

Iranian Media Reactions to the Nuclear Impasse

Aug 15, 2005



Brief Analysis

Iran's hardline establishment often declares that all Iranian citizens are united in their determination to see Iran exercise its "right" to nuclear power and "self-sufficiency" -- that is, operation of the complete fuel cycle. But are all Iranians really so enthused by the national nuclear program and heedless of international repercussions? What follows is a collection of Iranian reactions to the recent nuclear impasse.

Conservative or Hardline Newspaper Editorials.

On August 10, the editors of Resalat wrote that Iran has a "legitimate right to uranium enrichment and a complete nuclear fuel cycle." The European Union's (EU) "political weakness" is demonstrated by the fact that the United States bullies it to adopt "unreasonable demands." The editorial continues, "Such conduct indicates that America's political spitefulness and its dual behavior concerning the Iranian nuclear case is the main problem, and that the issue cannot be resolved while these contradictions and dual behaviors continue."

Jomhuri-ye Islami editorialized on August 8 that accepting the European package would be an "eternal shame and disgrace." The editorial went on to argue that neither Europeans nor Americans can be trusted as long as they refuse to accept Iran's "lawful right to nuclear technology." Westerners hate a self-sufficient Iran and wish to "suppress Islam." "They are not to be trusted," the editorial continues, "because they will never accept seeing Iran gaining access to nuclear technology; and in fact, they do not want to see Iran becoming self-sufficient in any sphere of activity. What they want is for Iran to be an underdeveloped and dependent nation, with no option but to submit and give in to foreign domination."

An August 4 editorial in Ya Lesarat ol-Hoseyn accused the Europeans of delaying their promised concessions package until new president Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad took power in order to blame Iran's rejection on his supposedly extremist stance. "[B]y suggesting illusive classifications such as hardliner and moderate, or flexible and inflexible, they want to somehow turn the nuclear debate into an internal issue," the editorial argued. "The few dastardly betrayers of homeland who . . . speak of the need to submit to the pressures of the West . . . are just like those traitors in the period of nationalizing the oil industry."

The Tehran Kayhan's radical firebrand editor Hoseyn Shari'atmadari wrote on August 7, "Contrary to what is being remembered as absolute and accepted reality, the Islamic Republic of Iran is not a member of the NPT [Non-Proliferation Treaty] and the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] cannot and is not allowed to inspect and express opinion about the nuclear facilities of our country with reference to the NPT. . . . But what is expected from the honorable president is to give the rude Europeans his firm answer, so that they will never forget that they are dealing with a Muslim and devoted nation, not the princes of Pahlavi!"

Moderate Newspaper Editorials

E'temaad's editors argued on August 10, "This position of Europe, which is also supported by the United States, is undoubtedly regarded as interference in the internal affairs of Iran as an independent political unit in the world, and certainly the leaders of the country will not submit to it under any condition. The statements of the Iranian officials

in recent days clearly reveal that Iran is interested in continuing negotiations with Europe, provided Europe takes a step forward without any preconditions and recognizes Iran's right to enrichment."

On August 7, Iran News wrote, "The [EU] incentives look positive, but the point is that the Europeans are bent on bringing Iran's uranium conversion and enrichment processes to a halt.... One could be optimistic about the Europeans' recognition of Iran's right to peaceful nuclear technology, but the question is why they have pushed the Islamic republic to regain its sovereign rights through nondiplomatic means up to now.... The proposals look alluring, but they are deceitful."

Liberal or Reformist Newspaper Editorials

Tehran Sharq wrote August 9 that a "critical day" confronts Iran, and the nation now needs "collective wisdom" and democratic principles if it is to stand up against a superpower for the sake of national security. "Today, Iranian diplomacy needs democracy more than ever before. Even the establishment's leading critics will show support for the system while national security is at risk, providing that the collective wisdom of the people's true representatives is employed in the decision-making. . . . Stabilizing the role of collective wisdom in the nuclear talks, engaging in direct and outspoken dialogue with the entire nation on the issue and including all assets (including dissidents) in the decision-making process will play as great a role as the efforts that are made to attract the trust of the Europeans, or in the final reckoning, the Americans."

The August 8 Aftab-e Yazd published a compilation of readers' comments. One reader stated that Assembly of Experts head Ayatollah Ali Meshkini ought to explain what he means when he says that the "nation" has declared its desire for a renewal of nuclear activities. How did he go about discerning the views of the nation, the reader asked. In a similar compilation on August 6, a reader found a contradiction between the government's official line that nuclear power is sought for peaceful, scientific purposes and Muhammad Javad Larijani's statements that Iran has a right to nuclear deterrence. What, the reader asked, is the real nuclear policy?

Blogs

An estimated 75,000 of Iran's 4 million Internet users publish blogs. Many of these writers avoid the nuclear issue altogether, focusing instead on cultural and economic topics. However, one well-known political blogger based in Tehran who goes by the name of "Mr. Behi" at <http://mrbehi.blogs.com>, wrote: "[W]hy not [use] the options provided by Europe to both get nuclear technology and get rid of all this clashes [sic] that might get us into another period of sanctions? Iran is insisting that it want to be independent in the cycle but in what price?"

Hossein Derakhshan, whose blog at <http://hoder.com> is one of the most widely read and respected by Iranians, wrote an article on October 21, 2004, explaining why so many Iranians appeared to back Iran's nuclear stance: "[I]f people were aware of how easily this technology, if not curbed by the UN, could be used by the regime to produce nuclear weapons, and how such power could weaken the already humble foundations of democracy in Iran by giving more military power to the most radical and fundamentalist parts of the regime, they'd hardly be backing it as they do now -- if we accept that they really are." Derakhshan then posted a poll asking respondents whether they felt that Iran should possess nuclear weapons. Of the 831 who replied, 46 percent said Iran should possess nuclear weapons only if it is under the control of a democratic government, while 33 percent rejected nuclear weapons outright.

Surveys

A more scientific survey of Iranian attitudes was conducted by phone between May 26 and June 4 by the Tarrance Group for the Iran Institute for Democracy. When given a choice between nuclear technology and modernizing their petroleum infrastructure, 53 percent chose the first option. However, 60 percent agreed with the international community's worry of terrorists obtaining weapons of mass destruction. And a plurality of 42 percent said that the Islamic Republic's access to nuclear weapons would add to their anxiety and discomfort; only 37 percent said it

would not. Among those aged sixteen to twenty-four, 50 percent declared their anxiety at the thought.

In short, the Iranian people's feelings about a national "right" to nuclear technology and a complete fuel cycle are more nuanced than the hardliners in Tehran claim them to be.

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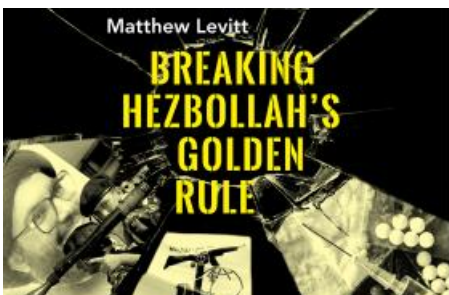
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