



Iran Won't Give Up Nuclear Program, Ex-Rouhani Associate Says

By Patrick Donahue - Oct 10, 2013

A former associate of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said no amount of sanctions will be able to spur the country to surrender its nuclear program, even though restrictions have debilitated the economy.

Hossein Mousavian, a former spokesman for Rouhani when he was [Iran](#)'s nuclear negotiator, told a panel in Hamburg that even as sanctions have affected the lives of ordinary Iranians, the country will never give up its right to enrich uranium under the auspices of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

"It's impossible," Mousavian, who is a research scholar at [Princeton University](#)'s Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, told an audience today at the Koerber Foundation in the northern German port city. "It doesn't matter what kind of sanctions you impose, Iran is not willing to forgo their rights under international rules."

Rouhani has made overtures to the U.S. and its allies since he took office two months ago, with a priority to ease Iran's isolation and negotiate a lifting of the financial and oil restrictions that have crippled the nation's economy.

Iran's new president spoke with President [Barack Obama](#) by phone on the last day of his trip to [New York](#) last month, the highest-level interaction between the two governments since the 1979 revolution.

On Sept. 26 at the UN, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif agreed with world powers to accelerate negotiations on [Iran's nuclear program](#), talks that will test the country's readiness to make concessions and allay concerns it's seeking the capability to produce nuclear weapons.

Espionage Charges

Mousavian, who was charged with espionage in Iran during the presidency of [Mahmoud Ahmadinejad](#) and now lives abroad, suggested that Iran could put forward confidence-building measures such as reducing enrichment levels to below 5 percent or allowing inspectors to visit military sites. He reiterated that Iran doesn't aspire to weaponize its nuclear capabilities.

“Iran has the capability and can make a nuclear bomb if they want, but they don't want,” Mousavian said.

Mousavian expressed optimism that the thaw has the potential to bring about a breakthrough on the nuclear issue in six months, though it will take more time to ease 34 years of hostility and bring about a rapprochement with the U.S.

“The wall of mistrust is really thick,” Mousavian said. “It is a good beginning, but we should not believe that things with the U.S. can be resolved in six months or one year.”

Since U.S. and EU oil sanctions went into effect in July 2012, Iran's oil [exports](#) have dropped by half and inflation almost doubled in two years, reaching 40 percent last month. The majority of Iran's government revenue comes from crude oil sales.

Iran was the second-biggest crude producer in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries as recently as June 2012, before U.S. and EU oil sanctions took effect, and was in sixth place last month, according to a Bloomberg survey of [oil companies](#), producers and analysts.

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