

NO ALTERNATIVE THAN TO COOPERATE

Hossein Mousavian about the Vienna talks with Iran

FRANK RADTKE | 17. DECEMBER 2014



ENERGLOBE MAR

Seyed Hossein Mousavian is a much sought after man in the world these days concerning the analysis of negotiations between the E3+3/5+1 powers and Iran in Vienna and Geneva.

There are two reasons for this: First of all Mousavian, who has been teaching since 2009 at Princeton University (USA), is said to have the best insider knowledge of the Iranian side and longstanding personal contact with Iran's president Rouhani and foreign minister Zarif.

Mousavian was the Iranian spokesman in its nuclear negotiations with the EU from 2003 - 2005, and not just that. As a diplomat he served as General Director of Europe in Iran's Foreign Ministry, Ambassador to Germany and Head of the Foreign Relations Committee of Iran's National Security Council.

Second of all his book, published only a few months ago, "Iran and the United States - An inside view on the failed past and the road to peace" (Bloomsbury 2014) is considered the very first book that analyses the Iranian-American conflict, ongoing since 1979, from the Iranian side - with the knowledge of someone directly involved politically with this conflict.

ENERGLOBE met Seyed Hossein Mousavian a few days after the negotiations between the E3+3 powers had once again been extended on November 24, in order to ask his opinion of the situation.

Common understanding

The decisive question was first, of course, what had realistically been achieved to this point in the negotiations and what might be expected in the coming months?

According to Mousavian's analysis regarding the nuclear question, in an important series of questions, a common understanding had been achieved on how these questions might be solved.

To that end, the question first of all of transparency and verifications within the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the International Atomic En-

ergy Agency (IAEA) regulations would be important. Second, the question of technical conversion of the heavy water reactor in Arak to reduce proliferation risk. Third, the question of capacity of uranium enrichment and the stockpile of enriched uranium for practical domestic needs of Iran.

For Mousavian, these are important results after a year of intensive negotiations. There was agreement on how these questions could be resolved, and Iran had contributed to that by means of great flexibility in the negotiations. That concerns both the level of uranium enrichment at under 5 percent as well as renunciation of the reprocessing of atomic fuel.

But all these agreements would only come into effect in the context of a final comprehensive deal.

Open questions

There would still be two open issues, as Mousavian continues.

There was agreement in the joined plan of action that the capacity of uranium enrichment should be synchronised with the practical needs of Iran for peaceful use of atomic energy. The contract with Russia for the delivery of nuclear fuel for the nuclear power plant Bushehr runs until 2021. Until then, the amount of 9600 Iranian centrifuges for the enrichment of uranium would be sufficient. But Iran should be able to provide fuel for Bushehr after 2021 as a real practical needs.

After that, according to Mousavian, Iran will need much more than 100.000 centrifuges. To achieve this amount by 2021, the amount of centrifuges will have to gradually be increased. This is a fact on the ground.

Now however, the American side would demand that the contract with Russia be extended, in order to slow the number of centrifuges. Would that be a possible solution? "This is a point of dispute", says Mousavian.

Furthermore, in the joint plan of action, it has been explicitly emphasized that with an agreement, sanctions will automatically be lifted. Now, according to Mousavian, the Americans want a comprehensive agreement according to which the sanctions should only be lifted in long term gradually according to an agreed upon time table. Making things more difficult is the fact that the US delegation has no authorization to unilaterally lift the US sanctions, as this can happen only through Congress. Here, the American side has to do its homework, this is not a matter for the other members E3+3 or Iran.

These two open questions have to be clarified in the coming months, says Mousavian.

Chances

Beginning in January, the Republicans in the US will control both the Congress and the Senate. Is there still any chance for a final deal?

"I think there is a big chance", Mousavian answers. First of all, according to his understanding, all the other sides of the E3+3 negotiating partners are convinced that the best possible point has been reached. Upon contention that he had just written in his book that the same situation existed 10 years ago without success, Mousavian says: At that time in contrast to today, the US was not on board. Today the US is also convinced of a positive outcome in negotiations.

