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Former Iranian Ambassador: Historic Nuclear Deal has Prevented a New War in the Middle East

After eight days of talks in Switzerland, Iran and world powers have reached a framework agreement on curbing Iran's nuclear program for at least a decade. In return, the United States and Europe plan to lift economic sanctions on Iran. As part of the deal, Iran must reduce the number of its centrifuges that can be used to enrich uranium into a bomb by more than two-thirds. Iran also has to redesign a power plant so it cannot produce weapons-grade plutonium, eliminate much of its stockpile of low-enriched uranium and be subject to regular international nuclear inspections. While U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said the deal would contribute to peace and stability in the region, praise for the deal was not universal. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu condemned the agreement as a "threat to Israel's existence." We speak to Seyed Hossein Mousavian, a former nuclear negotiator for Iran. He served as Iran's ambassador to Germany from 1990 to 1997. He joins us from Princeton, New Jersey, where he is an associate research scholar at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. Last year, he published the book, "Iran and the United States: An Insider's View on the Failed Past and the Road to Peace."

TRANSCRIPT

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JUAN GONZÁLEZ: Welcome to all our listeners and viewers from around the country and around the world. After eight days of talks in Switzerland, Iran and six world powers have reached a framework agreement on curbing Iran's nuclear program for at least a decade. In return, the United States and Europe plan to lift economic sanctions against Iran. The parties must now reach a final agreement by June 30. President Obama described the deal as historic.

PRES. BARACK OBAMA: Today, after many months of tough principled diplomacy, we have achieved a framework for that deal. And it is a good deal, a deal that meets our core objectives. This framework would cut off every pathway that Iran could take to develop a nuclear weapon. Iran will face strict limitations on its program and Iran has also agreed to the most robust and intrusive inspections and transparency regime ever negotiated for any nuclear program in history. So, this deal is not based on trust. It is based on unprecedented verification.

AMY GOODMAN: As part of the deal, Iran must reduce the number of its centrifuges that can be used to enrich uranium into a bomb by more than two-thirds, to about 5000 or 6000. Iran also has to redesign a power plant so it cannot produce weapons-grade plutonium, eliminate much of its stockpile of low enriched uranium and be subject to regular international nuclear inspections. The Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif said the deal recognizes Iran's right to a peaceful nuclear program.

JAVAD ZARIF: [translated] The decision we took today is very important, because it forms the basis of a full agreement. We can now begin to bear a final

draft agreement with its relevant clauses based on the solutions that we have reached over the last few days. Iran will be able to continue its peaceful nuclear program, but, there will be limitations placed on the level and duration of its enrichment program, and the quantity of enriched material that can be kept.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: While U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon praised the deal for contributing to peace and stability in the region, praise for the deal was not universal. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu condemned the agreement as "a threat to Israel's existence." In Washington, Republican Lawmakers are demanding the right to review the deal. Republican Senator Mark Kirk of Illinois said, "Neville Chamberlain got a better deal from Adolf Hitler," referring to the 1930's British prime minister and his policy of Nazi appeasement. On Thursday, President Obama urged Congress not to scuttle the deal.

PRES. BARACK OBAMA: If Congress kills this deal not based on expert analysis and without offering any reasonable alternative, then it is the United States that will be blamed for the failure of diplomacy.

AMY GOODMAN: To talk more about the nuclear deal, we are joined by Seyed Hossein Mousavian, a former nuclear negotiator for Iran. He served as Iran's Ambassador to Germany from 1990 to 1997. He's joining us now from Princeton, New Jersey where he is an associate research scholar at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. Last year, he published the book, "Iran and the United States: An Insider's view on the Failed Past and the Road to Peace." Welcome to *Democracy Now!*, Ambassador Mousavian. Do you see this deal as historic and a road to peace?

AMB. SEYED HOSSEN MOUSAVIAN: Good morning. Definitely, the deal is a historic achievement and definitely, this is a road to peace because the deal practically prevented a new war in the Middle East, which could be much more disastrous for the U.S. and for the region compared to the war against Afghanistan and the war on Iraq. I believe diplomacy worked. They have achieved excellent conclusion. They should continue to reach the final comprehensive deal by end of June, the first of July. And then Iran and the U.S., they should negotiate on further disputed issues through diplomacy.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: Well, Ambassador Mousavian, could you talk about the key aspects that have been announced of the framework, what you think were the most important? This whole issue of the sharp reduction in the number of centrifuges that Iran will have in operation? And also this issue of the breakout period that has been discussed?

