

# “The Big Powers are Worried”. Iran’s Military Technologies for Defense

Interview with Iran's Ambassador to Belgrade. H.E. Rashid Hasanpur

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*The trend of changes in the Middle East is frequent, and if we want to be acute, we should talk every day, or at least once a month, because of the changes themselves. There is absolutely no sanction that has not been introduced to Iran. Tehran is developing all conventional weapons for the defense of Iran except weapons for mass destruction, because its very existence is against all the principles on which the Islamic Republic is based and against the religious and political convictions of all Iranians.*

Military-technical cooperation with Russia dates back many years and has nothing to do with the war in Ukraine – as they accuse us ... The agreement between Tehran and Riyadh, mediated by China, is not a change in itself, but a great opportunity for significant changes. “The child” of the “multipolarists” will be born in six, eight, nine months, and it is up to us to make it happen with as few costs as possible.

These are only parts of the answers from the interview of His Excellency Rashid Hasanpour, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Belgrade, to “Sepat”.

The diplomat from Tehran was open to talk to the Serbian public as much as a diplomat can be and did not avoid any questions.

Sepat (S): Your country is not getting off the headlines of the world's mainstream media?

Amb. Rashid Hasanpur (ARH): The Islamic Republic of Iran is the country that creates the most news in the world, and regionally. It can be understood and commented on differently for each country because the events in Iran have one meaning for the USA, another for Serbia, and a third for a third country. The views of the US and its allies on the events in Iran are negative. Because, since the very foundation of the Islamic Republic, it has been presented as a danger to the interests of the US and its allies in our region. Simply put, with the formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the previous order was disrupted, given that Tehran's business and every other policy is a rejection of any desire for hegemony, and also independence in decision-making regarding international issues. So the natural reaction to such a goal of a state can be different, harsh and even aggressive. Iran has always been in the spotlight.

S: Is only the Islamic Revolution in Iran the reason for such intolerance of the collective West?

ARH: Iran is not only thinking about its independence, but also about the independence of the entire region. If you look at the news about any happenings in our country, you have a wave of negative Western propaganda. And that's why every event in Iran is subject to negative zooming and negative propaganda. This is because Western interests are threatened by the independent policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Let's consider Iran's peaceful nuclear activities. Efforts are being made to magnify this issue and to give a military dimension to the legal and legitimate economic and necessary efforts of our country. But the only fact and truth is that, based on Iranian doctrine and principles, the only thing we want is to have a peaceful benefit from that energy, which is persistently denied to us. Every time, Western media point to the alleged military component of our program.

S: Protests on the streets of Iranian cities are not taken off the television?

Image: Iranian protestors on the Keshavrz Boulevard (Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0)



ARH: Unfairly, in every country where there is free political will, it is natural for protest movements to arise in those areas, and in the Islamic Republic, protests occasionally arise and the "Right to protest" is recognized in our Constitution. But, on the condition that it does not go beyond the scope of protests and that they do not turn into attempts at a violent change of government. Unfortunately, some countries are trying to ride on the

“waves of those protests” and turn them into a rebellion and an attempt to overthrow the system.

S: How do you rate the protests, justified or unjustified?

ARH: Even the Islamic Republic of Iran has its shortcomings. We never claimed to be perfect. But there is no country in the world that will tolerate rebellion and change of government by the “street”. All the propaganda instruments of the West have conspired to divert Iranians from the path of pure protest against injustice. By their interference, they change the essence of the protest. This does not mean that they are very concerned about the violation of the rights of those who protest, but their only intention is to abuse the situation in order to benefit their interests. Or, to create problems for Iran, that is, to divert the country from the path it has chosen. They always seem to have miscalculated so far.

S: Along with Cuba, Iran is the country that the so-called international community has been under sanctions for the longest time?

ARH: The history of sanctions against Iran is such that we can say that there are absolutely no political or military sanctions that have not been imposed on us.

S: Despite everything, Iran managed to develop in all areas, from science to culture, especially film?

ARH: Actually, it worries the big powers. When we talk about forces, it does not mean that everyone is equally concerned. On the contrary, China and Russia welcome Iran’s achievements. You yourself know what is the root of all tensions in our region, and that is Israel’s non-cooperation with the UN and Security Council Resolutions. Israel does not recognize the decisions of the United Nations, and the Palestinians were forcibly occupied, expelled, and scattered all over the world. Now when a country wants to prevent the oppression of those people, that country must be punished.

S: What is the average Iranian proud of?

ARH: We are equally proud of our history and our present, as well as our future, because it is not enough to be proud only of the past. That civilization must remain alive and continue life. You have noticed very well that, regardless of the huge obstacles and paralyzing sanctions, we managed to develop in all areas, and in some to reach the maximum.