Furthermore, Mousavian was insistent that the alternative was much too dangerous. "Neither the Republicans nor the Democrats nor the extreme Republicans want a war", he emphasizes. Rather, public opinion and the US government were for the deal.

If you look at the current situation in the entire region, there can be no reasonable alternative to cooperating with Iran. Key words: Syria, Iraq, ISIS, Afghanistan. The geopolitical situation is completely different from that of ten

Aghajanian. The geopolitical situation is completely different from that of ten years ago. In fact, the US and Iran are already cooperating in the struggle against ISIS, because the USA is carrying out air strikes and Iran is leading attacks on the ground, says Mousavian, and points to the current front page story of Newsweek.

Other regional interests: Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey

For Mousavian there is no doubt that Israel and Saudi Arabia would do everything possible behind the scenes to prevent a deal. For them, the issue is less the nuclear question than that of limiting Iran's influence in the region, once it becomes clear that the nuclear question will soon be resolved.

In comparison with Israel and Saudi Arabia, he sees the role of Turkey in a less negative light. Turkey and Iran are the strongest powers in the region and know that they need each other. To the assertion that he had just written a few days ago that the Turkish president Erdogan was playing a very dangerous game, Mousavian replied that Erdogan's Syrian policy had totally failed, and that he was completely isolated among his neighbors. Nonetheless, Iranian-Turkish relations were still stable, owing to extensive economic ties.

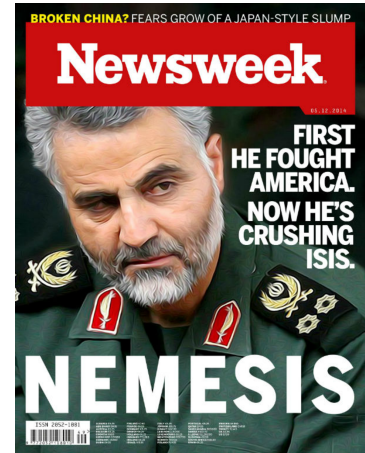
The Future of energy resources

Israel's secretary of energy, Silvan Shalom, emphasized just recently in a conversation with ENERGLLOBE that for him, the deciding factor in the E3+3 negotiations was who would have control over the energy deposits in the Middle East in the coming decades. What does Mousavian have to say on this score?

For him, the Persian Gulf States, Iraq, Iran and a few others would continue to be the states with the most significant energy reserves.

But: "The decisive question is how stable these countries will be in the future." Libya currently finds itself in serious crisis, for example, and it would take 10 to 15 years to bring Libya to stability again. Iraq, with its massive energy reserves, will be in a crisis situation for years to come. With Saudi Arabia and ISIS, Sunni movements would face off in conflict, in which the Caliphate would be necessary to topple the Gulf monarchies. Then one would have to view the Muslim Brotherhood as the strongest and most organised Sunni movement etc.....

Mousavian continues: "The main question will be what country will be the most stable!" For him, Iran is the best alternative in this regard, because when a country is still so stable after 35 years of economic war, military conflicts and sanctions, "than it is the one you can count on!".



Reports on Iran, Newsweek



Reports on Iran, The Economist

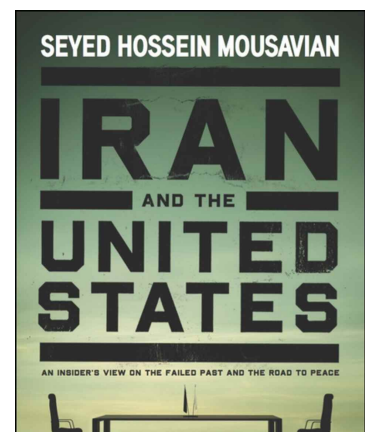
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Seyed Hossein Mousavian: „Iran an the United States“; Bloomsbury 2014

