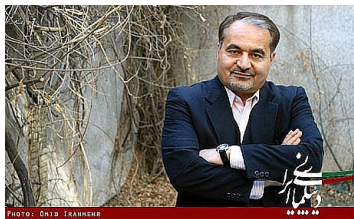




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Negotiating Team Did Not Cross Red Lines

Excerpts of an exclusive interview with Hossein Mousavian, a former senior member of Iran's nuclear negotiating team

January 28th, 2014 - by Sara Massoumi

More than ten years have passed since the beginning of nuclear negotiations between Iran and the West. This dossier, which had once become the most controversial file in the IAEA because of certain technical and legal questions, was gradually transformed into a political affair following its referral from the IAEA Board of Governors to the UN Security Council and this prepared the ground for the presence of new players. On November 24th 2013, a document was finally signed between Iran and the P5+1 as a Joint Plan of Action, giving the two sides six months to maneuver in the first step. During this decade of negotiations, the Iranian nuclear dossier has experienced the presence of numerous experts and diplomats with various political views. Iranian Diplomacy recently spoke with Hossein Mousavian, a former senior member of Iran's nuclear negotiating team, about the recent Geneva agreement and the future of the nuclear talks and Iran's relations with the West, the US, and with countries of the Persian Gulf region. Mr. Mousavian, who is Princeton University, was Iran's Ambassador to Germany from 1990-1997 and headed the Foreign Relations Committee of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran during the eight years of Mohammad Khatami's presidency.

What is your assessment of the signing of the Joint Plan of Action between Iran and the P5+1 after many years of ups and downs in negotiations?

In a realistic view of this agreement, I must say that this agreement is neither desirable and ideal for the Iranian negotiating team nor desirable and ideal for the P5+1 negotiators. Neither of the parties has reached its maximum demands by signing this agreement. But considering the conditions or the situation of the nuclear dossier, I believe that neither the Iranian side nor the other party was able to achieve more than they did. The most important challenge and difference of opinion which exists in this agreement is, in fact, the response to the question of whether Iran's enrichment program has been recognized or not? John Kerry, the US Secretary of State, stated in an interview that we have not recognized this right but the Iranian party reiterates that this right has been recognized. The critics of this agreement in Iran and the US maneuver over this issue. I believe that in order to understand the issue of uranium enrichment in Iran, we must study 40 years of US policy with regard to enrichment. Following the adoption of the NPT in the late 1960s and its implementation in the early 1970s, the US has never, up until now, officially recognized enrichment in any country.

The second issue is that the US believes that if Iran's enrichment is recognized, then there will be an international competition over this issue at the global level which would spread the threat of proliferation of nuclear weapons. Therefore, the US has pursued a dual policy, meaning that it has explicitly and practically accepted enrichment in countries which it trusts like Germany and Japan. Unfortunately this issue has not been well-comprehended inside the country. The fact is that the non-recognition of the right to enrichment by the US is not only implemented for Iran but that it is rather a general and 40-year long policy of the US administration.

You were one of the members of Iran's team of nuclear negotiation between 2003 and 2005 led by Mr.

Hassan Rohani. At that time, Iran accepted to take many voluntary measures including the suspension of enrichment and the signing of the Additional Protocol and according to some critics, retreated from some of its positions. Nevertheless, the negotiations ultimately failed and this case was referred to the Security Council and the sanctions were intensified. What were the reasons behind this failure?

At that juncture, both parties withdrew from their positions. Iran accepted to sign the Additional Protocol and suspend some of its nuclear activities and the other party accepted to take the following measures:

1. Not referring Iran's dossier to the Security Council
2. Not adopting sanctions
3. Entering the area of comprehensive strategic cooperation with Iran
4. Accepting Iran's right to have nuclear power plants
5. Accepting the provision of fuel for Iran which meant breaking 30 years of deadlock
6. Accepting Iran's enjoyment of peaceful nuclear technology in the fields of medicine, agriculture, ...
7. Accepting the development of cooperation between Iran and Europe in the political, economic and security dimensions. Based on this item, Iran and Europe even reached an agreement over the issue of the common struggle against al-Qaeda and the MKO.

Why did this round of negotiations reach a conclusion?

The reason behind the success this time lies in the US' change of position. The US position has changed from zero enrichment to an Iran without a nuclear bomb. These two issues are very different from each other for Iran has no problem with observing the red line of the nuclear bomb. Barack Obama has, many times, stated that Iran's achievement of a nuclear bomb is our red line. Before Obama, the Supreme Leader had reiterated that not only are nuclear armaments Iran's red line but also any weapon of mass destruction is our red line. Therefore, Iran's leadership had determined the red line for our country before the western politicians.

In this round of negotiations, the US has accepted that they will not have a problem with enrichment in Iran, although it will be limited in the beginning. Of course, the trust which exists between the US and Germany does not exist between Iran and the US. Gradually and with the development of relations, these limitations in enrichment will also be removed.

Therefore, by getting the acceptance of even 5% enrichment in Iran by the P5+1, the new administration has bypassed the main obstacle in the trend of negotiations.

Yes. Don't forget that the principles of the plan which we presented to the Europeans in 2005 are the same as the principles of the plan which was put on the table in November 2013 in Geneva. The principles that we have accepted in the Joint Plan of Action are as follows:

1. Agreeing to IAEA inspections
2. Enrichment up to 5% and not more
3. Non-storage of more than necessary materials
4. Non-reprocessing of materials

These principles, not the details of the two agreements, are similar to each other. The principles of Iran's latest proposal

in Geneva were the same as in March 2005, which was of course approved by the high-ranking officials of the country at that time. But in 2005 no agreement was reached due to the US position with regard to enrichment but in 2013 this agreement was reached because the US changed its position in this regard.