S: What are those areas?

ARH: Science, defense industry, education, healthcare. Let’s say, in nano-technological research, we are among the top ten countries in the world. Also, when it comes to the field of defense industry. If someone thought they could attack us before, they certainly don’t think so now!

By the way, at one time we extended our hands to everyone in order to buy military equipment, but now the opposite is the case.

S: Are you now talking about the development of hypersonic weapons?

ARH: Except for the development of weapons of mass destruction, we have no restrictions on the development of other military technologies for defense. Any weapon that has a

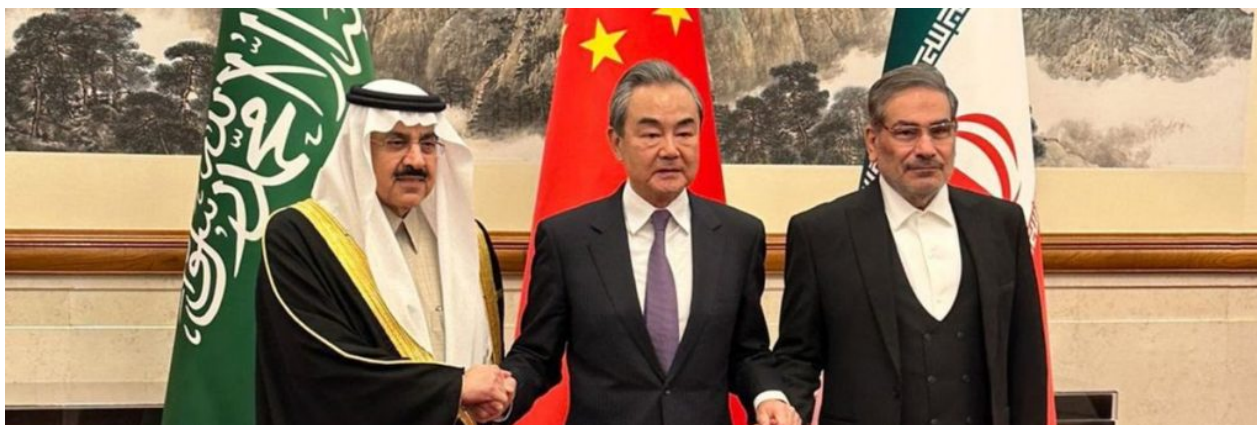
defensive purpose is welcome. When it comes to weapons of mass destruction, Iran is not developing them, because their very existence is against all the principles on which the Islamic Republic is based and against the religious and political beliefs of all Iranians.

S: And weaknesses?

ARH: We have to admit that we failed to develop as we intended in all areas. We are lagging behind in some areas, above all in the economy. If sanctions were imposed on the Americans, as they are on us, I'm sure they would have failed a long time ago.

S: Iranian politicians despite the so-called sanctions are more frequent guests in metropolises around the world?

ARH: Very few countries do not want cooperation with our country. The Islamic Republic of Iran wants cooperation and cooperation with other countries in accordance with bilateral interests. Iran is not a country to ignore.



Wang Yi, China's top diplomat, stands between Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, and Saudi Arabia's minister of state and national security adviser, Musaad bin Mohammed Al Aiban, on Friday in Beijing. (Photo: Chinese Foreign Ministry)

S: The impression is that your President Raisi is a dear guest everywhere today, and he was especially surprised by the agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran. China is said to have mediated for about six years?

ARH: You must know that the success of a country does not depend on one person. It is the result of the power and strength of the Islamic Republic of Iran. We have turned Iran into one of the main actors and powers in our region. The Yemen issue will not be resolved without Iran. The same applies to Syria, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iraq. We are now in a position where foreigners, whether they like it or not, have to cooperate with us. This has been Iran's position since the founding of the Islamic Republic: our region must be its own, independent, and the countries of the region must decide their own destiny. We are against the interference and hegemony of any foreign power in our region.

S: The Iran-Saudi agreement is therefore the architecture of future peace in the Middle East?

ARH: This is a chance for something like that. Therefore, the Agreement is not a change in itself, but an opportunity for significant changes because Iran and Saudi Arabia are the two main actors in the Persian Gulf. The fact is that we have to cooperate and it is inevitable!

S: When is the re-establishment of diplomatic relations expected?

ARH: A few days ago, the two ministers talked by phone and agreed that in the coming weeks the expert delegations would meet agree on the renewal of the existing relations. In this development there is a “main variable factor” and that is the role of China. I can freely say that as much as Iran and Saudi Arabia have an interest in establishing more harmonious relations in the region, so does China.

