

GREAT  
DECISIONS

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## Seyed Hossein Mousavian

Seyed Hossein Mousavian is a Research Scholar at the Program on Science and Global Security at Princeton University. Previously, he served as Iran's Ambassador to Germany and head of the Foreign Relations Committee of Iran's National Security Council.



### Transcript

#### What is the history of the milestones in U.S.-Iran relations and some of the milestones of the nuclear negotiations?

Iran and the U.S. had a very close – maybe strategic – relations before the revolution. That was the time actually that the U.S. laid the foundations for a nuclear Iran. The Iranian nuclear practically started during the shah by the U.S. initiative. The U.S. proposed Iran to have 23 power plants within the year 2000, and the first Iranian nuclear site was built by the U.S. in 1967.

At that time, the U.S. allies – the Europeans – were competing with the U.S. to grab more lucrative projects to nuclearize Iran. The Germans, they signed an 8 billion deutsche mark contract with an Iranian power plant, and France signed more than a billion dollars on enrichment with Iran.

Right after the revolutions, the time Iranian revolutions decided to shrink the ambitious nuclear projects of the shah. The U.S. decided to cut nuclear cooperation with Iran, and even the U.S. denied the rights of Iran to have civilian nuclear power plant.

I believe this was the main reason for Iran to move forward to accomplish the unfinished projects – billions of dollars of unfinished projects paid by Iran – and the rest of the countries withdrew from their contractor commitments, and there was really no way for Iran to go towards self-sufficiency.

In order to complete the projects, that time, Iran was neither looking for enrichment nor reprocessing, nor heavy water – only Iran wanted to finish the civilian nuclear power plant and to stop the expansion of nuclear activities, even Iran decided that time to cancel the U.S. proposal – the U.S. agreement with the shah – to build 23 power plants. This was the main reason, practically; Iran was somehow pushed toward self-sufficiency on the nuclear issue.

Interviewer

Where are we at this point with nuclear enrichment negotiations? Have there been any breakthroughs? Milestones?

Mousavian

It depends very much I believe on the U.S.' strategy and its European allies. If the red line for them is a nuclear bomb – for Iran to not have a nuclear bomb. Definitely there can be a very quick break through. If the red line is enrichment, which is the legitimate rights for every member of NPT (Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons), I don't believe there will be any chance because no one in Iran would be able to accept for Iranians to be deprived of their legitimate rights.

It has nothing to do with clerics. This was exactly the shah's policy also. This was the red line for shah. The shah was also reiterating for Iran to have enrichment, to have reprocessing, to have full rights under

#### GDTV QUOTES

China is interested in Africa's resources because they are interested in controlling their own economic destiny. And for China to control its own economic destiny, it must have a range of economic relationships and diplomatic partnerships that will allow them to procure sufficient raw material and keep the mothership going."

— Jon Huntsman, Former U.S. Ambassador to China

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NPT. It is really the same; it doesn't make difference.

But the issue, the red line for the US and Europeans, is a nuclear bomb – for Iran not to have a nuclear bomb and for Iran to remain a non-nuclear weapon state forever – I am very much optimistic. We can have a very quick breakthrough to reach a peaceful solution because both during our time, when we were nuclear negotiators in 2003, 2002, 2005, and even in Ahmadinejad's era, 2005 to 2012, Iran has been ready to accept the maximum level of transparency of cooperation with the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) if the U.S. and the West is ready to recognize the rights of Iran, the legitimate rights of Iran for NPT.

During the last two or three talks, Iran was ready to deal on 20 percent enrichment, to decrease the level of enrichment to 5 percent in order to remove an concern or ambiguities for Iran to have high level enrichment to go toward bomb. This was a big issue. Iran showed [green line] and flexibility in Moscow, in Bagdad, and even in Istanbul that they are ready to decrease to have enrichment below 5 percent.

And Iran also was ready to sign a very, very comprehensive plan with the IAEA, which practically the draft is already agreed between Iran and the IAEA, to support inspection at the maximum level, to permit the IAEA to have maximum level of inspection. Even Iran accepted to address all issues of possible military dimensions, which the IAEA has in its agenda – all ambiguities, all technical questions – to be removed.

Even Iran was ready to cooperate on transparency measures beyond NPT. But they were asking at the same time the rights, the legitimate rights, to be recognized and for the gradual lifting of sanctions. The West was neither ready to recognize the right for enrichment nor to lift the sanctions. That's why the negotiations have failed, and I believe this will continue to fail as long as the West is not ready to recognize the rights of the Iranian nation – I'm not talking about any governments, I'm talking about Iranian nation – to have peaceful nuclear technologies including enrichment, like other nations; many countries have enrichment.

Interviewer

With all these red lines being drawn, where are there opportunities for cooperation and progress between the U.S. and Iran?

