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## **Disputes Flare Up In Iran Over A Nuclear Deal**

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The latest round of Iran's nuclear negotiations with the 5+1 group (the US, UK, France, China, Russia and Germany) failed to reach a final agreement by its second deadline on November 24, 2014. Consequently, the two sides agreed to extend the negotiations for seven more months until July 1, 2015. As the third deadline is now looming, the confrontation between President Hassan Rouhani and the opposition factions in Iran is heating up. Rouhani wants to yield to the West's demands on the nuclear issue in return for support to protect his shaky government. At the same time, the opposition factions in Iran want to prevent dismantling of Iran's nuclear program under the pressure of sanctions. They favor to protect Iran's right to maintain its existing nuclear program and to expand it for peaceful purposes.

The West's basic strategy is to negotiate a nuclear deal to reduce Iran's nuclear program gradually to a trivial level in return for lifting some of the sanctions and releasing some of about \$100 billion Iranian frozen assets. This strategy wants to save face for the clerics who intends to accept the West's demands. However the opposition factions in Iran disagree on the concessions Rouhani is making to please the West. They prefer to live with the sanctions and use their influence in the parliament to block Rouhani's concessions. Given that Iran has invested about forty billion dollars in its nuclear installations, reducing them to a trivial symbolic level will wipe out its investment and block its progress in such an important advanced technology.

The sudden oil glut triggered by the Saudis' discount oil sale to the West has caused the collapse of oil prices in the past few months and has cut Iran's oil revenues. That is forcing Rouhani's government to implement the neoliberal economic reforms recommended by the International Monetary Fund and cut welfare subsidies to the populace poor.

On January 4, 2015, Rouhani gave a speech in an economic conference in Tehran, in which he indirectly opposed the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's call for forming a “resistance economy,” to resist the West's economic sanctions against Iran. Rouhani said “the country's economy does not progress under [government] monopoly ... and must be opened to [foreign] competition.”.... “Today, we are encountered with new phenomenon of declining oil prices and we have to pass that.” Rouhani further said that the Constitution foresees a referendum on important issues facing the country. “For important economic, social, political and cultural issues, we should enforce this article of our constitution by putting them to public referendum rather than parliamentary vote”. [1] That meant Rouhani had in mind to put the nuclear issue to referendum and bypass the parliament. While Rouhani's mentioning of a referendum was well received in the West, it was immediately challenged by the domestic press as it was perceived to be a Western conspiracy against Iran's national interests. Since Rouhani has held the nuclear negotiations in secret, his mentioning of referendum was immediately denounced by some members of the parliament. There are articles 59 and 177 of the constitution that let an issue be put to referendum. Article 59 requires approval by two-third of parliament votes and article 177 needs approval of the Supreme Leader.

As it appears, the West's “fifth column” is at work in Iran to impose an unwanted nuclear deal on the Iranian people. Assuming Rouhani reaches a deal with the West by the third deadline, he will have tough time to sell it to the Iranian nationalists, members of the parliament, and the Revolutionary Guards who support Iran's nuclear right and are not willing to dismantle Iran's nuclear installations. Rouhani foresees such an outcome and that was why he brought the word referendum to the fore in his speech.

Two days after Rohani's speech, the Foreign Minister Mohammad-Javad Zarif was called upon to the Majles on January 6, 2015, to answer questions regarding the nuclear negotiations. Iran's parliament members were mostly concerned about the secrecy of the negotiations and the Iranian negotiators' concessions to Washington's excessive demands. Javad Karimi-Ghodosi, a member of National Security and Foreign Policy of the parliament, spoke on behalf of 100 parliament's members. [2] Karimi-Ghodosi lashed out on the Foreign Minister for handling of the nuclear negotiations. He questioned Zarif why he had not formally informed the nation regarding the concessions made in the negotiations. He asked him “Why did you concede on all crucial issues in the first round of negotiations in Geneva and why did you hold bilateral talks with the United States, despite instructions not to do so. Why do you prevent the media coverage of the negotiations?” He also asked whether after having lived in the US for about

