



Ambassador Seyed Hossein Mousavian

Associate Research Scholar at the Program on Science and Global Security, Princeton University

Iran & the US: The Way Forward

Seyed Hossein Mousavian

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Iran & the US have experienced one of the most hostile relations in contemporary history. A relation characterized by an ocean of mistrust, misunderstanding, miscalculations and misperceptions.

From an Iranian point of view, the US poses the greatest national security threat as Washington has applied continuous coercive policies towards Iran since the 1979 revolution. In addition, the destabilizing of the region, with multiple military conflicts raging in Yemen, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq pose an immediate concern for Tehran. The rise of terrorism and extremism in the region, particularly the expansion of ISIS and Al Qaeda are another major source of instability that Iran seeks to mitigate.

Iranian government's first priority focuses on stabilizing its borders in a turbulent region. In an effort to achieve this goal, Iran seeks to advance the proposal for a regional cooperation system to resolve major regional disputes. This will require confidence-building measures and trust amongst key regional countries to cooperate and maintain peace and stability. A key to this initiative includes resolving the long-dispute over Iran's nuclear program, removal of international sanctions and redirecting efforts to socioeconomic development.

The US as the sole super power with great involvement in the region and Iran as the regional power have an opportunity to contribute positively to the stability and security of the region in partnership with other key states (Saudi Arabia, GCC, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey). The first step towards this cooperation is already underway with sizable progress on the nuclear negotiations and the formal bilateral channels created between US and Iran within the framework of the nuclear talks. US Secretary of State John Kerry and his counterpart Dr. Javad Zarif have an

opportunity to cement a direct and sustained dialogue to discuss an array of pressing security issues.

Resolving the Iranian nuclear issue would be a success for both Iran and the West, and it could then serve as the basis for a broader agenda for a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone in the Middle East. The agreement with Iran could alleviate present concerns over the nature of Iran's nuclear program and concurrently to be recognized as a "model" to address future proliferation challenges in the region and take new steps for a regional arrangement for fuel supply.

Certainly, the dispute between Iran and the West is not limited to the nuclear issue. The primary root cause of this hostility is mistrust, but we need to understand that the mistrust is mutual. You have heard, with great exaggeration, the West's reasons for not trusting Iran. The following is the primary reasons Iran views the West, particularly the US with mistrust.

The reasons Iran distrusts the US:

1. Western opposition to Iran's oil nationalization in early 1950s that led to its referral by the US and the UK to the UNSC as a threat to international peace and security resulting in pressures and sanctions.
2. The US and UK orchestrated 1953 Coup in Iran, removing democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeqh and installed a dictator. This act uprooted democracy in Iran for decades to come.
3. The US and the West gave their full support to the dictator, Shah, for a quarter century. The Iranian revolution in 1979 was a natural reaction to the West's policy in Iran.
4. Since the 1979 Revolution, the US core policy toward Iran has centered on regime change by applying coercive policies of sanctions, isolation and support for groups opposed to the Iranian government. A rethinking of this position only began to change during the Obama presidency.

5. After the revolution, the West unilaterally withdrew from its contractual commitments and left Iran with tens of billions of dollars of already paid but unfinished industrial projects.
6. In 1980, Saddam Hussein invaded Iran to disintegrate the country, sparking an 8-year war, costing the lives of 300,000 Iranians and damages amounting to a trillion dollars. The US and the West supported the aggressor.
7. Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons and long-range missiles, with the US and Western countries providing Baghdad the know-how and material.
8. In 1988, during Iraq's invasion of Iran, the US launched the largest American naval combat operation since World War II, striking Iranian oil platforms in the Persian Gulf.
9. In 1988, the US Navy shot down Iranian civilian plane, killing 290 innocent civilians including 66 children.
10. During Rafsanjani's presidency in 1989, Iran welcomed "goodwill begets goodwill" proposal of President Bush and demonstrated it by facilitating the release of American and Western hostages. Paradoxically, the US in return responded with heightening pressures and hostilities.
11. During Khatami's presidency, Iran was among the first countries to condemn the 9/11 terrorists attacks and cooperated with the US on the "war on terror," leading to the removal of Taliban and Al Qaeda from Afghanistan in 2001, in return, the US rewarded Iran by designating it as "axis of evil".
12. Even during Ahmadinejad's presidency, Iran was prepared to resolve multiple disputes with the West, specifically the US:
 - Iran offered to invite the US representative in Afghanistan for talks on cooperation in Afghanistan