AMB. SEYED HOSSEN MOUSAVIAN: For Iranians, two points were important from the day one. The first point was to accept, to respect the rights of Iran for peaceful nuclear technology, including enrichment on their nonproliferation treaty NPT. This was the first key issue for Iran from the day one when we negotiated the nuclear — when we began nuclear negotiation in 2003. This deal covers this key demands of Iran. Iran would be entitled to have peaceful nuclear technology. The second key issue for Iran was lifting the sanctions. This deal also contains, ultimately, lifting all unilateral, multilateral sanctions — nuclear-related sanctions. That is why I believe this deal is good for Iran because the two key elements Iran

was asking already is covered in the deal. However, the deal is good for the U.S., for the war powers, because for them, the red line was no nuclear bomb. Although, Iran does not have a nuclear bomb, although, there is no evidence of diversion in Iranian nuclear program towards weaponization — however, because of mistrust between Iran and the U.S., Iran and the West, this was a big issue for the U.S. and for the West to make sure any deal would guarantee no diversion on Iranian nuclear program toward weaponization.

This deal contains exactly the key element the U.S. was looking. Because, first, Iran has accepted the maximum level of transparency and verification ever during the history of proliferation. Even transparency verification measures beyond the current nonproliferation treaty NPT. Second, with all the limits which you mentioned already, and President Obama also in his statement mentioned, Iran has accepted all confidence building measures that there would be no breakout and there would be no diversion toward weaponization. As long as the deal covers the maximum level of transparency, all measures on non-diversion toward weaponization, this is a good deal for the U.S., and I told you why the deal is good for Iran.

AMY GOODMAN: I want to turn to Mark Regev, the spokesperson for Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Shortly after just a deal was reached, he tweeted, "PM Netanyahu to Pres Obama: A deal based on this framework would threaten the survival of Israel." Regev later appeared on *CNN* and lambasted the deal as "very dangerous." He suggested Iran will become the next North Korea.

MARK REGEV: We see this deal as very dangerous. We say this deal is a move in the wrong direction and if this framework actually becomes the basis, the foundation for a final deal with Iran, we see this like a deal with North Korea. I mean, you recall, in the 1990's, North Korea signed a deal that committed themselves to nonproliferation. They kept their nuclear program intact, and when they were ready, they proliferated, they exploded a nuclear device and, today, they threaten East Asia. Iran is much, much more dangerous than North Korea.

AMY GOODMAN: That was Israeli spokesperson Mark Regev speaking on *CNN*. Your response, Ambassador Mousavian? He said Iran is an existential threat to Israel and that Iran is trying to build a nuclear bomb.

AMB. SEYED HOSSEN MOUSAVIAN: I think there's no difference between Israel and North Korea because North Korea has a few number of nuclear bombs. Israel has about 400 nuclear bombs. Therefore, they both are the same. They have nuclear bombs. There is a big difference between Iran and Israel. They really belong to two different wars on nonproliferation. Iran is member of the Nonproliferation Treaty and Israel has never been ready to accept it. There is no evidence in Iranian nuclear program. Iran does not have nuclear bomb. Israel has about 400 nuclear bombs. During last 10 years, Iran has given more than 7000 mandate inspections to International Atomic Energy Agency, the IAEA. This is completely unprecedented during the history of IAEA, no other country in the world has given access to IAEA, the International Atomic Energy Agency, like Iran during the last decade.

Israel, during last 50, 60 years, has not given even one inspection to the IAEA. Therefore, I believe the war and international community, they should judge who is wrong, who is right. Iran does not have nuclear bomb. Iran has accepted every level of inspection, transparency. Iran has accepted to have completely open nuclear program, and Israel does have a nuclear bomb and the country which does have nuclear bomb is blaming Iran, which does not have nuclear bomb.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: Ambassador Mousavian, I would like to ask about the impact that the sanctions have had on the Iranian people and Iranian society over so many years. And also, do you think that the change in government in Iran has made the West, now with President Rouhani, more willing to reach a deal?

