

Iran: Hasan Rowhani Interviewed on Nuclear Negotiations Interview with Dr Hasan Rowhani, by Mehdi Mohammadi: "Nuclear Case From Beginning to End in Interview With Dr Hasan Rowhani (Part 1): We Are Testing Europe"

KEYHAN

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The nuclear case is still open and so is the debate about it. Without a doubt, the most qualified person to unravel the knots of the nuclear case one by one and have new explanations about its every detail would be Dr Hasan Rowhani. He has been in charge of the nuclear case for one year and nine months now, and as he himself says, among a thousand kinds of tasks that he juggles every day at the Supreme National Security Council's secretariat, he devotes the most time and effort to this one to the point that sometimes he has to spend the night in his office, and...

We didn't want to argue or get into unnecessary details, and we didn't do so. At least we in Keyhan have probably done enough arguing and argumentative writing. This time our intention was to hear an account of the nuclear case and its latest developments from someone who had the history of the nuclear case with all of its ups and downs as part of his report card now. We talked to Rowhani in the Supreme National Security Council's place for four hours. Those parts of our discussions that are publishable will be presented to Keyhan's dear readers in more than one part.

(Mohammadi) We have already discussed enough about the details of the nuclear case in Keyhan. So perhaps it would be more useful to dedicate this interview to the general procedures that were passed during the past two years or so, although it would be certainly necessary in some cases to discuss details as well. The nuclear diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran during this period has contained certain messages regarding our view of the subject of international relations and the issue of regional and international security. To start the discussion, perhaps it would be necessary for you to begin with a comparison between the present status of this case from political, legal and technical aspects and its status at the beginning of the process.

(Rowhani) From a historical standpoint, the outset of the nuclear crisis goes back to Mordad 1381 (July-August 2002). At that time, because of the activities of the Hypocrites (Mojahedin-e Khalq) and media like CNN, it was said that Iran was producing nuclear weapons in three secret sites. Then the Islamic Republic of Iran announced that it had invited Mr ElBaradei to come to Iran and visit Iran's nuclear facilities. ElBaradei paid a visit to Iran and after his trip the uproars subsided for a while. The reason was that at that particular juncture, America was preparing itself to attack Iraq, which it did in Esfand 1381 (March 2003). So in early 1382 (April 2003), there was no clamor and uproar in Western circles about Iran's nuclear affairs. But the first time that the issue took on widespread international dimensions was in Khordad 1382 or June 2003, when our case was propounded in the International Atomic Energy Agency's Board of Governors for the first time. Mr ElBaradei for the first time presented a report about Iran to the Board of Governors. And after the summit of the Board of Governors, the chairman of this board passed a resolution containing certain demands of Iran.

(Mohammadi) It was in that resolution where it was demanded that Iran suspend the gas injection operation in Natanz for the first time, wasn't it?

(Rowhani) There were several demands. They wanted Iran to sign the additional protocol and to be more cooperative with the agency, and they encouraged Iran to suspend the gas injection in Natanz. After June, we reached the September summit of the Board of Governors. It was at that summit where they passed a strongly worded resolution against Iran and the Board of Governors set a deadline for Iran to carry out the demands stated in the resolution. After that resolution, there was a lot of noise and ballyhoo in the world and subsequently our country's economy was greatly

affected, too.

(Mohammadi) Affected how?