forty years Zarif was a pro-west person. Also, referring to Rohani's speech, he said "in my opinion requesting a referendum is what the Americans have asked for." Karimi-Ghodosi said the purpose of the two key words win-win and moderation is to omit the power of peoples who create esteem for standing against compromise with the west. Previously, Rouhani had said his strategy of positive-sum would result in win – win situation for both sides, but so far it has resulted in a zero-sum that is a loss for Iran and a win for the West because of the coercive diplomacy pursued by the United States that has put Iran under heavy pressures. Karimi-Ghodosi mentioned the results of several polls concerning the nuclear issue, according to one of the poll, 90.7 % of Iranians had said use of nuclear energy, including all of its features and red lines is Iran's definite right. At the end Karimi-Ghodosi said he was not convinced with Zarif's answers to the questions asked but agreed more time should be given for the negotiations to proceed.

#### The Nuclear Negotiations is Reminiscent of Oil Nationalization disputes in Iran

The nuclear negotiations remind Iranians of the oil nationalization situation in early 1950s. For decades, under the British owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), Iran was not getting much benefit from its oil wealth. After several years of secret negotiations with the AIOC, on July 17, 1949, AIOC initiated a proposal called the Supplemental Agreement to please Iran. The proposal was under scrutiny when on June 26, 1950 the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi appointed Lieutenant General Ali Razmara as prime minister. Razmara premiership had been supported by the US and British ambassadors in Tehran. [3] AIOC negotiated the Supplemental Agreement with Razmara's Government and offered increasing royalties and profit sharing for Iran. However, the proposed offer did not please Iran as it was far less favorable as compared to other contracts that had been signed between the Standard Oil of New Jersey and the Venezuelan government; and also between the Arabian-American Oil Company and the Saudi Arabian government. [4]

Razmara had pledged to work for approval of the oil agreement. He tried to push the controversial proposal through the Majles but was not successful. His relations with the British came to focus, when he began to tackle the oil issue. Speaking in a private session in the Majles on March 4, 1951, he reiterated his opposition to oil nationalization. He opposed nationalization on the ground that it was not good for the country. [5] Mohammad Mosaddegh who was at the time the head of oil committee of the Majles rejected the AIOC proposal and demanded the entire oil industry to be nationalized. Three days later when Razmara arrived to attend a

memorial at the Shah's Mosque in Tehran on March 7, 1951, he was tragically gunned down by an assassin bullets. [6]

Rouhani's compromises with the West on the nuclear negotiations are somewhat reminiscent to Razmara's favoring the British 1951. Rouhani wants to push the controversial nuclear agreement through the parliament. But he knows he will face opposition at the Majles, so he wants now to test the water for conducting a referendum.

At present, the international effort for controlling of nuclear weapons is not on a reasonable footing. The Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is under the influence of powerful nuclear states and the treaty is not enforced uniformly to eliminate the existing nuclear weapons. The powerful nations themselves have huge stockpiles of nuclear weapons and the International Atomic Energy Agency has no enforceable power to compel them to get rid of their own nuclear weapons development programs. Especially, the US double standard treatment of certain countries in Iran's vicinity that already possess nuclear weapons is an inconsistent and illogical nuclear proliferation policy.

As other NPT member countries are enriching uranium at industrial scale why not Iran benefit from the same technology? Forcing an unwarranted nuclear deal is not acceptable to many Iranians. There are at least a dozen countries that have nuclear capability but possess no nuclear bombs, included are Canada and Brazil that are closer to the United States than Iran. Why should Iran be treated differently?

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[1] ISNA News code 9310140717, January 4, 2015, <http://www.isna.ir> .

[2] The Iranian Parliament news website, <http://www.icana.ir/Fa/News/269837>

[3] Fakhredin Azimi, Iran: the Crisis of Democracy, Tauris 1969, pp. 227 -239

[4] Dean Acheson, Present at the Creation, Norton, 1969, p. 503.

[5] Azimi p. 234.

[6] Ervand Abrahamian, Iran between Two Revolutions, Princeton University Press, 1982, pp. 263-66.

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