S: We are talking about 500 billion dollars of Chinese investments in the Region. Sudan and Syria included?

ARH: It seems to me that one of the aspects of this agreement is ending the war in Yemen. Because among the issues we had with Saudi Arabia, there are also regional issues. That’s why I said: It’s a chance for change. You have the forces that put the pistons under the wheels, and some “players” in the region are not enthusiastic. The two countries are aware that if they need to strengthen bilateral agreements, than they have to solve regional issues. The consequences of the agreement between our two countries should be “good” for Iran and Syria and Lebanon and Iraq. Therefore, it has to create opportunities for peace and stabilization of our countries.

S: Specific relations between Russia and Iran have been established. Iran and Russia saved the integrity of Syria?

ARH: Thank you for noticing and knowing that Iran was the one who, along with Russia, saved Syria. Victory always has many fathers and mothers and defeat is always an orphan. The Americans say that they have defeated ISIS, as well as the EU countries. But it is also true that Iran and Russia defeated ISIS. Because of common positions with Russia on some topics (but not all), Moscow and Tehran have developed strong bilateral relations. Now they are accusing us of supplying drones to Russia. We have always cooperated with Russia in the defense sphere. Cooperation between the two countries was not made because of the war in Ukraine. THOSE have become the points of Western policy through which they want to attribute Iran and inflame Iranophobia even more.

S: General Kasim Suleimani is a legend of your region. Iranians particularly appreciate him?

ARH: General Suleimani was a representative of one country, one power. He represented the strength of the Islamic Republic and that is why he is popular. Had it not been for the activities of the forces under his command, not only would ISIS occupied Syria, but maybe Iraq and some other countries would also “fall”. The general was a man who thought well, who knew the region and the instruments of the forces at his disposal. And he had great charisma in command. He managed to rid the region of extremism and that is one side of the coin that the American presence in the region has faded, but not completely. America is still in our fields.

S: What are the relations with Iraq? In Iraq, two-thirds of the population are Shiites and a third are Sunnis?

ARH: For various reasons, we have to have good relations. These are religious, cultural and religious reasons. A large number of Muslim leaders are buried there and the two nations are so intertwined that you cannot separate them. This is observed in all spheres of life. The security of Iraq has a direct impact on the security of Iran. And we cannot be indifferent.



S: Are you saying that ISIS has been defeated?

ARH: What is important is that they no longer have organized force and strength. Unfortunately, that ideology still exists and that is why ISIS has now been transferred to Afghanistan.

S: Syria is the country that suffered the most. How stable is there now?

Image: The SDF besieging al-Baghuz Fawqani, 12 February 2019 (Licensed under the Public Domain)



ARH: The stability of Syria is still fragile. A part of this land is allegedly claimed by Turkey. One part is under US control. Israel bombards it every day, and a small part of the territory is held by the opposition. It cannot be said that this country has the necessary stability. Establishing full stability requires time. Bashar Al Aasad is making good moves. He recently visited the Russian Federation and he was in the United Arab Emirates. HE brought Syria back to the Arab world and the Arab world accepted him. You can see it on the horizon!

S: The Kurds in the Middle East do not have a state. Is there room for the Kurds in China's plan?

ARH: The Kurds are distributed in four countries: Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria.

Often, almost continuously, they are the subject of political games and political players in the region. If you talk to the "Iranian" Kurds, they are not asking for the disintegration of Iran because they consider themselves Iranians, but they are asking for their specific rights, which is logical. In Iraq, fortunately, after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, they have a better position. The president of the country is always from the ranks of the Kurds, and their demands have been met in Iraq. There are problems in Syria and Turkey. We cannot speak of a united Kurdish community in the region. Unfortunately, they also have problems between themselves.

S: The consequences of the war in Ukraine are also visible in the de-dollarization and strengthening of other regional organizations BRICS, SCO, BRI, OPEC and Iran is a mandatory part of the equation in each of them?

ARH: There are things I can authoritatively say now. As a result of the strengthening of regional organizations and states in all parts of the world, the influence of the USA is fading. The United States can no longer command. They remain in the game, but that unilateralism no longer works. It doesn't work. The US must cede some of the world's governance to others. It's not a US choice, it's something that was imposed on them. We are witnessing the strengthening of China. Now China has reached the level of entering political-security issues at the world level. China, which was a political dwarf, is becoming a political giant. One of the proofs for these claims is the Chinese mediation between our country and Saudi

Arabia, then the Peace Plan for the end of the war in Ukraine in 12 points... You have noticed well, BRICS and other organizations are developing the world into true multipolarity.

S: There is talk about the new money “Brixcoin” “Newscoin”, the currency of future international trade which would basically have a 40 percent gold base?