(Rowhani) Almost all of Iran's economic activities were locked. A decline in business activities pervaded the entire market and even ordinary trades were affected, because they had publicized in the world that Iran's case was going to the Security Council after the elapse of this deadline. In other words, they wanted -- and to some extent managed -- to impress this notion on world public opinion that an incident similar to what had happened in Iraq was awaiting Iran, too. Of course, it seems that at least the planners of the September resolution were not so reluctant to have Iran's case referred to the Security Council after all. When we read the text of that resolution, it seems as if all of the ways were closed and they had left no escape for Iran. In fact, they had written the resolution in a way that it wouldn't matter if Iran did or did not comply with it, and either way, Iran's case would be referred to the Security Council. If Iran wanted to carry out the terms of the resolution, it had to allow the agency to conduct its intended samplings and inspections, in which case it would become clear that Iran had committed a breach and injected gas without notifying the agency, which in turn would give them an excuse to refer the case to the Security Council. And if Iran wouldn't allow them to do the inspections, it would mean Iran's noncompliance and refusal to meet the resolution's demands, and again on those grounds they could refer the case to the Security Council. Mr ElBaradei had a comment at that juncture when he said whether we cooperated or not, our case was bound to be at least reported to the Security Council; but only if we cooperated, the Security Council's approach to the issue would be a little more lenient. They had placed us in such circumstances. These conditions caused the nuclear case to acquire national security aspects, and so the organizations that were naturally pursuing the issue up to that time, which means the Foreign Ministry and the Atomic Energy Organization, referred the matter to the Supreme National Security Council. After all, the global atmosphere was not favorable and there were dangers ahead. This was in October 2003.

(Mohammadi) This is the time when the matter of putting someone in charge of the nuclear case came up?

(Rowhani) Yes, it was around that date that it was suggested that all issues involving the nuclear case be placed under one person's authority and that person's orders be mandatory for all organizations related to the case. There were discussions as to who that person should be. Eventually, the system's high-ranking officials in one of their meetings decided that I should undertake this responsibility. The first one who suggested this matter was Mr Kharrazi himself. But I declined the offer in that meeting. I said no, I wouldn't accept any responsibility and this task could be assigned to the Foreign Ministry itself, and the Security Council would give its help and support. But Mr Khatami insisted on this matter. These discussions went on for nearly a week. He kept insisting and I kept saying no. The eminent leader also emphatically advised me to accept. I saw that the conditions were not normal and we couldn't hesitate and leave the work in suspense, so I accepted. Another reason why I accepted this responsibility was that I felt my reluctance was due to the fact that I knew it was a heavy burden of responsibility that would put my position and reputation on the line. Even from that time, I could see the difficulties ahead. I remember that I explained in detail to Mr Khatami what was going to happen and what difficulties we were about to face.

(Mohammadi) What were your speculations, for example?

(Rowhani) I predicted not only our foreign problems, but our internal difficulties as well. I knew that some people in the country would take radical positions.

(Mohammadi) Like Keyhan?

(Rowhani) Well, Keyhan's positions, in my opinion, were radical yet combined with some kind of rationality. I mean it argued with logic. But there were others whose sole purpose was to hassle and cause trouble. Anyway, I predicted these cases. On

the other hand, it was necessary that different organizations cooperate with the official in charge of the nuclear case and I wasn't sure at the time if all of them were willing to cooperate 100 percent. When the work started, 90 percent of the problems that I predicted came true. The problems included both disharmony and sabotage. At that time, we especially had lots of problems with some of the Majles representatives and some other personalities. At the outset, because I saw these difficulties, I didn't want to undertake the nuclear case. But then I realized that this effort to protect myself and stay immune wasn't exactly the right thing to do. After all, if we have a reputation, it belongs to the system, not anything else.

(Mohammadi) Let's not stay paused in this period. We have already discussed enough with other gentlemen about these details. But right here, there is a question that I think you should answer. There are two issues on which we would like to know what your opinion was at the beginning of the process. One is about the negotiating team as the forces in the field of the nuclear case, and the other is about the decision-making process, which means the stages that had to be passed for a decision to be made with regard to the nuclear case.

(Rowhani) Look, before I was appointed, there were certain guidelines for these issues. There was a committee on the nuclear case that could be called the "Council of Heads" which was held from an earlier stage and I too was a member of it. And then there was another committee that could be called the "Policymaking Committee" which was on a secondary level. We had this committee, too.

(Mohammadi) Who were the members?

(Rowhani) It was a committee on the level of ministers and some other personalities were present, too. For example, Dr Larijani, Dr Velayati, the intelligence minister and the director of the Atomic Energy Organization were and still are its members. On the third level, there was also an expert committee consisting of experts of different institutions involved with the issue.

(Mohammadi) Which institution was in charge of these sessions?

(Rowhani) The Foreign Ministry, and those who carried out the negotiations were chiefly from the Foreign Ministry, too. I mean this team existed before I took charge of the case. In the month of June and especially in September, this team went to the agency and was active there.

