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## The nuclear talks and the cost of sanctioning Iran

Tehran, March 18, IRNA – A former top nuclear negotiator says with the nuclear negotiations entering its final phase, there is a high probability that an initial deal will be struck (within the coming days) and followed by the comprehensive agreement by July 1, 2015 deadline.

In an opinion column appearing in Tuesday's issue of El Pais, Seyed Hossein Mousavian says once the nuclear negotiation is concluded, it will open the gateway for the formation of a security cooperation framework between Iran and the world powers, specifically the US to tackle regional crises and the fight against ISIS.



The following is the full text of the article.

The latest round of nuclear talks between Iran and the world powers (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States) currently underway in Lusanne, Switzerland aim to reach a political framework agreement by the end-of-March deadline. Ironically, a nuclear deal could have already been stuck in 2005, when the European powers (UK, France and Germany) were negotiating with Iran.

Unfortunately the then Bush Administration, on the incorrect assessment that further sanctions would force Iran to abandon its nuclear program, blocked the deal. The US policy of imposing unilateral and multilateral sanction to curtail Iranian nuclear program has been also completely counterproductive. Since the passage of the first UN Security Council sanction bill in 2006, the number of Iran's centrifuges grew from 200 to 20,000 today; it produced higher enriched uranium, going from 3.5 percent to 20 percent and amassed over ten-tons of low enriched uranium stockpile; and its Arak heavy-water research reactor is less than a year from being commissioned.

Ultimately, after ten tumultuous years, the US concluded that Iran's government would not abandon its uranium enrichment program as a result of sanctions imposed against it. This realization was the impetus for paving the path toward a successful interim agreement on November 24, 2013. Referring to past failed policies of the US ahead of the latest talks, Secretary of State John Kerry candidly stated, "In previous years when U.S. policy was not to talk to Iran and insist at the same time that they can have no nuclear program, whatsoever, the number of centrifuges skyrocketed. Every time negotiations have broken down in the past, Iran's nuclear program has advanced."

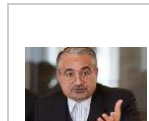
There is no doubt that sanctions have caused a great deal of economic harm for Iran, yet little has been said about the cost for the US in implementing it. A report published in 2014 asserts that the US economy lost between \$134.7 and \$175.3 billion in potential export revenue to Iran between 1995 and 2012. Additionally, the report concludes that "each year," the US loses "between 51,043 and 66,436" job opportunities as a result of sanctioning Iran. As expected, the report sparked debate between its authors and critics. Experts may one day quantify the economic consequences of US-imposed sanctions on Iran for the US economy. However, what should be emphasized rather than ignored is the significant role that Iran could have played in preventing the ever-growing US expenditure in multiple military theatres and extraordinary investments made to marginalize Iran in the region.

As I extensively detail in my book, "Iran and the United States: An Insider's View on the Failed Past and the Road to Peace", albeit for the sake of its own national interests, Iran cooperated with the US in toppling the Taliban in Afghanistan (2001) and Saddam Hussein in Iraq (2003).

As a result, Iran-US cooperation led to successful establishment of the new governments in Kabul and Baghdad. The US decision to discontinue its cooperation with Iran in managing both crises, led to a decade of US engagement in Afghanistan and Iraq, costing trillions of dollars and several thousand lives while leaving both countries in a total mess.

If the US had chosen to continue cooperation with Iran in regional crises—it could have dramatically shorten the US military presence, facilitate reconstruction and reorganizing the army and security forces

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thus saving an astronomical amount in the US budget and most likely preventing today's disastrous situation, specifically in Iraq.

Based on a study conducted by Harvard University, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars will cost the United States between \$4-6 trillion in the long term, constraining the government's budget for decades to come. Not only did the US attempt to marginalize Iran's role in Afghanistan and Iraq, but Iran was also under constant threat of a US military attack. Those who followed oil markets between 2003 and 2005 may remember that each rumor of possible attacks against Iran and a wider war in the Middle East pushed oil prices higher on speculations.

Two prominent economists, Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes maintain that the Iraq war and instability that it caused in the region were partly responsible for that sharp increase in oil prices and they argue that the 2008 economic crisis was also partly due to the increase in oil prices.

Hoping to curb Iran's strategic depth in Syria, the US engaged in and allowed its allies to participate in a proxy war with Iran. While Iran resisted, the US both invested more to topple Assad and chose silence, as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar continued supporting the jihadists.

The amount that the US has invested in Syria so far is not clear. But just in June 26, 2014 President Obama requested \$500 million from the Congress to support Syrian rebels. Meanwhile, he asked for \$1 billion to help stabilize nations bordering Syria that are increasingly affected by the war in Syria.

The emergence of a jihadist state in Iraq undoubtedly became possible when they gained their stronghold in Syria. Today we do not simply face a terrorist group. Dangerous jihadi forces have a state and caliphate of their own, ruling one third of Iraq after a stunning sweep through the northern and western regions of Iraq in June. Had the US cooperated instead of competed with Iran, it can be said with high certainty that Syria and Iraq would not be in their current dismal situation. Again, to reverse the current trend and root-out the terrorist state in Iraq, which the US considers as a national security threat, may cost the US billions of dollars.

In this respect, Iran-US cooperation would be crucial in three major areas. First, the two countries could build an effective intelligence system enabling them to track the movements of jihadists aimed at their eventual root-out. Second, Iran and the US could cooperate in building an effective and committed army in Iraq – not one with 250,000 troops that lays down its weapons and flees when faced with a few thousand terrorists. And finally, by using Iran's vast, skilled human resources, with the financial backing of the US, the two countries can build infrastructure in Afghanistan, Iraq and even Syria.

Looking forward, a resolution to the nuclear dispute between Iran and the US is paramount to both countries planning and working together to combat the takfiri forces that gravely threaten the security of both states. With the nuclear negotiations entering its final phase, there is a high probability that an initial deal will be struck (within the coming days) and followed by the comprehensive agreement by July 1, 2015 deadline. Once the nuclear negotiation is concluded, it will open the gateway for the formation of a security cooperation framework between Iran and the world powers, specifically the US to tackle regional crises and the fight against ISIS.

• Ambassador Seyed Hossein Mousavian is a research scholar at Princeton University and a former spokesman for Iran's nuclear negotiators. His latest book, "Iran and the United States: An Insider's view on the Failed Past and the Road to Peace" was released in May 2014. For the latest publications, please visit: [www.hosseinmousavian.com](http://www.hosseinmousavian.com)

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