

Iran's new President proposes immediate 'time-bound' talks on nuclear issues

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From the podium of the United Nations General Assembly, Iran's new President, Hassan Rouhani, today foreswore the production of nuclear weapons, reasserted his country's right to peaceful nuclear enrichment and proposed immediate "time-bound" talks to resolve the issue.

"I declare here, openly and unambiguously, that, notwithstanding the positions of others, this has been, and will always be, the objective of the Islamic Republic of Iran," he told the General Assembly on the first day of its General Debate, speaking hours after United States President Barack Obama told the same gathering that he was directing US Secretary of State John Kerry to pursue a diplomatic course with Iran on the matter.

"I listened carefully to the statement made by President Obama today at the General Assembly. Commensurate with the political will of the leadership in the United States and hoping that they will refrain from following the short-sighted interest of warmongering pressure groups, we can arrive at a framework to manage our differences," Mr. Rouhani said.

Iran's nuclear programme has been an international concern ever since the UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported in 2003 that it had committed numerous breaches of its Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) safeguards agreement.

These covered the entire spectrum of the nuclear fuel cycle including experiments in enriching uranium and separating plutonium - potential ingredients for nuclear weapons. Throughout, Iran has insisted that its programme is solely geared to the

peaceful production of energy.

“Nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction have no place in Iran's security and defence doctrine, and contradict our fundamental religious and ethical convictions,” Mr. Rouhani said. “Our national interests make it imperative that we remove any and all reasonable concerns about Iran's peaceful nuclear programme.”

But he said his country's right to enrichment inside Iran and enjoyment of other related nuclear rights must be accepted and respected, stressing that its nuclear technology, including enrichment, has already reached industrial scale.

“In this context, the Islamic Republic of Iran, insisting on the implementation of its rights and the imperative of international respect and cooperation in this exercise, is prepared to engage immediately in time-bound and result-oriented talks to build mutual confidence and removal of mutual uncertainties with full transparency,” he said, criticizing those who speak of a military option being on the table.

He stressed that his own recent election represents “a clear, living example of the wise choice of hope, rationality and moderation” by the Iranian people, condemned coercive economic and military policies and practices geared to the preservation of old superiorities, and dismissed the imaginary so-called “Iranian threat.”

“Iran poses absolutely no threat to the world or the region. In fact, in ideals as well as in actual practice, my country has been a harbinger of just peace and comprehensive security,” he said, adding that Iran seeks constructive engagement with other countries based on mutual respect and common interest, and within the same framework does not seek to increase tensions with the United States.

Turning to issues in the Middle East, Mr. Rouhani deplored the “brutal repression” of the

Palestinian people, calling it structural violence. “Palestine is under occupation; the basic rights of the Palestinians are tragically violated, and they are deprived of the right of return and access to their homes, birthplace and homeland,” he said. “Apartheid as a concept can hardly describe the crimes and the institutionalized aggression against the innocent Palestinian people.”

On the “human tragedy” of Syria, he said there is no military solution, called for a quick end to the killing of the innocent, condemning any use of chemical weapons but welcome Syria's acceptance of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

He deplored terrorism and the killing of innocent people as “the ultimate inhumanity of extremism and violence... Terrorism is a violent scourge and knows no country or national borders. But, the violence and extreme actions such as the use of drones against innocent people in the name of combating terrorism should also be condemned,” he said, also condemning the “criminal assassination” of Iranian nuclear scientists.

Summing up his overall view, Mr. Rouhani concluded with a message of hope. “Notwithstanding all difficulties and challenges, I am deeply optimistic about the future,” he declared. “I have no doubt that the future will be bright with the entire world solidly rejecting violence and extremism.

“Prudent moderation will ensure a bright future for the world. My hope, aside from personal and national experience, emanates from the belief shared by all divine religions that a good and bright future awaits the world.”

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