- Iran welcomed the “Russian Step by Step Plan” on nuclear dossier, which would have addressed major concerns regarding the nature of Iran’s nuclear program
- Iran offered 5 years of full supervision to IAEA, in an effort to remove the technical ambiguities
- Iran freed the American hikers
- Iran offered to halt 20% enrichment, limiting it to 5%, if provided with fuel rods for TRR

However, the US and the West responded to all these unprecedented overtures with mounting pressures, sanctioning oil and Central Bank and advancing UN resolutions that condemn Iran on terrorism and human rights.

13. The US continued policy to undermine the legitimate role and interest of Iran in the Middle East. Such policy has lend itself well to over militarization of the region with unprecedented US military sales to rich Persian Gulf Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia. The situation is made worse by the US aggressive policy to isolate Iran from the region and the world through economic and political pressures.

14. While hostilities continue between US and Iran, the US military presence in the region that is effectively encircling Iran remains a primary national security concern for Tehran.

15. The US policy towards Israel that provides a carte blanche for Tel Aviv to disregard the legitimate demands of the Palestinians and continue to violate international laws on expansion of illegal settlements and treatment of Palestinians in West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

16. The US policy of supporting a series of dictators and corrupt regimes in the region, from the Shah of Iran, Ben Ali of Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and oppressive Arab Monarchies—while simultaneously claiming to be the vanguard of promoting democracy and human rights in the region.

17. The US double-standard foreign policy, a striking example is Washington forging strategic relations with countries like India, Pakistan and Israel, which have not joined Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), built, tested and have stockpiles of nuclear weapons. Paradoxically, the US applied coercive policies on Iran (sanctions and isolation), while Tehran is member of NPT, doesn't have nuclear weapons and there is no evidence of diversion of its nuclear program toward weaponization.
18. The US support for terrorist groups in the region—ranging from extremist elements in the Syrian opposition, separatist terrorist groups aiming to disintegrate Iran such as the Baluchie terrorist group Jundallah.
19. The Iranian Nuclear File:

The Origin of the Iranian Nuclear Program

- A. The US laid the foundation for a nuclear Iran in the 1960s due to its strategic relation with the Shah of Iran. The US supplied Iran's first nuclear facility, the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR) in 1967, estimating that Iran would have a full fuel cycle with 23 nuclear power plants by 1994.
- B. But after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, even though Iran decided to cancel the Shah's ambitious nuclear and military projects, the US and the West withdrew from all nuclear agreements and contracts and challenged country's 'inalienable right' under NPT to enjoy peaceful nuclear technology.
- C. After revolution Iran paid for fuel rods at the TRR but the US neither gave the rods nor returned the money.
- D. Pressured Germany to halt the completion of the Bushehr power plant, which was 90% done and Iran had already paid about 8 billion Deutsche Mark.

- E. Strong-armed France to also suspend an enrichment agreement signed in 1973, which included Iran in a consortium worth \$1.2 billion with Eurodif to enrich uranium in France for the Tehran Research Reactor and the Bushehr power plant.

These coercive policies towards Iran left no other option for Tehran but to be self-sufficient in providing its nuclear fuel.

- F. In 2003, shortly after Iran had mastered enrichment technology, its nuclear case came under the spotlight of the IAEA. Iran subsequently submitted proposals to assure the international community of the peaceful nature of its nuclear program.

In that period, while I was a member of Iran's nuclear negotiating team, we proposed a package to address the concerns of all parties. It included the following:

1. Cap uranium enrichment at 5%
2. Export of all low-enriched uranium (LEU) or fabricating it into fuel rods
3. Commit to maximum level of transparency by implementing the Additional Protocol and committing to the updated Code 3.1 of the Subsidiary Arrangements.
4. Opting out of any reprocessing at heavy water facilities
5. Limiting enrichment activities and stockpile for domestic needs.

Such measures would have not only maximized the barriers to any nuclear weapons 'break-out', it would have also provided the maximum level of transparency. In exchange for concessions made by Iran, we expected the international community to recognize Iran's right to enrichment under the NPT and normalize Iran's nuclear dossier at the IAEA.

- G. Based on Iranian intelligence reports, the string of cyber attacks and assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists involved the United States and Israel.

