

Iran's Nuclear Agreement: A Victory for World Peace

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

The Oct. 21 announcement that Iran, following talks with the foreign ministers of Germany, Britain, and France, had agreed to sign an additional protocol to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), as demanded by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), was greeted almost unanimously as a positive step. The protocol, which will allow IAEA inspectors to conduct inspections at Iran's nuclear facilities on short notice, had been demanded as a guarantee that the country's nuclear program was dedicated solely to the development of energy plants, and not weapons. The Islamic Republic also announced it would suspend, at least temporarily, its uranium enrichment program, as a gesture of good will to the international community.

The *Tehran Times*, in an editorial the following day, praised the agreement, saying it "benefits world peace." And indeed it does. Warmongers in the neo-conservative faction led by U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney in the United States, flanked by fanatical Sharonites in Israel, had been exploiting the protocol issue to whip up hysteria about Iran's presumed nuclear weapons capability, with the aim of mounting a campaign against the country, leading at some point to military action. As the *Tehran Times* correctly noted, the decision to sign the protocol thwarted U.S. plans to destabilize Iran and the region; furthermore, it "helps foil U.S. efforts to present an extremist image of the Islamic Republic to the world by accusing Tehran of attempting to develop nuclear weapons."

Discussion, Not Confrontation

As important as the decision itself was the process leading up to it. For it was not a confrontation between the IAEA or the United States and Tehran, but a discussion process among leading European governments and the Islamic Republic, which led to the breakthrough. In an unprecedented move,

the foreign ministers of Britain, France, and Germany—Jack Straw, Dominique de Villepin, and Joschka Fischer, respectively—travelled to Tehran on Oct. 21 and, in talks with Iran's foreign minister, President, and head of the Supreme National Security Council, succeeded in striking a compromise satisfying all sides. It was the first time that such a European joint delegation had intervened, in effect, to negotiate a solution to a problem of strategic significance. Thus, it was a victory for Iran, but also for the Europeans. For the *Tehran Times*, Iran's decision to invite IAEA Director General Mohamed Al-Baradei and the three foreign ministers was "a success for the international community as well as . . . a victory of multilateralism against unilateralism, and dialogue over dictation"; it showed Iranian leaders can solve problems.

The initiative started on Aug. 4, when the three European governments sent a letter to Tehran, urging the government to comply with IAEA demands. Tehran responded positively, and invited both the IAEA head and Paris, London, and Berlin to send their top diplomats to discuss the matter. Tensions were increased when, under U.S. pressure, the IAEA issued an ultimatum to Iran, during its September meeting: the Islamic Republic must "prove" that its nuclear program had no military dimensions, by Oct. 31, an ultimatum which the Iranian leadership rejected. The timing of the joint talks in Tehran on Oct. 21, was in this context propitious.

Washington exerted pressures on Iran, not only to "prove" the innocence of the energy program which it has been developing with Russian cooperation, but to abandon the nuclear program altogether. Russia and the West Europeans, however, were of the view that Iran, like any other country, has the sovereign right to develop this technology to meet its growing energy needs. Thus, Moscow resisted demands made by the U.S. administration, from representatives such as John



A representative of the conservatives in Iran, appointed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, negotiated the nuclear deal, ensuring its acceptance. Here, Ayatollah Khamenei (right) meets with Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee (left) in 2001.

Bolton up to President Bush himself, to stop cooperation on the Bushehr nuclear energy plant. Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov and President Vladimir Putin exerted their own pressure on Iran, demanding that it comply with legitimate IAEA requirements, and suggested that, as a gesture of good will, Tehran should also voluntarily suspend its uranium enrichment program. At the same time, the Russian government reaffirmed the country's sovereign right to the technology.

National Sovereignty Preserved

It was this formula which was adopted in the final declaration issued on Oct. 21 in Tehran with the Europeans. The Iranian government reiterated that nuclear weapons have no place in its defense doctrine, that it is committed to the NPT regime, and that it would cooperate fully with the IAEA to ensure transparency; that is, sign the protocol. The resolution reaffirmed Iran's right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy. The agreement stressed that the protocol in no way is intended to "undermine the sovereignty, national dignity, or national security of its state parties." As reported by the Iranian News Agency (IRNA), the full implementation of Tehran's decision, confirmed by IAEA head Al-Baradei, "should enable the immediate situation to be resolved by the IAEA Board of Governors" at their next meeting, scheduled for Nov. 21. Most significant, the agreement meant that "once international concerns, including those of the three governments, are fully resolved, Iran could expect easier access to modern technologies and supplies in a range of areas. They will cooperate with Iran to promote security and stability in the region, including the establishment of a zone free from weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East in accordance with the objectives of the United Nations."

Inside Iran, international concern about the nuclear program had become a major national issue, in which all factions

rallied to defend the sovereign right to this technology. Leading figures and press organs on the conservative right argued against signing the protocol, on the grounds it would constitute a violation of sovereignty, and pave the way for intrusive inspections that would be tantamount to espionage expeditions. Those arguing in favor of signing, were accused of selling out to imperialism.

Thus, it is crucially important that the person who negotiated the agreement was a representative of this conservative faction—Hojatoleslam Hassan Rowhani, Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council. In their four-way talks, important points were hammered out. It was Rowhani who made the official announcement that Iran would sign. He specified that it would not be by Oct. 31, because of the number of details still to be settled, but before the IAEA's Nov. 21 meeting. Rowhani also stressed that the suspension of Iran's uranium enrichment program was a gesture of good will, a purely voluntary decision of undetermined duration. Iran could resume it in "a day, a week," or whatever. In this manner, the agreement could not be construed as a sell-out, and was not: Iran is not giving up this capability.

Khamenei: Strength Comes Not From Weapons

With a few exceptions of token resistance to the deal, the Iranian leadership and press welcomed the development. The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khamenei, stated on Oct. 22 that nuclear weapons never guaranteed the strength of any country, whereas reliance on "knowledge, perseverance, and faith" did. Government spokesman Abdaollah Ramezanzadeh told the press, that all the negotiations had been conducted in line with the views and support of the Supreme Leader, adding that the head of the negotiating team, Rowhani, had been assigned by Khamenei. In answer to journalists' questions regarding what the attitude of the Guardians Council (which vets legislation) would be, Ramezanzadeh said, "Given the fact that what has been accomplished so far has been approved by the highest authority of the land, it is not likely to face any difficulty." By the same token, it is expected that the Majlis (parliament) will approve the agreement.

The implications of the agreement are many and far-reaching. First, France, Germany, and Britain scored a diplomatic coup, by demonstrating that their "constructive dialogue" approach to Iran works, whereas the confrontationist course pursued by the neo-cons in Washington does not. The fact that Iran got guarantees from the Europeans that it would receive the technological assistance it requires, and has a right to according to the NPT, is a good omen for all those in the developing sector seeking access to advanced technologies. Last but not least, the reference to a joint commitment to establish a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the region, is a blow to Israel, and signals support for the proposal that the Arab League has long held on the issue.