(Mohammadi) Was that team's composition the same as the present one?

(Rowhani) Yes, it was the same team. Of course, there may have been some minor changes in it, but the present team was there. In fact, I made no changes since I was appointed. The Council of Heads is clear, and I wasn't supposed to change the committee of ministers. In fact, I was supposed to work with the existing conditions and facilities. For example, about the negotiating team, I neither removed nor added any person. The same members stayed in the team and still are there.

(Mohammadi) How were the decisions adopted?

(Rowhani) Important or strategic decisions were made in the Council of Heads.

(Mohammadi) What kinds of decisions were considered "important" and "strategic."

(Rowhani) Well, I should use examples. For example, deciding whether we should have talks with Europe or not; or the decision as to whether we should have extensive cooperation with the agency or not. These decisions were made in the Council of Heads. Or, for example, the decision that the nuclear fuel cycle was our red line and under no circumstances would we waive it was also among these decisions. In fact, all of the important and strategic principles and decisions that were the foundation of our work were ratified in the Council of Heads. The decisions that were made on the second level, which means in the committee of ministers, were also reported to the leader and the president before being executed. In the third-level

committee, which means the expert sessions, details were further discussed and I led the sessions myself.

(Mohammadi) In what order were these decisions made, from top to bottom or from bottom to top?

(Rowhani) It varies from one case to the other. For example, the decision that our cooperation with the agency should be full cooperation was a bottom-to-top decision. But the decision that the nuclear fuel cycle must be considered as our red line was discussed and made both in the expert sessions and in the Council of Heads. Of course, in most cases, the decisions were made from bottom to top, which means that the principles of the topics discussed in the sessions of experts or ministers would later be considered and ratified in the Council of Heads.

(Mohammadi) Were there also any cases where a decision made on a lower level was rejected on a higher level? The reason why I am asking this question is because this doubt has been raised at times that the decisions adopted on a lower level were processed and then presented to the system's authorities in such a way as to leave them no choice but to approve those low-level decisions.

(Rowhani) Let me bring an example to clarify this issue. This idea that along with our cooperation with the agency, we also needed to conduct systematic political work developed during our expert sessions. However, there were different suggestions as to which combination we should choose to do political work with. The idea that was finally approved in the Council of Heads was for us to embark on negotiations with Europe. Of course, this didn't mean that we wouldn't work with the others. Or as another example, when we reached the stage where we were ready to put the Esfahan project into operation, there were lots of differences of opinion as to whether we should proceed to put the Esfahan project into operation or not. But eventually, the decision was made in the expert session to put the Esfahan project into operation, and the Council of Heads also confirmed the decision.

(Mohammadi) How about suspension?

(Rowhani) The matter of suspension was decided in the Council of Heads, but as for its limits...

(Mohammadi) Do you mean the time of suspension?

(Rowhani) Of course, the time was not clear. This matter was also discussed in the Council of Heads -- that we should accept the suspension voluntarily, so that we would have control over its time. Besides, there was also this point that we would accept the suspension for a short period of time, for example six months or a year. In our negotiations with the three European ministers, one of the cases that took a lot of our time was this very matter to specify the suspension as being voluntary. They wouldn't agree to include this word, but we said we wouldn't accept the suspension without it, because if we didn't specify that the suspension was voluntary, it would mean we were making a commitment to suspend our activities, while we were not ready to make any such commitment at all.

(Mohammadi) What about increasing the extent of suspension?

(Rowhani) The suspension first started from Natanz. What we accepted under the Tehran declaration in October was only to suspend the gas injecting operation in Natanz. Later in February 2004, according to the Brussels agreement, it extended to the production and assemblage of parts of centrifuge machines as well. In return for this suspension, the Europeans promised in Brussels to close our case in the June 2004 summit, and since that didn't happen, we resumed our activity in the field of assemblage and production of parts. After that, in Paris (November 2004) we accepted yet another suspension, and the range of suspension was extended for the third time. Of course, there were lots of discussions in Paris as to how we should proceed. Our experts who were drafting the text of the agreement and negotiating with the Europeans in Paris were constantly in contact with me while I was in Tehran. When

the work was complete and ready to be signed, I told them to hold on and not sign anything. I told them to send a copy of the entire agreement to Tehran and also tell the Europeans that signing the final agreement depended on Tehran's confirmation.