The US continued its coercive nuclear strategy towards Iran until recently even though the US National Intelligence Estimate confirmed in 2007 and 2011 that Iran neither has nuclear weapons nor has decided to build them. Furthermore, according to the US intelligence services, Israeli intelligence community 'largely agree' with their assessment of Iran's nuclear activities. Israel's Chief of Staff, General Benny Gantz, has [stated](#) that in his view Iran has not decided to develop nuclear weapons and probably will not decide to do so.

The Current Status of Iran's Nuclear Talks

On April 2, 2015—Iran and the P5+1 reached a framework agreement that ensures intrusive transparency and confidence building measures on Iran's nuclear program in return for the lifting of all nuclear-related sanctions and respecting the legitimate rights of Iran for enrichment, with continued talks until the June 30 deadline toward a comprehensive deal.

Based on the principles agreed thus far:

- A combination of constraints—including reductions from **more than 9,000 to just over 5,000 centrifuges enriching uranium**, from over 19,000 to around 6,000 installed centrifuges, and from around 10,000 kilograms to 300 kilograms of enriched uranium—will increase the time it would take Iran to produce enough fissile material for a single nuclear weapon to at least one year for a period of at least ten years.
- The **re-design of the Arak heavy water reactor**, the requirement to send its spent fuel out of Iran, and the ban on reprocessing facilities will effectively block the plutonium path to a nuclear weapon.
- Far-reaching verification arrangements—including adherence to the IAEA Additional Protocol, continuous surveillance of key elements of the uranium and centrifuge supply chain, and a monitored procurement channel—will provide confidence in the ability to deter and detect covert Iranian activities.
- **The US fact sheet states** that “Iran will engage in limited research and development with its advanced centrifuges, according to a schedule and parameters which have been agreed to by the P5+1.”

Following the implementation of the comprehensive nuclear deal, the Iranian nuclear file will be removed from United Nation Security Council and return to the IAEA. Iran's nuclear facilities following the 10 to 25 year limitations will expand in accordance to the domestic needs of the country and in close coordination with the IAEA.

The Way Forward

1. Thirty-five years of hostilities and policies that have resulted in a lose-lose outcome for both the US and Iran need to be changed.
2. Reaching the final nuclear deal by the set deadline of June 30, 2015 is vital. Iran has accepted every commitment within NPT, the maximum level of transparency that exists internationally and placing limits on its nuclear enrichment and heavy water program for a period of 10 to 25 years. To date, no other country has accepted such limits.
3. Iran-US direct talks should continue and emphasis should be placed on discussing regional crisis. The failure of talks will effectively end the opportunity for peace and stemming a new cycle of escalation of animosities.
4. ISIS and other Sunni extremist terrorist groups are the greatest threat to the stability of the region and beyond. Iran and the US have common interest in the fight against this new wave of terrorism. The US as a global power and Iran as an influential regional player are well posed to eradicate ISIS and similar groups. It is therefore essential for both countries to collaborate and cooperate.
5. Due to their common national interests, Iran and the US have supported the same governments in Afghanistan and Iraq. Cooperation between two capitals would be an effective factor for stability and security.
6. Iran and the US have common position on NWFZ & WMDFZ in the Middle East. It is however necessary for the US to take genuine and serious steps to promote and accelerate the establishment of the zone. Concerted practical cooperation would save the Middle East from all WMDs and more importantly prevent terrorists from acquiring such dangerous weapons.

7. There are other areas, where both countries can cooperate on, including the fight against drug trafficking, security of the Persian Gulf, stabilization of the energy sector and reconstruction efforts in war-torn countries in the region.
8. Concurrently and parallel to the nuclear talks, US and Iran should begin to address areas of dispute and find a negotiated settlement.
9. In an effort to streamline the gradual US military presence from the region, the US should support a regional cooperation system among Iraq, Iran and the GCC for peace, stability and security in the Persian Gulf.
10. To accommodate and facilitate a broader US-Iran engagement, both countries should support people-to-people relations in such fields as academia, humanitarian assistance, healthcare, environment, tourism and Christian-Islamic interreligious dialogue.

Ambassador [Seyed Hossein Mousavian](#) is a research scholar at Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School 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 published by Bloomsbury Publishers in May 2014. For the latest articles, publications, interviews and lectures, please visit: www.hosseinmousavian.com