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Opinion: Success is in sight, if sanctions can be lifted

Posted By [Seyed Hossein Mousavian](#) On November 6, 2013 @ 12:00 am In [Opinion](#) | [No Comments](#)

The inability of the United States to maintain a meaningful dialogue with Iran for over a third of a century has remained a serious obstacle to peaceful crisis management in the Middle East, and could erupt into an all-out war at the least provocation or error by the two states.

However, new signs of hope emerged following the 2012 re-election of Obama and the recent election of Hassan Rouhani in Iran. At the opening of the latest session of the United Nations General Assembly, President Obama noted: "We are not seeking regime change...we respect the right of the Iranian people to access peaceful nuclear energy...I do believe that if we can resolve the issue of Iran's nuclear program, that can serve as a major step down a long road towards a different relationship—one based on mutual interests and mutual respect."

Iranian President Rouhani did not neglect this opportunity to respond positively at the same forum, asserting that Iran sought "constructive engagement" and did not "seek to increase tension with the United States," adding, "Let me say loud and clear that peace is within reach."

This was followed by the first direct talks between Secretary of State John Kerry and his Iranian counterpart, Javad Zarif, on September 26, 2013 at the United Nations. The following day, Obama and Rouhani held their first telephone conversation and instructed their respective foreign ministers to continue direct talks.

The new political atmosphere following the Iranian presidential election, coupled with direct talks between Washington and Tehran, had substantial impact on two regional developments.

Firstly, trilateral cooperation between Russia, Iran, and the US led the Syrian government to relinquish its chemical weapons, sign the Chemical Weapons Convention, and open the country to international inspectors with a mandate to destroy its chemical weapons. Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif summed up this success by noting, "[War] was averted through a concerted effort on the part of a number of players, including Iran and Russia, and the United States, and a good number of other players, because there were forces that were pushing for war."

Secondly, in the first round of nuclear talks between Iran and the world powers on October 15-16, Tehran presented a "very comprehensive" package to overcome the decade-long standoff over the Iran's nuclear program. The Iranian side also held landmark talks with US officials. "I have never had such intense, detailed, straightforward, and candid conversations with the Iranian delegation," a senior US official admitted to reporters.

Thirdly, at the two-day session in Vienna on October 28-29, Iran opened a new chapter in dealings with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to resolve remaining technical ambiguities. Iranian deputy foreign minister Abbas Araqchi put forward a new proposal to IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano and pledged a new approach.

Although the contents of the Iranian package has been kept confidential, during two different conferences representatives of two members of the international delegation attending the recent nuclear talks in Geneva informed me that "the new Iranian nuclear package addresses all major concerns of the world powers." Russia's "Step-by-Step Proposal" from 2011, plus credible media reports and statements by former US officials engaged on the nuclear issue, reveal that the major demands of the world powers are twofold.

Firstly, they insist that Iran show the maximum level of transparency by implementing the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty's Additional Protocol, Subsidiary Arrangement Code 3.1 and cooperating with the IAEA to resolve the so-called "possible military dimension" issues.

Secondly, they want Iran to accept measures to prevent the chance of a "breakout" to a nuclear weapon: cap uranium enrichment at 5 percent, limit the number and type of centrifuges, accept a maximum ceiling on stockpiles of enriched uranium, ensure no reprocessing takes place at the heavy water facility in Arak, and forbid plutonium separation.

The Russian step-by-step plan contained all these major elements required by the world powers, and was welcomed by Iran because it includes two major Iranian demands: the recognition of Iran's right to enrichment, and the lifting of sanctions. Reliable sources informed me that the Russian proposal failed because of US inability to provide sanctions relief in return for substantive Iranian measures.

All of the above suggests that a comprehensive deal on the nuclear issue is possible if the US and the world powers respects the rights of Iran under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, and if Iran gets proportionate sanction relief in return for accepting their major demands. This, in effect, places the demands of both parties within a package and implements a step-by-step, proportionate, and reciprocal process.

To prevent such a breakthrough from materializing, hawks in Tel Aviv and Washington are pushing a misleading proposal on "freeing up funds." "My biggest concern is that if the administration takes out a brick from the sanctions regime, you won't be able to put it back together," asserted Mark Dubowitz, Executive Director of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. He called the "freeing up funds" plan a way to offer a concession without changing the sanctions.

About USD 50 billion of Iran's oil revenue is currently held in escrow accounts in countries that continue to import oil from Iran. Iran employs these assets to pay for imports from these countries. The resumption of nuclear negotiations has provided Israeli hawks and US hardliners the opportunity to freeze these funds entirely. Their suggestion that President Obama temporarily allow Iran access to those funds is most likely tied to nuclear concessions. Iran's compliance will result in monetary rewards which leave the structure of the current unilateral and multilateral sanctions regimes imposed by United Nations, US, and Europeans intact.

Failure to comply, however, will result in the freezing of Iran's assets abroad and placing it under a virtual embargo. Therefore, this proposal is in fact nothing but a Trojan horse. This policy not only blocks the nuclear deal, but would complicate the situation further at a time when—after a decade—the world powers and Iran are in a position to reach a final deal if the US can deliver real action on sanctions relief.



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