

# A Resolution in the Iran Nuclear Mess?

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

The European Union's (EU) agreement with Iran over its nuclear program was, in the words of one European diplomat, a "win-win" situation, in which both sides got what they wanted and there were no losers. Although the United States has not yet accepted the agreement, European and Iranian sources are hopeful that the Bush Administration will be boxed in, and forced to do so. The Nov. 18 charge by outgoing Secretary of State Colin Powell that Iran is building missiles to carry nuclear warheads, which was immediately contradicted by some U.S. intelligence sources, reflects the fact that the fight inside the Administration is still unresolved, to say the least.

The agreement came after months of hard-nosed negotiating between the "EU-3"—that is, Great Britain, France, and Germany—and the Islamic Republic. Iran demanded that its right to nuclear technology, indeed, to the entire nuclear fuel cycle, as guaranteed in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which it has signed, be respected, and that the Europeans help in providing the technology required for a civilian nuclear energy program. The Europeans, under pressure from the neo-con crowd in Washington, asserted the need for Iran to renounce its uranium enrichment program, which, some say, could lead to the production of weapons-grade uranium.

The final agreement was made public on Nov. 15, after intensive talks in Paris the preceding week. Iran was granted its right to maintain its uranium enrichment capabilities, but agreed to suspend any related activity on a voluntary basis, while maintaining the option of restarting it at any time. It was understood that the suspension would last for three months, during which time further negotiations on a final agreement would be held.

This was accepted by the EU, in hopes that a final, long-term deal could be worked out to the satisfaction of both sides. After the Iran-EU agreement had been announced, the chief of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Mohamed ElBaradei, issued his report on Iran, in which he stated that nothing in the Islamic Republic's dossier on its nuclear program indicated that any weapons program were under way. On Nov. 25, when the Board of the IAEA meets in Vienna, it is hoped that the Iran dossier will be officially closed, and that those neo-con political figures in Washington, chief among

them Undersecretary of State for Arms Control John Bolton, who have been lobbying for the dossier to be sent to the UN Security Council for deliberation leading to sanctions, will be silenced.

## The Fine Print

The final agreement struck on Nov. 15, emerged from discussion of several competing drafts from both sides, which went on for months. According to the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), Iran and the EU reaffirm the commitments of the Tehran Declaration they signed on Oct. 21, 2003, and decided to move forward building on that agreement. High Representatives of the EU, led by France, Britain, and Germany, recognize Iran's rights under the NPT exercised in conformity with its obligations under the treaty without discrimination, part of the agreement signed in Tehran.

Iran, the report continued, reaffirms that in accordance with Article II of the NPT, it does not and will not seek to acquire nuclear weapons. It commits itself to full cooperation and transparency with the IAEA. Iran will continue to implement the Additional Protocol voluntarily, pending ratification. Most significantly: "To build further confidence, Iran has decided, on a voluntary basis, to continue and extend its suspension to include all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities, and specifically: the manufacture and import of gas centrifuges and their components, the assembly, installation, testing, or operation of gas centrifuges, work to undertake any plutonium separation, or to construct or operate any plutonium separation installation, and all tests or production at any uranium conversion installations. The IAEA will be notified of this suspension, and invited to verify and monitor it. The suspension will be implemented in time for the IAEA to confirm before the November Board that it has been put into effect. The suspension will be sustained while negotiations proceed on a mutually acceptable agreement on long-term arrangements," it said.

"The E3/EU recognize that this suspension is a voluntary confidence-building measure and not a legal obligation," IRNA commented. Sustaining the suspension while negotiations on a long-term agreement are under way will be essential for the continuation of the overall process, the IRNA report continued.

Furthermore, in the context of this suspension, the E3/EU and Iran have agreed to begin negotiations, with a view to reaching a mutually acceptable agreement on long-term arrangements. The agreement will provide objective guarantees that Iran's nuclear program is exclusively for peaceful purposes. It will equally provide firm guarantees on nuclear, technological, and economic cooperation and firm commitments on security issues. A steering committee will meet to launch these negotiations in the first half of December 2004 and will set up working groups on political and security issues. The steering committee shall meet again within three months to receive progress reports from the working groups and to move

ahead with projects and/or measures that can be implemented in advance of an overall agreement.

