

MEMMO

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Iranian Stonewalling Blocks Engagement Efforts

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice late last month reiterated the U.S. offer to engage Tehran in a direct and unrestricted dialogue if it meets U.N. Security Council demands to suspend its enrichment of uranium. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad rejected the offer on Nov. 6, saying Iran will not compromise on “one iota of its nuclear rights.” Iran’s rebuff follows repeated rejections of U.S. efforts to engage the regime, which has used past talks with our European allies as a cover to continue its illicit nuclear program.

A U.S.-backed offer to negotiate with Iran in exchange for suspending its uranium enrichment remains on the table, but Tehran continues to spurn it.

- Rice announced in May 2006 that the U.S. would join multilateral talks with Iran if it suspended enrichment. The U.S., Britain, France, Russia, China and Germany offered the Iranians a major package of economic and security guarantees, which Iran rejected after taking a full three months to consider the package—during which it continued its nuclear activity.
- U.N. Security Council Resolution 1737, which passed in December 2006 and imposed a second round of sanctions against Iran, affirmed that Tehran could receive the economic and security incentives if it suspends its uranium enrichment. As the U.N. now considers a third round of sanctions, Iran continues to snub the offer of engagement.
- Rice has reiterated numerous times, including last month, that the dialogue offer remains on the table and she is prepared to sit down with her Iranian counterpart “anytime, anywhere—to discuss every facet of our countries’ relationship.”
- Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad rejected the possibility of dialogue and of ending its nuclear program, saying Nov. 6 that “we didn’t ask for talks. ... If talks are to be held, it is the Iranian nation that has to set conditions, not the arrogant and the criminals. ... The world must know that this nation will not give up one iota of its nuclear rights.”



Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad continues to spurn dialogue with the United States and its allies.

Iran has rebuffed past 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 for terrorism and accelerating its nuclear program – while under the leadership of the “reformers.”

- During the 1990s, European countries pursued “constructive engagement” with Iran concerning its support for terrorism, its human rights abuses, and its nuclear program, all the while encouraging their companies to trade with and invest in Iran. The dialogue made no impact on any of Iran’s troubling policies and activities.
- 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. Iranian immediately announced that it would resume its uranium enrichment-related activities. Subsequent offers that built on and expanded the European offer were similarly rejected.

Iran has exploited past negotiations over its nuclear program in a successful and cynical effort to continue its pursuit of atomic arms.

- Iranian officials have been candid about their exploitation of negotiations with the West. Former lead Iranian nuclear negotiator Hassan Rowhani proudly claimed in March 2006 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 while negotiating with the EU-3.
- Iran last year successfully dragged out negotiations for months 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.
- 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 as a way to deflect focus on the resumption of their enrichment activities.
- If the goal of international sanctions is to get Iran to suspend its nuclear activities, U.S. efforts to engage Tehran without prior suspension could allow the Iranians to use their apparent willingness to negotiate as a cover to continue their nuclear program and further delay more serious sanctions.

Any dialogue with Iran can only be effective if there are real consequences for its continuing destabilizing actions.

- Any engagement with Iran must be accompanied by continuing pressure 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 current policies.
- Intensification of the international community’s efforts to impose biting diplomatic and economic sanctions on Iran offers the best way to convince Iran to end its nuclear weapons pursuit. The U.N. Security Council should impose a third round of sanctions that further cuts off the regime from the international economy.
- Recent U.S. sanctions against state-owned Iranian banks and Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps constitute an important step in pressuring Tehran to halt its nuclear pursuit.
- Pursuing vigorous economic and political sanctions while keeping all options on the table signals to Iran that the world—as expressed by the U.N. Security Council’s passage of Resolution 1737 and 1747 under Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter—views its pursuit of nuclear weapons as a threat to international peace and security.