AMB. SEYED HOSSEN MOUSAVIAN: I believe this is a very, very important question, not because of the nuclear deal, because of the future negotiations between Iran and the U.S. The narrative in the U.S. Congress is, the deal is done because of U.S. sanctions and pressures. But, the fact is, the deal was signed yesterday is the principles, the framework is exactly like the principles and frameworks we proposed European countries in 2003 and 2005, between 2003 to 2005. The same principles, Iran was not on the sanctions 2003-2005. After eight years of sanctions, pressures, the U.S. accepted the same principles. Why the deal was done, why the deal was possible? There was only and only one reason; in 2003 to 2005, the U.S. was not ready to accept the legitimate rights of Iran on their NPT for enrichment. U.S. would saying the red line is enrichment. Iran cannot have one centrifuges. Iran should have zero enrichment. That's why we couldn't make the deal.

In 2013, the preliminary deal was signed. The U.S. changed, moderated its position. The U.S. said, now Iran can have enrichment on their nonproliferation treaty, but limited and for its practical needs. But, Iran should give all assurances that would not seek nuclear bomb. Therefore, really, the reason for the deal was not pressures and sanctions, was the U.S. to realize and to respect the nonproliferation treaty. Sanctions had two different impacts. One, on the nuclear issue, sanctions only caused increase of Iranian nuclear program. Before sanctions, Iran had a few hundred of centrifuges. After sanctions, Iran reached to 22,000 centrifuges. Before sanctions, Iran had a few hundred kilogram of stockpile of enriched uranium. After sanctions, about 9000 kilogram. Before sanctions, Iran was enriching below 5 percent. After sanctions, Iran increased the enrichment to 20 percent. Therefore, Congress and Israeli policy for sanctions only led to the increased Iranian nuclear and capacity. Until the point which the U.S. recognized Iran has only three months to breakout, then the U.S. accepted enrichment in Iran and decided to have verification, transparency, and change the red line from zero enrichment to zero nuclear bomb.

But the second that I mention of the sanction is on Iranian economy, Iranian people. Definitely, sanctions harmed the Iranian economy. Definitely, sanctions harmed Iranian nation. There is no doubt about it. But, if the objective of sanctions was limiting the Iranian nuclear program, this was 100% counterproductive. This is a good lesson for the U.S. Congress and for Israelis. More pressure, more threat, Iran would become more aggressive. But, if you go for mutual respect, negotiating with Iran based on mutual respect and based on

international rules and regulations, you would find a very, very cooperative, a flexible Iran.

AMY GOODMAN: What about what Congress is saying right now, the House Speaker Boehner as well as the Senate Majority Leader McConnell went to Israel to meet with Netanyahu. They're saying they want a say in this. What about these three months? Yesterday, John Kerry did not stand with the Iranian foreign minister in making the announcement. They held separate news conferences. What are the chances this deal will be sealed Ambassador?

AMB. SEYED HOSSEN MOUSAVIAN: I believe this is for the United States of America, the administration, who resolved its domestic problem. But for Iranians, they are really shocked and surprised and they do not understand how the U.S. Congress trust a foreign leader, prime minister of Israel, more than its own president, President Obama. This is something the Iranians, they really cannot understand. How the Congress has more trust to Israeli prime minister than to the President of the United States of America. However, the framework is agreed. The U.S. has — the United States of America would be committed to implement it, and domestic issues is something Americans they have to resolve with themselves. It has nothing to do with Iranians, and Iranians, they would not care about the domestic situation of the United States of America.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: Ambassador Mousavian, I would like to ask you about another aspect of this whole issue. In recent months, the key leaders in Saudi Arabia, which obviously considers Iran a chief enemy in the region, have raised the possibility of Saudi Arabia itself would begin to seek atomic bomb. And seeing it as a counterweight to what they perceive as Iran's move in that direction. Could you talk about that and is that just — are those just threats on the part of Saudi Arabia?

AMB. SEYED HOSSEN MOUSAVIAN: I think the deal is done with Iran. If Saudi Arabia is going to have a nuclear program like this deal, that would be fine because this is the right of every member of Nonproliferation Treaty to have peaceful nuclear technology for civilian purposes. This deal means no nuclear bomb. This deal means the most powerful, intrusive inspection during the history of proliferation, during the history of nuclear program in last 60, 70 years.

