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Real Solutions To Nuclear Deadlock With Iran By Hossein Mousavian

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TALKS BETWEEN Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany (P5+1), scheduled for next month, provide the best opportunity to break the nine-year deadlock over Iran's nuclear program.

Going in, the P5+1 members need to know that war or coercion are not the only two options. A third, offered by President Obama, seeks to engage Tehran regarding its nuclear program. This could work – since 2003, Iran has been looking for a viable and durable solution to the diplomatic standoff.

The first step toward a workable proposal is to identify the bottom line of both parties. For Iran, this is the recognition of its legitimate right to create a nuclear program – including enrichment – and a backing off by the P5+1 from its zero enrichment position. For the P5+1, it is an absolute prohibition on Iran from creating a nuclear bomb, and having Iran clear up ambiguities in its nuclear program to the satisfaction of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Second, the West needs to drop any demands – real or perceived – of regime change in Iran. It needs to do so clearly in order to dispel the notion that the United States is using the issue of Iran's nuclear program as a pretext for regime change. For talks to go forward, Iran needs to believe that regime change is not a US policy goal.

Third, the West needs to understand that crippling sanctions, covert actions, and military strikes might slow down

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Iran's nuclear program but will not stop it. In fact, it is too late to demand that Iran suspend enrichment activities; it mastered enrichment technology and reached break-out capability in 2002 and continues to steadily improve its uranium enrichment capabilities. Notwithstanding, the United States, the European Union, and even Israel agree on three things: Tehran does not have a bomb, has not decided to build one, and is years away from having a deliverable nuclear warhead. Iran's current nuclear program is, therefore, not an imminent threat – leaving time for diplomacy to succeed.

To help Obama's engagement policy succeed, the United States should credibly demonstrate that the ultimate goal is "engagement" and not regime change. The P5+1 should offer a package that includes three major elements: 1) recognition of Iran's inalienable rights for enrichment; 2) removal of the sanctions; and 3) normalization of Iran's nuclear file. In return, Iran should provide full transparency to IAEA inspection as well as confidence-building measures and assurances that it will remain a non-nuclear weapon state.

The following approach might help end this standoff:

Phase 1: To cool down war-mongers, Iran should limit the extent to which it enriches uranium; it should stop producing 20 percent enriched uranium, which can be processed into weapons-grade fuel relatively easily. Simultaneously, the P5+1 should provide fuel rods for the Tehran Research Reactor, and the United States and EU should suspend sanctions on Iran's oil and central bank.

Phase 2: Iran should implement the "Subsidiary Arrangement Code 3.1" and the "Additional Protocol" (this is the IAEA's arrangements to secure the maximum level of transparency) and address the IAEA's military questions. The P5+1 should recognize Iran's right to nuclear energy under the Non-Proliferation Treaty, including enrichment (limited to civil, peaceful purposes) and suspend the UN nuclear-related sanctions.

Phase 3: Iran should permit the IAEA full surveillance of centrifuges and limit enrichment to existing sites. For a confidence-building period, it should get rid of nuclear fuel it isn't using for domestic consumption. In response, the P5+1 should suspend unilateral sanctions related to the nuclear issue, lift sanctions on civilian goods (such as aviation) and cooperate with Iran on peaceful nuclear technology.

Phase 4: To secure sustainable transparency, Iran should ratify the "Additional Protocol" and "Subsidiary Arrangement Code 3.1", maximize cooperation with the IAEA, and halt building further enrichment sites until IAEA ambiguities are removed. In return, the P5+1 should lift all UN and unilateral sanctions.

The nuclear issue is part of a broader dispute between Iran and the West. It is crucial for Washington and Tehran to begin a serious dialogue to resolve more than three decades of hostilities, mistrust, and tension, and usher in a new chapter in relations, positively contributing to global peace and stability.

Hossein Mousavian, a former Iranian ambassador to Germany, is a research scholar at the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University. He was spokesman for Iran's nuclear negotiating team from 2003 to 2005.

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