

Iran's Nuclear Program: Tehran's Negotiations with the West

World powers not negotiating with Iran in good faith: James Corbett. Interview by Kourosh Ziabari

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Canadian radio host and journalist James Corbett believes that the group of six world powers have not ever been sincere and honest in their negotiations with Iran and constantly used the opportunity of talks to put more pressure on Iran over its nuclear program.

"At this point, the players in this drama have all but given up the pretense that this is a negotiation at all. It has become more of a venue for the west to deliver threats and ultimatums to Iran. The goalposts are constantly shifting and have become so hopelessly nebulous that they are about as realistic as it was for Bush and Blair to demand that Saddam Hussein "disarm" the WMDs he never had or face military invasion," said Corbett in an interview with Fars News Agency.

James Corbett edits, writes and hosts the Corbett Report. James has been living and working in Japan since 2004. He started The Corbett Report website in 2007 as an outlet for independent critical analysis of politics, society, history, and economics. Corbett has interviewed several renowned authors, journalists, academicians and activists for his listener-supported show. He is also a producer for Global Research TV (GRTV).

What follows is the text of Fars News Agency's interview with James Corbett ahead of the upcoming nuclear talks between Iran and the P5+1.

Q: Iran and the P5+1 held a meeting in Kazakhstan on February 26 to talk about Iran's nuclear program. The past meetings between Iran and the six world powers yielded few practical results as the West has persistently called on Iran to abandon its enrichment activities, while knowing that Iran's nuclear program is purely peaceful. What's your viewpoint in this regard?

A: In labor law there is a concept of "good faith negotiation" which stipulates that both sides in that negotiation have to recognize each other as bargaining representatives, attend and take part in meetings at reasonable times, respond in good time to proposals from other representatives, and to respond to those proposals with reasoned responses indicating a genuine attempt to consider them. On almost every point, the P5+1 powers have shown themselves to be in violation of these principles in their negotiation with Iran over the Iranian nuclear program. The attempt to force concessions and/or impose sanctions as a precondition to negotiations is a clear sign that the P5+1 are not negotiating in good faith.

Take the IAEA's 'revelation' this week that Iran is installing "advanced" centrifuge technology at its Natanz plant. The leak comes conveniently right as these so-called

negotiations are set to begin, and provides a convenient excuse for everyone, including, of course, the Obama administration, to deliver more hand-wringing about Iran's "provocative" actions. The problem with this reading, of course, is that this technology is in no way inconsistent with a peaceful nuclear program, and the very same IAEA report also shows no evidence whatsoever that any of Iran's nuclear materials are being diverted for weapons purposes. All this is conveniently ignored, however, and the entire attempt to replace Iran's admittedly outdated 1970s centrifuge technology with more stable, modern equipment is portrayed as some type of monstrous breach of international etiquette.

The hypocrisy is self-evident. Iran cannot so much as upgrade its aging equipment without being accused of provocative action. None of its actions are in violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the IAEA itself cannot demonstrate any proof that it is diverting any of its nuclear material for an offensive weapons program. Meanwhile, Israel, its avowed enemy who has repeatedly threatened military action against it for even pursuing the idea of peaceful nuclear technology, is the world's sixth largest nuclear power and yet is not an NPT signatory and has never allowed its nuclear facilities to be inspected by anyone, least of all the IAEA. What clearer indication can there be that the P5+1 are not negotiating in good faith?

Q: Iran has always expressed its willingness for engaging in talks with the six world powers based on mutual respect and provided that its nuclear rights are recognized, but the Western powers have always imposed new sanctions against Iran before the talks and stalled clear and meaningful negotiations. Isn't this practice a policy of carrot and stick aimed at intimidating Iran and forcing it into making concessions?

A: At this point, the players in this drama have all but given up the pretense that this is a negotiation at all. It has become more of a venue for the west to deliver threats and ultimatums to Iran. The goalposts are constantly shifting and have become so hopelessly nebulous that they are about as realistic as it was for Bush and Blair to demand that Saddam Hussein "disarm" the WMDs he never had or face military invasion. Just this week, White House spokesman Jay Carney told reporters that "If it [Iran] fails to address the concerns of the international community, it will face more pressure and become increasingly isolated." What does this blather mean? What are the concerns, and how does Iran go about "addressing" them? It is obvious at this point that nothing short of the government of Iran agreeing to shut down the nuclear program entirely and hand the keys to their country over to America would be enough to meet these vague demands.