If Saudis they are ready to accept such a level of transparency, if Saudis they are ready to have completely open nuclear program, and if they are ready to give all objective guarantees that they would never seek nuclear bomb and they would only go for peaceful nuclear civilian technology, that's fine. I think all countries in the Middle East can have the same nuclear technology, this is Nonproliferation Treaty, which already has entitled every member state to have peaceful nuclear technology. But, I believe the deal with Iran means a redline to nuclear weapon in the Middle East and ultimately, Israel also should be ready to give up its nuclear weapon in order to have nuclear weapon-free zone in the Middle East.

AMY GOODMAN: Ambassador, I wanted to ask you about a [piece](#) that Peter Baker, a *New York Times* reporter recently wrote. He wrote, "Since the 1979 Iranian revolution that swept out the Washington-supported shah and brought to power an anti-American Islamic

leadership, the country has been the most sustained destabilizing force in the Middle East — a sponsor of the terrorist groups Hezbollah and Hamas, a supporter of Shiite militias that killed American soldiers in Iraq, a patron of Syria's government in its bloody civil war, and now a backer of the rebels who pushed out the president of Yemen." Could you respond to this?

AMB. SEYED HOSSEN MOUSAVIAN: See, this is how some Americans they read Iran. But you should know there is the same reading of some Iranians about the U.S. They believe the U.S. has supported — the U.S. is the source of instability in the Middle East. They believe the U.S. has supported all dictators in the last 60 years. Shah of Iran was a corrupted dictator supported by the U.S. Mubarak in Egypt was a corrupted dictator supported by the U.S. Ben Ali in Tunisia was a corrupted dictator supported by U.S. And they have a lot of evidence as, even today, many U.S. allies are corrupted and dictator and there is no human right, no democracy, but they have full support of United States of America.

They believe that the U.S. invaded Iraq and made Iraq destabilized. They believe the U.S. invaded Afghanistan led to expand of terrorism, Al-Qaeda, Jabhat al-Nusra, Isis. They believe Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons against Iran, killed 100,000 Iranians, and the U.S. provided material and technology for Saddam Hussein to use weapons of mass destruction against Iranians. I mean, these are mutual grievances, but, we need to change the course. Mistrust is there. Every side has its own reading story and history. But, whether we should remain in the past or think about a better future, a new future, a road to peace, a peace between Iranians and Americans, a peace between Washington and Tehran, I believe we should go for the second version. That is why I wrote the book, how we can make peace between Iran and the U.S.

These nuclear talks is the first such successful negotiations between Iran and the U.S. Therefore, this is an excellent president. This is excellent experience for Iran and the U.S. First of all, to continue further negotiation on other disputed issues like terrorism. Iranians they would say, yeah, United States of America founded Taliban, United States of America founded and supported Al-Qaeda, they gave all weapons, money to opposition of the Bashar al-Assad in Syria, the terrorist. I mean, these are the differences. But, we need to sit, to discuss the other differences we have on weapons of mass destruction, on terrorism, and other issues. However —

AMY GOODMAN: Ambassador, we have to wrap there.

AMB. SEYED HOSSEN MOUSAVIAN: However — OK. There are a lot of commonalities between Iran and the U.S. Peace and stability in Iraq, Afghanistan, fighting Isis, security of an energy, these are key commonalities between Iran and the U.S. I believe we should have a dialogue for Iran and the U.S. on the issues of common interests.

AMY GOODMAN: Ambassador Seyed Hossein Mousavian, we want to thank you very much for being with us, Associate Research Scholar at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, former diplomat who from 1990 to 1997 served as Iran's Ambassador to Germany. From 1997 to 2005, he was the head of the Foreign Relations Committee of Iran's National Security Council and served as spokesman for Iran in its nuclear

negotiations with the European Union. His book, "The Iranian Nuclear Crisis: A Memoir." And most recently, "Iran and the United States: An Insider's view on the Failed Past and the Road to Peace." He was speaking to us from Princeton University. In a moment, we will be joined by George Takei on the new laws in Arkansas and Indiana. Stay with us.



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