The implementation of the Joint Plan of Action has officially begun. Nevertheless there are waves of protests against this agreement both inside Iran and in the US Congress. What issues threaten the future of these negotiations?

There are 4 threats on the other side:

1. US Congress
2. Pressures exerted by some Arab states
3. Pressures of the Zionist lobby
4. Mobilization of the anti-revolutionary forces led by the MKO

These 4 opponents pursue 5 objectives:

1. Failure of direct talks between Iran and the US
2. Failure of nuclear negotiations
3. Re-establishment of the sanctions which are to be removed during the next 6 months
4. Adoption of new sanctions from next fall
5. Directing the US towards a military attack against Iran

In general, it must be said that these four fronts seek an all-out confrontation with Iran.

You mentioned that, due to the change in the US position, this round of negotiations succeeded. What were the causes of this change?

The US and the West assumed that by referring Iran's nuclear dossier to the Security Council and imposing numerous sanctions, Iran would withdraw from its position. All of the Iranian negotiators in 2003 to 2005, from the highest ranking negotiator of the time who was Mr. Hassan Rohani to me, as the less senior one, had repeatedly reiterated Iran's red line and stated that if the case was referred to the Security Council, sanctions were intensified and even if they moved towards military confrontation, Iran's red line which is enrichment on its soil would not change. Of course, during all those years, the western countries considered Iran's insistence on this issue as a bluff. In the end, Iran continued its uranium enrichment and the sanctions were intensified. During these years Iran was under the most oppressive sanctions. In my opinion, right now no country has ever been more damaged than Iran within the framework of the UN resolutions and unilateral sanctions.

Following the sanctions, the number of Iran's centrifuges has increased from 3000 to 11000. Iran's enrichment was 5% and after the imposition of the sanctions it reached 20%. Today the P5+1 has reached the conclusion that it must accept enrichment inside Iran.

The Western countries had reached this conclusion during Ahmadinejad's presidency and in November 2010, Hillary Clinton said in an interview with BBC that if Iran remains committed to its obligations, they would accept enrichment.

If the West had reached this conclusion during the previous administration, then why was no agreement

reached in the nuclear negotiations in the ninth and tenth administrations?

The atmosphere of relations between Iran and the West was so tense that there was no possibility of making a deal. In the second term of Barack Obama's presidency, the presence of John Kerry as the US Secretary of State and Chuck Hagel, as the Defense Secretary, returned diplomacy to this country. Never before in the 34-year history of relations between Iran and the US, had such a triangle been formed in the White House where each element of it believed in interaction and improvement of relations with Iran. Therefore this matter helped this issue.

The second issue was Iran's elections which changed the negative atmosphere against Iran at the international level.

The combination of Mr. Zarif, Rohani, Shamkhani and Salehi, who are the main decision-makers in Iran's nuclear program after the Supreme Leader also attracted the positive view of the world towards Iran.

The ice of relations between Iran and the US has recently melted. If the two foreign ministers had talked with each other for only a few minutes last year, it would have been breaking news but today we see that the two sides negotiate with each other for hours on the sidelines of the nuclear negotiations. What perspective would you predict for these relations which are filled with mistrust?

I agree with this point that direct negotiations between Iran and the US reached its highest level in the history of political relations between the two countries during the presidency of Mr. Rohani. The negotiation between the two foreign ministers and the phone conversation between the two presidents happened for the first time in this administration. But this phenomenon was formed during Mr. Ahmadinejad's presidency. The first bilateral meeting was held between the US and Iranian ambassadors in Baghdad and the subject was Iraq and its problems. The second meeting was held between Mr. Saeed Jalili, as the Secretary of the High Council of National Security, and William Burns, the third highest-ranking person in the US Department of State at that time. Iran entered into direct negotiations with the US at the level of the Secretary of the High Council of National Security. These historical facts cannot be forgotten. In a fair judgment, I must say that, during his second presidential term, Mr. Ahmadinejad used all of his potentials and capacities to reduce the tension between Iran and the US.

Can the common regional and extra-regional concerns lead to the reduction of tension between Tehran and Washington and the expansion of cooperation between the two countries?

Since 4 years ago when I started my research activities at Princeton University, I have frankly expressed my political opinions in hundreds of articles that have been published. I believe in two parallel negotiations; one negotiation between Iran and the P5+1 about the nuclear issue and another direct negotiation between Iran and the US with regard to the issues of concerns of both sides. I believe in comprehensive negotiation. There is instability in Iraq and the stability of this country is one of the priorities of Iran's national security. Whether we like it or not, Iran and the US support the same government in Iraq. Iran and the US are the most influential powers of the region and the world in Iraq. That is why at one juncture, the meeting between the ambassadors of the two countries in Baghdad was allowed. The same issue exists in Afghanistan as well. Despite all their differences, Iran and the US support the same government in Kabul. Iran and the US also play significant roles in the Syrian crisis.

Iran must negotiate and cooperate with the neighboring countries and the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council. I believe that a system of regional cooperation must be formed between Iran, Iraq and the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council and I believe that the US must leave the Persian Gulf and render the provision of security in this region to the regional countries. Of course this is a gradual process and needs time and will not happen without direct negotiations between Iran and the US.

What is the problem in the relations between Iran and the Arab states and the neighboring countries?

In response to this question, all of the Arab states must not be studied collectively. There are even two trends in the

member countries of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council: Oman believes in a high-level and strategic relation with Iran and some other countries believe in confrontation with Iran.

The strategy of Iran's new administration must be the creation of comprehensive cooperation in the Persian Gulf region between Iran and the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council and Iraq. This cooperation must include the 8 Persian Gulf Littoral States. This system of cooperation must be similar to that of the EU. All political, economic and security cooperation must be covered within this framework.

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