Mousavian

I believe a big mistake on engagement policy of President Obama has been concentrating on the nuclear issue, and to take all other issues – which Iran and the U.S. have common interests – to cooperate, to bring confidence building – more confidence, more trust like Afghanistan. Is a big issue for the U.S., for international community, for the region, and also for Iran. And Iran and the U.S. – they are in the same page, they are in the same boat, combating terrorism, drug trafficking, to bring stability in Afghanistan.

But the U.S. has declined to cooperate with Iran on such an issue – even on Iraq, even on the energy in Persian Gulf. To hostage all issues of common interest just because of the nuclear issue, for the nuclear issue – I think this is a mistake. I believe mistrust is a reality; hostility is a reality, but this is mutual. I mean Americans have their own reasons to mistrust Iran; Iranians have their own reasons to mistrust the U.S. because they remember the 1953 coup when the U.S. removed a democratically elected prime minister and brought a dictator.

They remember the U.S. support Iraq invasion of Iran for eight years, in which Iranians lost 300,000 civilians, military people during the war. The mistrust is mutual. The confidence building is a very, very important and urgent issue. It's the promising issue is that, although we have differences and mistrust, we have a lot of issues of common interest, which is really in the national interest of the U.S. and the national interests of Iranians.

That's why I believe in parallel – why they are discussing the issues of disputes like terrorism, like weapons of mass destructions, like human rights – all these issues. At the same time, they can open another line to discuss, to create a dialogue and cooperate on issues of common interests. If fighting al Qaeda – as the major threat to the U.S. since September 9/11 – if al Qaeda, fighting al Qaeda is one top priorities of the U.S., this is one of the top priorities of Iranians. Why they cannot see together and cooperate and fight against al Qaeda? Why they are discussing the disputes on Israel-Palestine nuclear issue?

Interviewer

It seems like there are a lot of opportunities for cooperation, but it seems like there's a lot of blustery statements and brinkmanship that seem to be in no one's interests. Does the leadership of Iran see these statements as playing to the base? What's the objective?

The statements – the rhetoric – you'll hear from two sides; it is not on Iranians. The U.S. also continues to threaten Iran for a military strike. The Israelis – every week they repeat that there should be a military strike. They are pushing the U.S. for a war in the Middle East against Iran.

I believe they have to – both of them – to start a constructive trend. They have to stop the rhetoric, the threatening. This is a duty for both parties – it is not only for Iran or the U.S.

Then to have a realistic understanding about the threat to peace and stability in whole Middle East – not only because a crisis between Iran and the U.S. or Israel and Iran, because, not only because of the crisis in Iraq, not only because of the crisis in Afghanistan. We have Syria issue, we have Egypt issue, we have Yemen, Tunisia, we have this Arab Spring. As the U.S. and Western countries call it "Arab Spring;" the Iranians call it "Islamic awakening." But nevertheless, the issue is the same: there is a real need for Iran and the U.S. – for the U.S. as the major international power, and Iran as one of the major regional powers – to sit and cooperate for peace, security and stability.

Interviewer

Is the goal at this point, on the side of Iran, what's the hope of the outcome?

Mousavian

You know, the good news is that Iranians during negotiations, they always have reiterated on a broader package, even in the latest talks in Moscow and Bagdad. They were proposing Americans, Europeans to discuss and to cooperate to find a package on the nuclear – but not to limit the issue to nuclear. Even they proposed that they are ready to discuss, to sit, to cooperate on the Syrian issue, Syrian crisis, Iraq, Afghanistan, but it is the U.S. and the Europeans who are still not ready.

Interviewer

Iran has a vibrant and well-educated population. How do they see the relationship between Iran and the U.S. specifically?

I believe nobody – or at least the majority – in Iran they are not happy. Iranians, I really don't, I cannot imagine the majority of Iranians they like hostility with the U.S., and they really want a good, normal relation with the U.S. based on mutual respect and non-interference.

Interviewer

And it seems Ahmadinejad is always in the news. Is he really the power structure behind the decision

making process?

Mousavian

The really power in Iran is the Supreme Leader. By constitution, he is the ultimate decision maker on foreign policy and security issues. The national Security Council – Supreme National Security Council – they discuss and they decide, but they send the decision over for the leader to decide. The leader can accept it or can reject it.

The national Security Council of the country has 11 members, and I believe the real power, the ultimate decision maker is the Leader. And the proposals was made during Khatami – we made the same proposal! We told the Europeans that time we were talking with EU-3 – Germany, France and U.K. – we were telling them that we were ready for every measures on confidence building, transparency, objective guarantees proving that Iran would never seek nuclear weapons. Just define for us the measures or objective guarantees that you would need to be convinced that Iran would never seek nuclear weapon.