(Mohammadi) Why did you do that?

(Rowhani) I felt that the issue was extremely important and wasn't something that I could make the final decision about myself. On the one hand, if we didn't take the agreement, since the November summit was very close, we would certainly encounter serious problems there and it was very likely that our case would be sent to the Security Council in the month of November. But if we accepted it, one problem was that the range of suspension would extend to many new cases that had not been suspended up to that point. And another problem was that Europe wouldn't accept to set any time limit for the talks. We insisted on setting a certain period of time for the talks, but Europe disagreed with setting any fixed time for the end of the talks.

(Mohammadi) And eventually no time was specified in the Paris agreement, was it?

(Rowhani) No, it wasn't. The Paris agreement does not consider any certain time for the end of the talks. This is why I said it had to be brought and discussed in the Council of Heads. Of course, in general, we assumed that the time of negotiations shouldn't be very long, because the suspension was connected to the period of the talks. Before accepting the Paris deal, I had emphatically stated this matter to the three European ministers and after that in a press conference. If you remember, I repeatedly said that the time of negotiations would be less than a year.

(Mohammadi) You said it was a matter of months, not a year.

(Rowhani) Yes, exactly. They said they couldn't confine this time at all or even talk about years.

(Mohammadi) Are you still abiding by your statement that the talks will eventually take less than a year, meaning that one way or another it will all come to an end this year in November?

(Rowhani) Yes, I am keeping my promise. Now, what I wanted to say is that the decision about the Paris agreement was made in the Council of Heads. We had a lot of discussion there as to how we should accept this deal. And finally, we precisely explained our understanding and interpretation of the agreement for the European side and told them that we would sign the agreement with this understanding. I clearly explained this to the three ambassadors and asked them to precisely inform their ministers.

(Mohammadi) If necessary, we will discuss more about the details of the Paris agreement, God willing. But the main question was, in what ways and to what extent have the present conditions changed since the time when the crisis started?

(Rowhani) I have been in charge of the nuclear case for about one year and nine months now. The day that I undertook this case, which means in Mehr 1382 (September-October 2003), the circumstances were such that we weren't very far from the Security Council and the option of America's military attack was not very unlikely. At that time, they assumed they were at the peak of victory in Iraq, and they were thinking that Iran would be next. And for this purpose, they believed that the best way was to use this case and send it to the Security Council, so that they could exaggerate Iran's failures there and so forth. You know how much effort they made to put the term of "noncompliance" in the November resolution. And we on the other hand made a lot of effort to prevent that from happening. If they had managed to introduce such an expression in the November resolution against us, their work in confronting Iran would have become very simple. If we had not started our talks with the Europeans in October, this matter definitely would have happened.

(Mohammadi) Before we continue the discussion on this issue, allow me to open a pair

of parentheses here and ask something. What status was our nuclear technology in at that time?

(Rowhani) At that time, in fact, we had made our first achievements in this technology. I mean we had already accomplished enrichment on an experimental level. We were taking the first steps in Arak. As for the Esfahan facilities, neither UF4 nor UF6 had been produced yet. From a legal standpoint, I also explained that in view of the September resolution we were in critical conditions, and in publicity, we didn't have a good situation either. The Western states had impressed this notion on world public opinion that Iran was making an atomic bomb somewhere. They had managed to impose this impression. Politically, we could say that a consensus had formed against us in the world. After all, the September resolution that contained the harshest phrases against us was unanimously passed by the Board of Governors, and everyone had a unified position against us. In the economic aspect, as I said earlier, the Japanese and the Europeans had abandoned almost all of their cooperation with us and no activity was being done. Now, when we look at the circumstances of today, in brief, we will see that the situation has significantly improved since then. From a legal standpoint, the very least is that our case is no longer on the Board of Governors' agenda on a regular basis.

(Mohammadi) Isn't this a violation of the Paris agreement that the assistant to the general director reports to the Board of Governors on a technical level?