A perfect case in point revolves around the sanctions that the US unilaterally imposed this month shutting down the gold-for-gas trade that had developed between Iran and Turkey. The sanctions have already had their effect: the trade is drying up. Now the major powers come along and tell Iran that they might ease up on these sanctions if Tehran scraps their Fordow uranium enrichment plan. This is not a negotiation by any stretch of the imagination, this is one step shy of all-out war. As Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast put it: "They want to take away the rights of a nation in exchange for allowing trade in gold." No self-respecting state could possibly give in to such demands. This is no carrot here, only stick, and no negotiation, only threats.

Q: 13 American intelligence agencies reported in 2007 that Iran's nuclear activities haven't diverted toward producing nuclear weapons and don't have a military dimension. However,

Washington still insists that Iran is after nuclear weapons, obstructing the progress of talks between Iran and the P5+1. Why does the U.S. repeat its claims for which it has no substantial evidence or proof?

A: The claim is entirely political, and explicitly so. One of the key authors of the 2007 National Intelligence Estimate that came to the conclusion that Iran's nuclear program is not offensive in nature, Dr. Tom Fingar, recently received a "Sam Adams Award" from the Oxford Student Union for integrity in intelligence work. The event received virtually no attention from any of the press and Dr. Fingar is still a complete unknown to the American public. Both the Bush and Obama administrations have done their best to cover up the findings and assessments of their own intelligence agencies, exactly as the Bush regime worked to cover up any intelligence pointing to Saddam's lack of WMDs in the run-up to the war in Iraq. The intelligence was being manipulated then, and it is being manipulated now.

Q: It was in 2004 that a German spy stole a laptop computer from a military unit in Iran. The laptop is said to have included thousands of documents regarding Iran's alleged underground nuclear activities. The American intelligence agencies confirmed that the data in this laptop are genuine, but so far, nothing of the information saved in the laptop have been presented and offered to the public or the inspectors of the IAEA. Can we say that the laptop issue is an intelligence hoax aimed at blemishing Iran's reputation and putting more pressure on it?

A: How can the public possibly be asked to put their trust in the pronouncements of politicians and government officials who have been caught lying to demonize their enemies time and again? The laptop should not be assumed to exist until it is presented for inspection by independent experts in a neutral setting, and even then all possible forms of tampering and planting of evidence have to be taken into account. Perhaps the intelligence agencies have learned their lesson since the release of the Niger yellowcake documents, which were easily exposed as crude forgeries. If the evidence is never presented, it can never be exposed as a forgery.

Q: The anti-Iran sanctions have created problems for the ordinary Iranian citizens, but it seems that they cannot persuade the Iranian politicians and the people to retreat from the path of peaceful nuclear program the country has been pursuing and investing on. What's your viewpoint about the sanctions, their humanitarian impact and the effects they have had on Iran's nuclear program?

A: The sanctions are lunacy on every level: humanitarian, political and strategic. The effects on the Iranian population are well documented and a perfectly predictable outcome of this form of economic warfare. But this has the exact opposite effect as the one supposedly intended by the west. To whatever extent reformist sentiment exists in Iran, the sanctions only help to make the case that the country is under attack by the west and must refuse to back down from the confrontation. If anything, it only stiffens the resolve of Iranians and makes the American dream of some spontaneous uprising from within that much less likely.

Even more bafflingly, the sanctions are having devastating effects on the P5+1 allies. Europe in general and Turkey in particular are sorely in need of Iranian gas to supplement their energy imports. The sanctions put the squeeze on these countries perhaps even more so than Iran, which will always find willing buyers for its gas in Asian markets that are unfettered by western sanctions.

Of course, this is well-known by America and its allies. The reason for the sanctions is not, ultimately, to make Iran cave to their demands; no one is seriously expecting this to happen. It is instead to exacerbate the situation so that international pressure against Iran increases. Europeans and Turks, for example, now have that much more incentive to pressure Iran on its nuclear program, since it is directly effecting their own bottom line.

Q: What's your opinion about the upcoming nuclear talks between Iran and the P5+1? Given that some members of the group have shown no willingness to ease the sanctions as an indication of their goodwill to Iran, can we await the success of the talks after an almost 8-month hiatus?

A" It would be nothing short of a miracle if any sort of agreement is actually struck in Almaty. The P5+1 powers have already made it abundantly clear that they are not interested in any agreement that involves Iran maintaining its nuclear program in any capacity. Sadly, if unsurprisingly, the best possible outcome is also the least likely one: the abolition of nuclear weapons altogether. It is also the one that was suggested by Ayatollah Khamenei last week, in keeping with a long tradition of Iranian proposals for a nuclear free Middle East that have been roundly rejected by the west. Go figure.

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