They were not able to give us the definition of the objective guarantees – or even to give us the transparency measures. At the same time, we were requesting for them to accept our rights, but we were proposing them to cooperate on all weapons of mass destruction, for elimination of weapons of mass destruction, in the Middle East, for everybody in the Middle East, to cooperate against terrorism with no discrimination; not to be selective, based on the UN resolution. To cooperate on an energy issue, to guarantee the face exported, the safe export of energy from the Persian Gulf and the region.

We put all of these proposals, and despite of harsh rhetoric you have heard in Ahmadinejad's era – like Holocaust, like on Israel, or even accusing American officials of having a hand on 9/11 issue – despite of all threes rhetoric's, they have proposed the same in nuclear negotiations P5+1. The package has been one side the nuclear, one broader issues, and this can never happen except approval of the Leader. Therefore, I can see his grand strategy is the same during Khatami and during Ahmadinejad. Why he decided to change the nuclear policy? It was not because Ahmadinejad was elected. He was really fed up with the Europeans playing with the time because that time we accepted to have suspension for a period as confidence building just for a period – a short period, non-legally binding. But the Europeans strategy was to continue negotiations for unlimited period in order to keep suspension during negotiations, to bring Iran to an indefinite suspension, ultimately to deprive Iran from its legitimate rights under NPT because the U.S. position was “no enrichment in Iran.”

The U.S. has told Europeans – during the time we were negotiating – The U.S. told Europeans, “no one, single centrifuge.” Unfortunately, this is still the position of the U.S., although they show some green light conditionally they are ready to recognize the rights for enrichment. But under the nuclear negotiations, they have never been ready to accept the rights of Iran on enrichment.

Interviewer

Before we move onto the next question, there was a bit of a glitch on one statement you had said. You had a good explanation that the president was one of 11 members of the Security Council; can you say that statement again?

Mousavian

The leader is ultimate decision maker in the country, but first the decisions are coming to the national Security Council. The Supreme National Security Council of Iran consists of 11 members, which the president is one member, the head of judiciary is another. The head of, the speaker of parliament, the foreign minister, the defense minister, interior minister, intelligence minister, two representatives from the leader – they will have 11 members. They decide on all major political, security, economic and cultural issues and they send it for the Leader. The Leader is the ultimate decision maker, either to

accept it or to reject it.

Interviewer

Moving on to the economy, what have been the effects of the sanctions – both U.S. sanctions and international sanctions?

Mousavian

The sanctions definitely has had a great negative impact on the Iranian economy, harming the ordinary people. The value of the Iranian currency has depreciated – I don't know, 60, 70, 80 percent. And the goods, commodities are much more expensive — the rate of inflation.

The sanctions definitely has harmed and would harm the Iranian ordinary people, but I really don't know what is objective of sanctions. If they believe sanctions would convince Iran to change its nuclear program? I can never imagine this would happen.

Interviewer

So you think the sanctions are to try to make a leadership change?

Mousavian

I believe, I believe, the ultimate goal of the West increasing the sanctions is more to bring a regime change than a change in nuclear policy.

Interviewer

How are the covert actions that have taken place relative recently perceived? Stuxnet – things like that?

Mousavian

To be fair, already economic war, cyber war, intelligence war, and political war have begun between Iran and the U.S., Iran and the West. And just yesterday I heard from Israeli president who said open war between Iran and Israel is underway practically. Assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists had a very great negative impact between Iranian nation because the nuclear issue is really a matter of consensus – the majority of Iranians, they are pro their rights.

They don't want bomb; definitely they don't want bomb. But they want their rights, like other members of NPT like Japan, like Belgium, like Germany, like Brazil, like Argentina – like other members of NPT. Assassinating the nuclear scientists I believe was a mistake, and continuing such a covert war, cyber war would be, again, a mistake because it's preparing the ground for a comprehensive war between Iran and the U.S., which is neither in the interests of the U.S. nor in the interest of Iran nor is good for peace in the region.

Interviewer

So if you were advising U.S. policy makers in the coming year, what advice would you give them on policy?

Mousavian

I would advise them – despite the fact that they have a problem with the Iranian administration – they

should count on Iran as a major regional power, which the majority of the population they are seeking a good relationship with the U.S. based on mutual respect. And even the Leader is not opposing healthy relations between Iran and the U.S.

Ayatollah Khamene, the Supreme Leader, is prepared for a relation, a healthy relationship based on non-interference and mutual respect. Considering this very important fact, I would propose to follow two issues in parallel. One issue, on the nuclear issue, based of respecting the rights of Iran and requiring Iran and requiring the maximum level of transparency — every objective guarantees on non-diversion to ensure that the Iranian nuclear program would remain peaceful forever. At the same time, in parallel talks between Iran and the U.S.; for a broader cooperation, including all regional bilateral and international issues to bring a major change to 33 years of hostilities between two countries.

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