(Rowhani) No, Iran's case is not on the agenda in the sessions of the Board of Governors at all, and they are not taking votes or passing any resolutions on it. The general director's assistant for safeguards can step in at any time and report about any country. When the case is on the agenda, it means that the case is still heavy and in need of regular consideration. But when it is removed from the agenda, it means that the work has become quite light.

(Mohammadi) On the same legal section, about the "corrective measures" that were introduced following the September 2003 resolution, what status are they in now?

(Rowhani) In the November 2004 resolution, two important matters were stated. One was that Iran had carried out the corrective measures, and the other was that Iran's nuclear activities were of a peaceful nature. Of course, this doesn't mean that Iran has finalized all the agency had asked for, and that the agency has finished its work with Iran. There are still some discussions left. Of course, issues such as contamination are on the verge of final settlement. There are issues like the history of the P1 and P2 centrifuges and some other minor issues. However, it is quite obvious that the ambiguities of our case are finally being resolved, and even if you asked the general director now, he would say that the case is coming to a close.

(Mohammadi) The General Director has said that he might be able to sum up the whole issue in the September 2005 summit.

(Rowhani) Exactly, because at this point it doesn't matter whether it was a failure or a breach. The important matter is that we take corrective measures, which we have. So there is a chance that our case would be completely closed in September.

(Mohammadi) What does our case being "closed" mean? In the September 2003 resolution, the Board of Governors said that the general director must express assurance about Iran. Will the General Director do so in September?

(Rowhani) Look, what we need is for the general director to announce that Iran has carried out whatever it was required to in accordance with the September 2003 resolution, and that there is no indication or evidence that shows any diversion in Iran's nuclear activities. At present, our conditions are such that allow the general director to make such an announcement. Maybe in September or November or at some other time in the current Christian year he could announce that there is no evidence of any military (nuclear) activities in Iran.

(Mohammadi) They call it absence of diversion.

(Rowhani) "Absence of diversion" is the expression they used in November.

(Mohammadi) Of course, there they said that this absence of diversion was related to the reported cases.

(Rowhani) Well, if they want to claim that there are any unreported cases, they must be able to prove it. Besides, we should keep in mind that, for example, in the case of Japan or Canada, it took many years for them to say that there were no unreported cases. But whether they would make such an announcement for Iran, meaning that they would say there is no indication of diversion, considering the extent of Iran's cooperation, I think they should be able to do so until the end of the current Christian year. Thus, if we want to have a comparison in technical and legal aspects between our conditions at the present time and at the beginning of the crisis, I think no one can deny that we have made very significant progress since then. However, from a technical standpoint, the day we started this process, there was no such thing as the Esfahan project. But as of today, we have prepared and tested the Esfahan facility on an industrial level and produced a few tons of UF6. Today, we have a considerable number of completed and ready-to-use centrifuges. On the surface, it may seem that it has been a year and nine months since we accepted the suspension. But the fact of the matter is that we have fixed many of the flaws in our work during this period. We continued our production and assemblage activities until the time of the Paris agreement. It is true that at a certain juncture between February and June 2004, there was a pause in this process according to the Brussels agreement. But after June, we made up for that pause with extra effort. We didn't suspend the Esfahan project for even a moment until the project was completed and tested and its product was achieved. The Arak project was never suspended either.

(Mohammadi) Dr Rowhani, could we say this as a general rule -- that as long as a technology or a facility of ours was incomplete, we wouldn't accept to suspend it, and wherever a project was suspended, we already knew for sure that we were able to complete it.

(Rowhani) Practically, this was the way it turned out. But the matter that we constantly had in mind was that when it came to suspension, we should suffice to the minimum extent, in order to suspend as little of our activities as possible. More importantly, when a certain activity was suspended, during that period we would concentrate all of our effort and energy on other activities. So the right thing to say is that wherever we accepted suspension, beside that we thought about another area of activity. The day when Natanz was suspended, we put all of our effort into Esfahan. Now that Esfahan is in suspension, we are fixing other existing flaws. Of course, we didn't adopt a high profile on this matter, though we always seriously thought about an atmosphere of work along with the suspensions. The day when the Esfahan project was completed and put into operation, the Europeans just began to complain. In a session, they told our experts that we deceived them and did our work in Esfahan. But today, as you see, the political consensus that had formed against Iran at the outset has completely broken. Even the Americans, who always believed under no circumstances should they deal with Iran through negotiation and interaction, have now reached a point where they say not only that they support Europe's diplomatic talks with Iran, but also they are ready to take certain measures to contribute to the process. So that consensus against us doesn't exist any longer.

