States failed to sway most of the world to join in its hostile stance toward Tehran.
5. Although the Americans and Europeans initially demanded the cessation of enrichment as a legally binding commitment by Iran, the EU states and Russia eventually dropped this demand, agreeing instead to a voluntary confidence-building approach.
6. The IAEA agreed to forgo demands for unlimited access beyond the NPT to nuclear facilities and limit it to within the framework of the NPT's Safeguard Agreement and Additional Protocol.

7. As negotiations continued, Iran made major technological and technical strides in its nuclear program while cooperating with the IAEA. These included the development of a heavy-water reactor project in Arak, the completion and launch of a uranium conversion facility in Isfahan and increased centrifuge production, from 100 to 3,000.
8. Iran succeeded in staving off referral of its nuclear file to the Security Council and implementation of sanctions.

These achievements came at some cost. Iran's agreement to temporary, partial and periodic suspensions of enrichment led to impatience among certain segments of the population and placed the moderates under intense pressure. The nuclear issue became one of the main platforms in the 2005 presidential elections. During and after the campaigns, some of the hard-liners labeled Khatami's nuclear negotiating team and moderate officials as [spies, traitors and tools of the West](#) who had sold out the rights and ambitions of the country.

Nuclear diplomacy under the Ahmadinejad administration took an approach different from its predecessor's. Only Iran's nuclear rights carried over from the Khatami government as a major concern of the new administration, which took power in 2005. Avoiding referral to the UN Security Council was dropped as a central policy objective.

The new nuclear policy had its advantages. Enrichment activities were expedited, and Iran increased the number of its centrifuges, from 3,000 to 12,000, and the level of enrichment, from 5% to 20%. Its low-enriched uranium stockpiles surpassed eight tons. The policy's most important achievement was demonstrating to the international community that the advance of Iran's nuclear program was irreversible. At the same time, the costs of Ahmadinejad's policy were huge and manifold:

1. Iran's file was reinserted on the agenda of the IAEA Board of Governors periodic sessions, with six resolutions passed against it to date.
2. Iran's nuclear file was referred to the UN Security Council and has resulted in seven resolutions being passed against its nuclear program.
3. The Security Council classified Iran's nuclear program as a threat to international peace and security under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.
4. The Security Council imposed the most comprehensive and draconian multilateral economic sanctions on Iran.
5. Enrichment suspension was reversed from a non-legally binding and voluntary confidence-building arrangement into a Security Council-mandated and legally

binding demand.

6. The UN nuclear watchdog reinstated its demand for unlimited access to the Iran's nuclear program as a requirement of the international community as voiced through IAEA and Security Council resolutions.
7. Since 2011, the possibility of there being military aspects to Iran's program has become the core issue of IAEA reports and resolutions.
8. The previous divide between the European and US positions on Iran's nuclear file was bridged, and other major powers — China, India, Japan, Russia and South Korea — have joined the American bandwagon in implementing crippling, multilateral and even unilateral sanctions on Iran beyond those dictated by the Security Council.
9. Iran's foreign relations drastically deteriorated. For example, as illustrated by WikiLeaks cables, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia repeatedly urged the United States to attack Iran and put an end to its nuclear weapons program, encouraging Washington to “cut off the head of the snake.”
10. The US Congress passed sanctions against Iran, its most comprehensive unilateral sanctions ever imposed on a country. Although a means to curb Iran's nuclear program, the sanctions were also tied to issues of terrorism and human rights. This web of sanctions, going beyond the realm of the nuclear issue, additionally complicated any viable solution to the Iranian nuclear file.

The **next Iranian president** will not be able to revert to Khatami's nuclear strategy, because the nuclear file has already been referred to the Security Council, nor to Ahmadinejad's strategy, because the multilateral and unilateral sanctions should be lifted. Although the supreme leader will remain the ultimate decision maker in Tehran, the new president will play an important role formulating the country's third nuclear strategy.

Understanding the domestic political considerations related to nuclear diplomacy, and taking into account the positive and negative consequences of past strategies, will help the P5+1 — China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States — and the next Iranian president define a new realistic and face-saving solution for all parties involved.

My advice to the P5+1 would be that the key to ending the ongoing situation is to respect “Iran's rights under NPT,” which includes enrichment. To the next Iranian president, I suggest accepting the maximum level of transparency in cooperation with the IAEA and offering assurances to the P5+1 on “no breakout” toward nuclear weapons.

To make a breakthrough possible, US President Barack Obama and the new Iranian president should not limit themselves to only discussing the nuclear issue. Instead they should think outside the box and make headway on areas of mutual, Iranian-US interest, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria and energy security. Progress on US-Iranian relations will inevitably increase the possibility of a breakthrough in the multilateral nuclear negotiations.

Ambassador *Seyed Hossein Mousavian* is a research scholar at Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School and a former spokesman for Iran's nuclear negotiators. His latest book is *The Iranian Nuclear Crisis: A Memoir*, published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.



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Hard Little Machine • a day ago

Obama is running out the clock on meaningless sanctions. If anything Obama and Iran quietly reached an agreement for Iran to go nuclear by the end of 2013. Whomever is president of Iran will double down on nuclear weapons programs. Odds are, nuclear war in west Asia and the Mideast in 2-3 years. The Ayatollahs have promised it. Of course they'll wreck Israel and kill millions of Jews but the cost to Iran will be that Iran ceases to exist.

So good luck with that. You have about 36 months before the weather in Tehran is 15 million degrees with a 90% chance of neutrons.

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Musa Qallab • 2 days ago

But what about your Islamic brotherhood in GCC Countries ? only you are concerned about :Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria and energy security?
Musa Qallab, Dubai - UAE

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Kevin • 2 days ago

The US is not challenged by Iran's "resolve". That is ridiculous propaganda. They are challenged by Iran's nuclear weapons program that the mullahs kept clandestine for nearly two decades. If a nuclear program is truly for peaceful purposes then why take all the trouble to hide it for so long? This writer is nothing more than a propagandist for the regime in Tehran which he was a part of for years. He still clings to the same lies as



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