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OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR

We Do Not Have a Nuclear Weapons Program

By JAVAD ZARIF*

THE controversy over Iran's peaceful nuclear program has obscured one point in particular: There need not be a crisis. A solution to the situation is possible and eminently within reach.

Lost amid the rhetoric is this: Iran has a strong interest in enhancing the integrity and authority of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. It has been in the forefront of efforts to ensure the treaty's universality. Iran's reliance on the nonproliferation regime is based on legal commitments, sober strategic calculations and spiritual and ideological doctrine. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the leader of the Islamic Republic, has issued a decree against the development, production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons.

Let me be very clear. Iran defines its national security in the framework of regional and international cooperation and considers regional stability indispensable for its development. We are party to all international agreements on the control of weapons of mass destruction. We want regional stability. We have never initiated the use of force or resorted to the threat of force against a fellow member of the United Nations. Although chemical weapons have been used on us, we have never used them in retaliation — as United Nations reports have made clear. We have not invaded another country in 250 years.

Since October 2003, Iran has accepted a robust inspection regimen by the United Nations. We have allowed more than 1,700 person-days of inspections and adopted measures to address past reporting failures. Most of the outstanding issues in connection with uranium conversion activities, laser enrichment, fuel fabrication and the heavy water research reactor program have been resolved.

Even the presence of highly enriched uranium contamination — an issue that some say proves the existence of an illicit weapons program — has been explained satisfactorily. Don't take it from me. According to the International Atomic Energy Agency, its findings tend "to support Iran's statement about the foreign origin of most of the observed H.E.U. contamination."

It's worth noting, too, that Iran has gone beyond its international obligations and allowed the atomic agency to repeatedly visit military sites — and to allow inspectors to take environmental samples. The agency did not observe any

unusual activities; the samples did not indicate the presence of nuclear material at those locations.

Most important, the agency has concluded time and again that there is no evidence of an Iranian nuclear weapons program.

In November 2003, for example, the agency confirmed that "to date, there is no evidence that the previously undeclared nuclear material and activities ... were related to a nuclear weapons program." A year later, and last September, it concluded again that "all the declared nuclear material in Iran has been accounted for, and therefore such material is not diverted to prohibited activities."

Another point that has been obscured: Iran is ready for negotiations. Since October 2003, Iran has done its utmost to sustain and even resuscitate negotiations with Britain, France and Germany, the three European countries responsible for negotiating with us. Since August 2004, Iran has made eight far-reaching proposals.

What's more, Iran throughout this period adopted extensive and costly confidence-building measures, including a voluntary suspension of its rightful enrichment activities for two years, to ensure the success of negotiations.

Over the course of negotiations, Iran volunteered to do the following within a balanced package:

- Present the new atomic agency protocol on intrusive inspections to the Iranian Parliament for ratification, and to continue to put its provisions in place pending ratification;
- Permit the continuous on-site presence of atomic agency inspectors at the conversion and enrichment facilities;
- Introduce legislation to permanently ban the development, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons;
- Cooperate on export controls to prevent unauthorized access to nuclear material;
- Refrain from reprocessing or producing plutonium;
- Limit the enrichment of nuclear materials so that they are suitable for energy production but not for weaponry;
- Immediately convert all enriched uranium to fuel rods, thereby precluding the possibility of further enrichment;
- Limit the enrichment program to meet the contingency fuel requirements of Iran's power reactors and future light water reactors;

- Begin putting in place the least contentious aspects of the enrichment program — like research and development — in order to assure the world of our intentions;
- Accept foreign partners, both public and private, in our uranium enrichment program.

Iran has recently suggested the establishment of regional consortiums on fuel cycle development that would be jointly owned and operated by countries possessing the technology and placed under atomic agency safeguards.

Other governments, most notably the Russian Federation, have offered thoughtful possibilities for a deal. Iran has declared its eagerness to find a negotiated solution — one that would protect its rights while ensuring that its nuclear program would remain exclusively peaceful.

Pressure and threats do not resolve problems. Finding solutions requires political will and a readiness to engage in serious negotiations. Iran is ready. We hope the rest of the world will join us.

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