(Mohammadi) The technical and legal progresses made in the nuclear case are almost undeniable. But from a political standpoint, still the feeling is that we haven't made much headway. The Security Council's Damocles sword is still hanging above our head. Today, the Europeans are still threatening us with the same insanity as they did two years ago -- and their threats are not so unrealistic -- that they will refer our case to the Security Council should we fail to comply with their requested measures and demands. Also in the country, the nuclear officials still unsparingly frighten us of the Security Council danger whenever they deem necessary. Have we made any progress in this aspect?

(Rowhani) Look, firstly, you cannot deny the amount of progress that we made since the juncture of October 2003, because at least we postponed the option of referring our case to the Security Council for two years. This is very important. When the entire world community has come together to take a country's case to the Security Council, to postpone this matter for even one minute, two minutes or a few days would be important. Secondly, the conditions of that day are not quite the same as the conditions of today. That day, if our case had been sent to the Security Council, the Americans even would have allowed themselves to consider a military attack. But as of today, I am sure that military attack is not an option anymore. Thirdly, if we had gone to the Security Council in 2003, legally, the Western states would have been full-handed. They would have introduced and maneuvered on the term "noncompliance" in November. Even they could have claimed that Iran was making an atomic bomb, because at that point, the agency's inspectors hadn't yet come to Iran and none of our activities were clear to the world. Yes, today they can still take our case to the Security Council, but only with political games and pretexts. Legally, they are quite empty handed. There was a time when they could take to the Security Council a dossier consisting of several thousand pages on our nuclear activities, full of failures and ambiguities. But today, if they take the case to the Security Council, it will just be a file, no more than a few pages. And referring such a case to the Security Council would be a political fiasco for them and for the agency. The global atmosphere has changed a lot. This atmosphere has changed to such an extent that we are now able to come to terms with Mr Chirac and reach an agreement on a final solution to Iran's nuclear case -- even though that was just in a private meeting and there was no official negotiation. It is true that this agreement was not put into practice because of the opposition of Britain and especially America, though the fact that we could reach such an agreement was of great importance itself.

(Mohammadi) What kind of agreement was that?

(Rowhani) Mr Chirac said that the debate over Iran's nuclear activities was not just between them and us, but many other large countries and political combinations were involved, too. He said: "We Europeans, along with Russia and America, unanimously agree that we mustn't let you accomplish the program that you have in mind, because we consider it a threat to the world. And you cannot say because you are an independent country, you will do whatever you want to do." I told Mr Chirac I wanted to understand basically what their point was, and whether they wanted us not to produce fuel or not to make a bomb? He said they wanted us not to make a bomb. I said, well, then we should have no argument with each other; that we were not trying to make a bomb and basically we wanted the entire world cleared of bombs. I asked: "So you want to make sure that we will only produce fuel and we won't go after bombs, don't you?" He said that was exactly the case. I said: "Very well, in that case I have five proposals that will show how we can produce fuel and at the same time assure the world that we are not interested in making bombs."

(Mohammadi) And this was the discussion that finally led to our proposal in the month of Farvardin (March-April), wasn't it?

(Rowhani) The Farvardin proposal was my fifth suggestion.

(Mohammadi) Which one did Mr Chirac accept?

(Rowhani) He accepted the fourth proposal.

(Mohammadi) What was its content?

