

MEMMO

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Proceed with Caution on Broadly Engaging Iran

There have been increasing calls in recent months for the United States to engage in an unconditional dialogue with Iran to help stabilize Iraq and other conflicts in the region. Obviously, the United States must consider any step that can save the lives of American soldiers in Iraq and restore stability to the country. Beyond Iraq, American leaders have consistently said they are ready for a dialogue with Iran as soon as it meets U.N. Security Council demands and suspends its nuclear enrichment program. However, Iran's demonstrated track record of "meet and cheat" when engaging on other issues warrants careful examination of previous efforts to engage the regime before entertaining any thought of an unconditional opening to Iran outside of the Iraqi context.

Iran has rebuffed numerous U.S. and European efforts to engage its leadership.

- The Clinton administration made serious efforts to engage the Iranian regime in dialogue and took numerous steps, including waiving prohibitions on some Iranian imports and apologizing for past U.S. involvement in internal Iranian affairs. Tehran spurned the gestures, continuing its support terrorism and accelerating its nuclear program.
- In August 2005—after almost two years of negotiations—the EU offered Iran a far-reaching package of political, security and economic incentives only to have it rejected by the Iranians, who immediately announced that they were resuming their uranium enrichment-related activities.
- Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced in May 2006 that the United States would join multilateral talks with Iran if it suspended enrichment. The United States, Britain, France, Russia, China and Germany offered the Iranians a major package of economic and security incentives. After taking three months to consider the package—during which it continued its nuclear activity—Iran rejected the offer and continued accelerating its nuclear enrichment activities.
- Since making the offer in May, Rice has repeatedly said that if Iran suspends its enrichment of uranium “the United States is prepared to reverse 27 years of policy, and I will meet with my Iranian counterpart—anytime, anywhere—to discuss every facet of our countries’ relationship.”
- Iran also has rejected U.S. efforts to discuss Iraq. In 2005, President Bush instructed U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad to begin a diplomatic dialogue with Iran concerning the situation in Iraq—an invitation that Iran rejected. Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said, “Negotiating with America is not on our agenda or program.”

Iran has exploited negotiations over its nuclear program to continue its pursuit of atomic arms.

- Iranian officials have been candid as to how they have exploited negotiations with the West. Former lead Iranian negotiator Hassan Rowhani proudly claimed in a March 2006 speech that while “negotiating with the Europeans in Tehran, we were installing equipment at the Isfahan site,”

a violation of Iran's commitments to suspend uranium enrichment related activities while negotiating with the EU-3.

- Iran successfully dragged out for months negotiations last year over a Russian proposal to move Iranian enrichment activities to Russia as a way to delay sanctions while at the same continuing both its uranium conversion and enrichment activities.
- Iran has established a clear pattern of brinksmanship. After prolonged negotiations, Iran will strike a temporary deal and then call for further talks after it is revealed that it has violated its commitments. Immediately after ending their agreed upon suspension of uranium enrichment activities in 2005, the Iranians approached both the EU-3 and Russia, as well as then-U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, calling for renewed talks.

U.N. Security Council resolutions on Iran state that any international engagement with Tehran is linked to a suspension of its uranium enrichment activities.

- The international community, through U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1696 and 1737, declared that Iran's nuclear program represents a threat to international peace and security and imposed sanctions on Iran for failing to end its uranium enrichment.
- If the goal of the international sanctions is to change Iran's refusal to suspend its nuclear activities, U.S. efforts to engage Tehran without first gaining a suspension could allow the Iranians to use their apparent willingness to negotiate solely as a cover to continue their nuclear weapons pursuit, further delay more serious sanctions and continue their support for terrorism.

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- Potential engagement with Iran must be accompanied by clear consequences to convince the Iranians to engage in a real dialogue and to prevent the regime from using talks merely as a tactic to continue its destructive policies.
- The United States and the international community must continue and intensify its diplomatic and economic pressure on Iran in order to squeeze the regime, thus giving it a reason to negotiate with the West.

Basic Facts Summary

- Iran has rebuffed numerous U.S. and European efforts to engage its leadership.
- Iran has exploited negotiations over its nuclear program to continue its pursuit of atomic arms.
- U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1696 and 1737 state that any international engagement with Iran is linked to Tehran's suspension of its uranium enrichment activities.
- Any dialogue with Iran can only be effective if there are real consequences for their continuing destabilizing actions.