The agreement says that once suspension has been verified, the negotiations with the EU on a Trade and Cooperation Agreement will resume. The E3/EU will actively support the opening of Iranian accession negotiations at the World Trade Organization (WTO). "Irrespective of progress on the nuclear use, the E3/EU and Iran confirm their determination to combat terrorism, including the activities of al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups such as Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization (MeK). They also confirm their continued support for the political process aimed at establishing a constitutionally elected government in Iraq," the agreement read.

### A Win-Win Situation

All parties to the agreement immediately hailed it as a breakthrough. Iranian National Security Council head Hassan Rowhani, who had led the negotiations, welcomed the deal, and explained that suspension of uranium enrichment per se had never been the "red line" for Tehran; rather, the red line has been *complete* suspension of the uranium enrichment process; that is, giving up forever any claim to the technology. "The Islamic Republic of Iran has not withdrawn from any of its principles; we did not accept suspension based on the [IAEA] resolution; we accepted temporary and voluntary suspension based on a political deal with Europe," he said.

The specification may seem like nitty-gritty to an outside observer, but it strikes the substance of the matter: Iran refused to give up its right, guaranteed in the NPT, to uranium enrichment technology, and thus refused any "obligation" to do so. Most important, Iran thus safeguards its sovereignty over such decisions. The issue of Iran's sovereign right to nuclear technology is the hottest issue in the country, one which unites all political factions in its defense, just as the issue of sovereignty over the nation's natural resources had rallied the nation around Prime Minister Mossadegh, in the early 1950s (see "'Mossadegh Reflex' in Iranian Nuclear Policy," *EIR*, Sept. 24, 2004). Any Iranian government which were to relinquish sovereignty over nuclear energy, would not last long.

In his remarks, Rowhani explicitly mentioned forces inside the country who were calling for abandoning talks with the IAEA. Shortly before the breakthrough, the Majlis (Parliament) had virtually unanimously passed a bill calling on the government to maintain the uranium enrichment program.

Further statements were issued by leading Iranian figures, in order to erase any doubts inside the country, that this issue of sovereignty had been compromised. Hossein Mousavian, foreign policy committee secretary at Iran's Supreme National Security Council and one of Iran's negotiators with the EU, announced days later: "We will give the nuclear experts of both sides three months. . . . Within three to four months

at the most, we should reach a stage where we have an overall conclusion. If they come to no conclusion or say the only visible guarantee would be to halt enrichment altogether, Iran will not accept this," he added.

President Mohammad Khatami reiterated the point: "If the other side does not respect its commitments, we will not have any obligations either," he warned, adding that Iran had struck a "positive accord that respects the national interests."

"Before we spoke of a maximum period of six months, but now we do not want to fix a timeframe," Khatami said of his country's pledge to suspend enrichment activities as of Nov. 22—just three days before the IAEA meeting. Khatami said it was now up to the IAEA board and the EU to respond in kind to Iran's agreement to cooperate as a first step in proving to Iran that the diplomacy was worthwhile.

The responses coming from Europe echoed those from Tehran, in hailing the agreement as a great diplomatic success, and welcoming Iran's suspension decision.

As expected, Washington's response was less than enthusiastic, but not an outright rejection. U.S. Secretary of State Powell said there had been "a little bit of progress, hopefully." State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said the U.S. position remains that Iran's program should be reviewed by the Security Council, which could impose economic and diplomatic sanctions. White House spokesman Scott McClellan stated: "We are staying in touch with our European friends, the British, and the French and the Germans. . . . We like to have the full details before we go out and make comments about it."

### Terrorist Front Group Deployed

No sooner had the ink dried on the agreement, than charges were launched, according to which Iran was harboring a secret enrichment facility. The accusations came from the National Council for Resistance in Iran (NCRI), a front group for the terrorist Mujaheddin al-Qalq (MKO/MEK). One Farid Soleiman, a senior official of the group, stated on Nov. 17, prior to a Vienna press conference, "The site is involved in uranium enrichment, they are developing a number of techniques." Another NCRI spokesman in Paris, Dhahin Gobadi, said, "Iran has been carrying out nuclear work" at a facility known as the Modern Defensive Readiness and Tehcnology Center. The group charged furthermore that Iran had received weapons-grade uranium and a nuclear bomb design from the father of the Pakistani bomb, Abdul Qadeer Khan. The group also said that Iran was developing missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

The charges would not have meant much, had not U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell lent credibility to the group's statements on Nov. 18. The Iranian government immediately denied the allegations. "It is a well-timed lie as well. The group wants to make another fuss ahead of the IAEA board meeting on Nov. 25," Iran negotiator Mousavian told Reuters. "They want to poison the board's atmosphere."