(Rowhani) That proposal was a plan for us to provide the required guarantees for absence of diversion through an international procedure. When Chirac said that he agreed with our fourth suggestion, all of the French experts and officials who were sitting next to him in the meeting began to disagree with him. The foreign minister and his national security advisor disagreed, too, and everyone started to discuss with him. He talked to them a little and then talked to me. But eventually he said,



"I agree his (Rowhani's) suggestion," and then added that they cannot be opposed to Iran's progress. This shows that our logic is extremely powerful. The Islamic Republic of Iran, in diplomatic methods and negotiation, has acquired a level of skill and maturity to be able to sit down and talk with topmost European officials and logically argue and explicate its (Mohammadi) There are lots of details about these matters, which we will skip over to keep the discussion moving on. One of the general discussions regarding the common procedure of our nuclear diplomacy, which we would like to know your opinion about, goes back to the existence of two different views on the issue of national security and foreign policy: the extroversive view and introversive view. In the extroversive view, some people believe that we must eventually reach some kind of partnership with the West; if not with America, with Europe. This is the only way before us and there is no other way. This view ignores the accumulated animosities of the West against Iran, especially the fundamental ideological differences between the Islamic revolution and the fundamentals of Western civilization, and believes it is possible to make a deal merely based on efforts to reach an equitable balance of interests for the two sides. On the other hand, the introversive view says basically we mustn't trust and count on the West. They would never trust us and the more we act friendly towards them, the more it will add to their animosity against us. Therefore, instead of trying to strike a deal with the West, we should spend our effort on increasing our national strength and our preventive power, so that we could gradually enter interactions with the world community from a position of power. Which one of these views do you prefer? Is it possible at all to reach a kind of partnership with the West that would also serve our interests?

(Rowhani) To answer your question in one sentence, I believe it is possible, but it would be very difficult and complicated. Look, the foundation of this matter is trust. We don't trust Europe, and Europe doesn't trust us. In the process of negotiating and working with Europe, we are seeking to build a foundation of trust, so that eventually the West will accept that the Islamic Republic of Iran is a country with its own particular features, culture, beliefs and ideals, but also one that is not seeking adventurism and does not meddle in the internal affairs of other countries and undermine the interests of other nations. Theoretically, when we propound this discussion, it may seem very complicated and basically unfeasible. But if we could find some practical, mutual interests on global and regional levels, it would be possible.

(Mohammadi) But could finding such interests plunge all of those fundamental ideological and civilization-related differences into oblivion?

(Rowhani) Look, a few years ago, if we said that the West would eventually for some reason wage war against Saddam and topple the Ba'ath Party and Saddam, it wouldn't be believable at all. But anyway, we saw that the West did so for its own reasons. It is true that this work could mean removing a huge obstacle from the way of the Islamic revolution in achieving its goals, but it did happen. We may have certain gains and losses in this matter, but the removal of Saddam was the common point where our goals converged with those of the West. Or consider the case of Afghanistan. The Taliban was created by the Americans and the British themselves, with the support of some of the regional countries. Ms Benazir Bhutto, the former Pakistani prime minister, was once asked why she had supported the creation of the Taliban. In answer, she said: "It wasn't only us. The British and others were involved, too." I mean now it is quite clear that the West was involved in creating and strengthening the Taliban. But in another era, because their interests necessitated otherwise, they toppled the Taliban, themselves.

(Mohammadi) Are you saying that it is possible to find mutual interests and take joint measures accordingly?

(Rowhani) Yes, there is even a clearer example of this in the Paris agreement. In this agreement, it has been stated that Iran and Europe promise to cooperate with each other with respect to Iraq's national sovereignty and security. Again in the Paris agreement, it has been stated that the two sides shall cooperate with each other in the war against terrorism, and it mentions al-Qa'ida and the Hypocrites

(Mojahedi n-e Khalq) as examples. This matter has also been discussed in the workgroups about how we should cooperate in fighting terrorism. It might be said that the Hypocrites were created by the Europeans and the Americans themselves. But now they have signed a deal with us to fight with these groups. What I mean is that although there might be very severe political differences between two countries or between two political combinations, there are always some points where they could find mutual interests and work with each other.

