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## **Oil history permeates Iran nuclear deal**

By Akbar E Torbat

Iran has had two major disputes with the West that have involved the scrutiny of international legal organizations: oil nationalization in early 1950s and the nuclear program controversy over the past two decades. In both cases, Iran was put under economic sanctions while pursuing its national interests.

### **The oil case**

In 1951, prime minister Mohammad Mosaddegh nationalized Iran's oil to end the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's monopoly in Iran. To support oil nationalization, Mosaddegh formed a coalition of political groups under the name of National Front (Jebh-e Melli). The British government complained against nationalization on behalf of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, bringing Iran's case to the International Court of Justice at The Hague and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Despite the sanctions imposed on Iran, Mosaddegh stayed firm against the British to defend Iran's right to nationalize its oil. In June 1952, Mosaddegh succeeded in winning a ruling from the court in favor of Iran.

Mosaddegh relied mainly on educated and intellectual Iranians to challenge the British oil monopoly in Iran. However, he was betrayed by a top cleric at the time, Ayatollah Abul-Qassem Kashani, who had initially allied with him. Kashani mobilized the mobs, mullahs, and royalists to provide support for a coup which brought Mosaddegh down. [1] The US joined Britain in a bloody military coup in August 1953 that overthrew Mosaddegh.

After the coup, Mosaddegh's National Front went underground. Its leaders, including the former prime minister himself, were imprisoned and some were later executed. In 1954, a consortium of Western oil companies was formed to control Iran's oil, which effectively reversed nationalization.

After the 1979 revolution, some members of the National Front participated in the newly established Islamic government but they were later purged by the clerics.

Today the Islamic regime tries to undermine Mosaddegh's achievements. In 2013, a book written by Ervand Abrahamian, a professor of history at City University of New York, was published which chronicled how the 1953 Anglo-American coup brought down Mosaddegh. The book was translated to Farsi by Nasser Zarafshan, an Iranian lawyer and human rights defender, but the clerics prevented its distribution. [2]

### **The nukes**

Iran's nuclear program has now created a situation similar to the oil nationalization in early 1950s. Iran has to defend its nuclear rights versus intervention from another major power.

Since 1995, the United States has accused Iran of pursuing the manufacture of nuclear weapons. The US accusation received attention when in August 2002 a member of the political arm of Mojahedin-e-Khalq revealed Iran had a secret nuclear program, which included construction of a uranium enrichment facility in Natanz and a heavy water plant in Arak.

In 2003, Iran officially confirmed that it had constructed such facilities. While these were not illegal under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, their construction triggered Iran's nuclear dispute with the West, a confrontation that lingers to this day and is under the scrutiny of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the UN Security Council.

In early 2000s, the clerics were afraid that the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq that toppled Taliban and the Ba'athist regimes would be extended to defeat their regime in Iran. Therefore, in May 2003, they offered a proposal to cooperate with the US and protect American interests in the region. In return, the clerics wanted the US to end sanctions and hostilities against them.

Their proposal however was rejected by the hawkish vice president Dick Cheney. [3] Meanwhile, Iran negotiated the nuclear issue, with Britain, France, and Germany (the "EU3") representing the West. Hassan Rouhani, now Iranian president and then Iran's head of nuclear negotiations team, agreed to an EU3 proposal to suspended uranium enrichment.

On November 15, 2004, Rouhani met with the foreign ministers of the EU3 at Sadabad Palace in Tehran and signed an agreement to suspend all Iran's nuclear enrichment activities. [4] The agreement was an outright suspension of Iran's nuclear activities and opening of Iran's military installations to IAEA inspectors. In 2005 while running for president, Mahmud Ahmadinejad criticized Hassan Rouhani for yielding to EU3 demands and to sign such an agreement which ignored Iran's rights to nuclear technology. He promised to take a tough stance against the West to defend Iran's rights and preserve its nuclear program if he became president. Consequently, after about two years of suspension, he ordered restarting enrichment in January 2006 after he took office.

On June 1, 2006, US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice offered a US face-to-face negotiation with Iran. [5] Eventually, on October 1, 2009, after 30 years, William J Burns, undersecretary of state, had a face-to-face talk with Iranian officials in a meeting of the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany (known as the "P5+1") in Geneva. This time Iran was in a radical mood and stayed firm despite US-led sanctions against it. Iran no longer wanted to suspend enrichment. The main issue instead was the stockpile of low enriched uranium that could provide fissile materials suitable to make nuclear bombs.

The six powers plan for Iran was to ship its stockpile of enriched uranium abroad in exchange for conversion to nuclear fuel that Iran needed for its reactors. Iran was concerned that the exchange was not certain because US could prevent return of the nuclear fuel to Iran. As a result the exchange deal was not agreed.

Subsequently the P5+1 group and Iran had several other meetings in Geneva, Istanbul, Baghdad, Moscow, and Almaty with no progress. The red line for Iran was "no suspension of nuclear enrichment". In the meantime, Iran became victim of a covert war that led to sabotage of its nuclear facilities and assassination of its nuclear scientists. [6]

Until 2012, Iran had resisted the West's pressures to end its uranium enrichment. When Ahmadinejad became a lame

duck president in the last year of his second term, the clerics bypassed him and the parliament and tried to secretly negotiate with the US. In 2013, the Western media outlets, especially the Persian BBC and Voice of America campaigned to bring back to the presidency the pro-West clerics Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani or Mohammad Khatami, but internal politics within the regime meant that did not happen. Instead, the clerics selected Hassan Rouhani, who the two ex-presidents found a favorable candidate. After 10 years, Rouhani was back on the international stage as Iran's new cleric president.

By electing Rouhani, the clerics made a concession to the West that was intended to save their theocratic rule in Iran. On November 23, 2013, the Islamic government signed a temporary agreement to cut back Iran's nuclear enrichment effective January 20, 2014. [7] Even though the official details of the agreement have not been released, based on the available information Iran is under pressure to change its enrichment facilities from an industrial scale to merely research laboratory and limited fuel production facilities for its existing reactors. This is despite the fact that Iran's nuclear activities have been in compliance with IAEA's guidelines. If finalized, the agreement will wipe out Iran's estimated US\$40 billion investment in its nuclear program.

The July 20 deadline for a final agreement on Iran's nuclear program is on countdown. It remains to be seen what the final agreement will be. Since the Iranian parliament has been kept in the dark, there is little chance that it may disapprove of the clerics' hasty compromise with the West.

**Notes:**

1. Abrahamian Ervand, *The Coup: 1953, the CIA, and the Roots of Modern US-Iranian Relations*, p192.
2. [Book Censorship Under Islamic Regime in Iran](#).
3. Patrikarakos, David, [Lighting Iran's Nuclear Fuse](#), 2012.
4. Naji, Kasra, *Ahmadinejad: The Secret History of Iran's Radical Leader*, 2008, p122
5. Patrikarakos, David 6. Torbat, Akbar, [The Confrontation with Iran: A Covert War](#), Information Clearinghouse, January 20, 2012.
7. Torbat, Akbar, [Iran yields to the West's demands](#), Asia Times Online, December 6, 2013.

**Akbar E Torbat** ([atorbat@calstatela.edu](mailto:atorbat@calstatela.edu)) teaches

*economics at California State University, Los Angeles. He received his PhD in political economy from the University of Texas at Dallas.*

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