ARH: Iran is absolutely committed to that idea. Iran has always been a supporter and pioneer of this idea of trade in nominal currencies. If you remember, it used to be the dollar and then the Euro, and now the share of the American currency in world trade has dropped from 80 percent to around 50 percent. There is no doubt that the world is in a phase of change. It gives us hints about the formation of a new order. In fact, the world is still waiting for a new multipolar order.

S: Are there big meetings of the SCO, BRICS, BRI in the summer of 2023?

ARH: Yes. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS can be a turning point and change the course of history. China plays the biggest role. That’s One Belt One Road, the Initiative for World Security, and you can already hear the thunder. The sleeping dragon wakes up and is ready to fly.

S: How do you personally assess the development of the new situation in the Middle East?

ARH: I am personally optimistic about the events in the region, but I am not overly optimistic, because there are a huge number of challenges we are facing. Changes in the economic-political sense can be such that they cause great costs. They must be approached with caution. That “child” will be born in seven, eight, nine months, and that “child” must be born with the least expense. The new economic future requires independent countries to cooperate with each other and to form such a strong front of changes that they are sustainable. I absolutely do not mean any block division here. If these countries unite in international organizations, they have enough capacity to cooperate, and then we can hope that the changes will pass with the least financial and other costs. It will be a transaction after which countries will have many more choices where they will be able to achieve a multitude of smaller goals, there will be less pressure for domination and, on the contrary, there will be greater security, there will be more peace and more “human rights” which, ironically, everyone claims are “protectors”

S: 24 years ago they attacked Serbia to separate Kosovo and Metohija?

ARH: One of the fundamental beliefs of Iran has always been to adhere to internationally recognized principles and charters, and especially opposition to the use of force to solve problems. We see Kosovo in that framework. This is precisely why we never thought of recognizing Kosovo’s independence. From the first day, we condemned the aggression against FRY. At the same time, we welcome any attempt for the two sides to reach an agreement that will satisfy them. Any agreement that both sides recognize, we will support. Our position has always been firm and stable. Fortunately, Serbia also supports the same principles in the international framework and that is why it did not recognize Crimea, although it has excellent relations with Russia, but it did not impose sanctions on Russia either. Those are things that can work side by side.

S: The last thing the west blames Iran for is the poisoning of children. What did the investigation show?

ARH: Investigation is in progress. What is most important, the leaders of Iran have condemned it and classified it in the category of mass crime, which is a crime of the highest rank whose organizers and culprits must be punished to the maximum. Some information says that there are also roots from abroad, such as the fact that it happened within our borders. It is the duty of our leaders to solve it.

S: Exactly how many children were at risk?

ARH: About 30-40 thousand. Fortunately, no one lost their lives. They all got well.

S: Is it biological-chemical warfare?

ARH: That kind of warfare is easy. Damage can be done by anyone who has access to substances.

S: When is the expected meeting between the leaders of our two countries?

ARH: That question is on the agenda, but it cannot be said exactly. We hope and expect that the visit of President Vučić will be realized soon and it will be a historic visit that will raise our relations to the highest possible level. Serbia has always opposed sanctions against Iran and has not supported any sanctions against our country. You are the only European country that has not done so, and for Iran it is very significant. We have excellent dynamics for the development of relations, and this gives us hope that our relations will be long-term and stable.

## Direction of Tehran-Belgrade Relations

S: How is Serbia-Iran bilateral relations?

ARH: As far as bilateral relations are concerned, I am satisfied. Although, perhaps a large number of our capacities and potentials have not been realized. What is important to me is the direction we have chosen, and it is a good one. The leaders of the two countries are determined to develop their relations. There is a common political will in both countries. We have common political and cultural views, and our people have similar thoughts. And it is such a strong and powerful atmosphere that it largely limits the space for those who are against it.

S: What about the economy?

ARH: Economic exchange increased. In 2020, it was only 20 million dollars, in 2021 already 50 million, and in 2022 over 60 million dollars. We are not satisfied, because it can be much better. The roasting is excellent.

## Deviation from Extremism

S: The impression is that Saudi Arabia has made a deviation from Wahhabism and extremism? This country was blamed by Iran for being the center of anti-Iranian propaganda?

ARH: It is true. In the collection of issues in the Agreement, that problem was also resolved. Let me remind you that a few years ago, during the time of President Hatami, we signed the Security Agreement with Riyadh, and this new agreement includes two more valid



agreements, the most important of which is the security agreement. There it is decisively emphasized that the two countries will not interfere in each other's internal affairs, it implies the recognition of territorial integrity... And it is true. Saudi Arabia is moving away from radical attitudes.. Because that radicalism is becoming dangerous and a burden on themselves.

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