(Mohammadi) Building confidence is the main issue in our nuclear diplomacy. During the past two years, whenever we suspended an activity, we declared that the suspension was intended as a confidence-building measure. Whenever we cooperated beyond the level of our obligations, again we said that our intention was to build confidence. Whenever our nuclear diplomats and the Europeans had a meeting, they also said that they wanted to lay the groundwork for building confidence and boosting our relations in the future. The problem is that it has been two years now since the beginning of this confidence-building process in the nuclear case, and it should be clear by now how effective this process has been and how much the Europeans have become trustful of us. Now, our discussion with Europe is that it is true that enrichment is a dual-purpose activity, the final product of which can be both power plant fuel and atomic bomb, but you have to trust us that we want to produce fuel, not a bomb, and we will give the required guarantees. But their answer hasn't changed. They keep saying that the only acceptable guarantee is termination. It seems that the Europeans are not ready to trust us and the continuance of this process is going to be useless.

(Rowhani) We mustn't forget that the Europeans from the very beginning of this process had a goal, which sometimes they openly spoke of, but most of the time they kept secret. Their goal was to make Iran relinquish its enrichment program. This is what the Europeans have always said. In the letter of the three European foreign ministers to Iran dated 4 August 2003, they explicitly stated that Iran must relinquish all of the activities related to the nuclear fuel cycle. But when they came to Tehran and started to talk with us, we told them that "termination" was basically out of the question, and that they should forget this discussion and put it aside forever. Even when the matter of suspension came up in the Tehran talks, I told the three European ministers to forget about the discussion of long-term suspension forever. I said under no circumstances would we resign ourselves to this matter, and we would pay any necessary price. Of course, this doesn't mean whatever I said they accepted. But eventually, in our final agreement in Tehran, the word "suspension" was stated, not "termination." I also told the three European Foreign Ministers that our suspension was voluntary, and it might be for a day or for a year. They didn't complain. What I am saying is that the Europeans want us to relinquish this activity. They are hoping that they can offer better proposals and convince us to waive the enrichment. On the other hand, we have insisted on our position from the very first day and declared that the nuclear fuel cycle is our red line, which we will not give up. Now, we may discuss and negotiate over its time to be a few months sooner or later, but we will never relinquish the whole issue. We have stated this matter very clearly and explicitly to the highest ranks of European authorities. You put a finger on the main point of our dispute with Europe that building confidence is not easy. I told Mr Schroeder that I was ready to discuss this matter with him for hours and convince him that we could have the nuclear fuel cycle and at the same time give the required guarantees to the world that our activities would remain peaceful. I said even if he didn't have the time himself, he could designate someone as his plenipotentiary so that I would convince him. In answer, Schroeder said he would certainly not do so, because he was sure I would convince whomever he appointed! At the end of this discussion, he told me that I might be able to convince him, but there were others who had to be convinced, too.

(Mohammadi) So termination is a goal for the Europeans.

(Rowhani) Basically, when they came to Tehran and entered a discussion with us, perhaps their main goal was to push us towards termination one step at a time. But now, they have come to realize that this is not possible. Now, in our unofficial talks and sessions, they tell us: "Ok, now we know that you won't accept

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termination, but consider accepting a long-term suspension." I mean from their previous position on termination, they have now reached the position of long-term suspension. In our last talks with the three European ministers in Geneva, they said that they didn't understand why we were rushing so much. They said the matter was not whether we should keep the enrichment program or not, but that they didn't understand the reason for our rush. You see, once they said that they didn't understand why we wanted nuclear fuel and what we needed a power plant for. But now, in the recent Geneva talks, they clearly say: "We accept your point, but don't rush."

(Mohammadi) What did they say they accepted?

(Rowhani) They said they accepted that we needed power plants while they knew that we had other energy resources such as gas and oil. And then they asserted that they would give us power plants with the guarantee that they would provide the necessary fuel. I want to say that their tone has changed.

(Mohammadi) What did you answer?

(Rowhani) I said, as a guarantee, we needed to be able to produce a part of our necessary fuel ourselves. They asked why we were rushing, since we had no power plants yet. What I mean is that the Europeans' tone of voice has changed, and this matter itself shows that the confidence-building process is in progress. Of course, creation of complete trust is difficult and will take more time. If you wanted to trust someone, even if it were a friend, you wouldn't do it so easily, especially when it is someone with whom you have a history of enmity. First you would want to test them, and so would they want to test you.

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