

Iranian president calls for dialogue with the US

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Newly elected Iranian President Hassan Rouhani yesterday appealed for “constructive dialogue” in a bid to end US provocations, sanctions and threats over Iran’s nuclear program. Just last week, as he backed off from an immediate attack on Iran’s ally Syria, President Obama issued a new military threat against Tehran.

Writing in the *Washington Post*, Rouhani urged his international counterparts to “seize the opportunity presented by Iran’s recent election” and “respond genuinely to my government’s efforts to engage in constructive dialogue.” He continued: “The world had changed... Gone is the age of blood feuds. World leaders are expected to lead in turning threats into opportunities.”

Rouhani, who is due in New York for next week’s United Nations General Assembly meeting, reinforced his appeal in an interview broadcast yesterday on NBC News, describing a letter received from President Obama as “positive and constructive.” He countered Washington’s unsubstantiated claims that Iran was building a nuclear bomb, saying, “We have clearly stated that we are not in pursuit of nuclear weapons and will not be.”

Significantly, Rouhani told NBC News that his government had “full power” and “complete authority” to negotiate over the country’s nuclear program. This comment indicates that Rouhani has been given the green light to pursue such talks by Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has ultimate control over the country’s foreign and defence policies. Earlier this week, Khamenei hinted at approval for negotiations, declaring that “flexibility” was “sometimes a very good and necessary move.”

Rouhani’s comments are part of a diplomatic offensive aimed at ending US-led sanctions that have

crippled the Iranian economy and warding off a threatened US military attack. The new Iranian foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zafir, met with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon yesterday and hosted a luncheon on Wednesday for UN ambassadors, inviting the permanent members of the UN Security Council, including the US. In a further concession, Iran released 11 political prisoners on Wednesday.

Zafir sought to distance the new Iranian government from the Holocaust denials of former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, declaring in a Facebook exchange with US House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi that Iran had never denied the Nazi murder of Jews. “The man who was perceived to be denying it, Ahmadinejad, is now gone,” he said. Both Rouhani and Zarif tweeted greetings on the Jewish New Year earlier this month. The Iranian president will be accompanied in New York by Iran’s only Jewish parliamentarian.

President Obama suggested earlier this week that he would “test” the new Iranian president, putting the onus on Tehran to make concessions. “There is an opportunity here for diplomacy. I hope the Iranians take advantage of it,” he told the Telemundo network on Tuesday. White House officials have mooted the possibility in the media of a meeting between Obama and Rouhani on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly.

The US administration, however, has given no indication that it will make any significant concessions to Iran’s demands for an end to the economic blockade. The most recent international talks between Iran and the P5+1 group (the US, Britain, France, China, Russia and Germany) broke down in April after the US made no change to its demands that Iran halt its production of enriched uranium to the 20-percent level, shut down its Fordow enrichment plant, and ship its stockpile out of

the country. These “confidence building” steps were just a prelude to US insistence that Iran shut down its enrichment programs completely.

In his *Washington Post* comment, Rouhani indicated that he was not prepared to negotiate Iran’s right under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to peaceful nuclear programs, including uranium enrichment. “To us, mastering the atomic fuel cycle and generating nuclear power is as much about diversifying our resources as it is about who Iranians are as a nation, our demand for dignity and respect and our consequent place in the world.”

Obama will undoubtedly attempt to exploit any talks with Tehran to obtain whatever concessions he can, while maintaining economic sanctions and the threat of a US military attack. At the top of the US agenda will be Syria. Having been compelled by overwhelming public opposition to step back for now from attacking Syria, Obama will be looking for Iranian assistance to undermine Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. While the US and its allies step up the arming and financing of reactionary anti-Assad militias, Washington will escalate its demand that Iran end its assistance to the Syrian government.

Rouhani won the June election with the backing of key figures from the so-called “reformist” faction of the Iranian regime—former presidents Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammed Khatemi. His efforts to open up talks with the US are in line with their advocacy of a rapprochement with Washington in order to secure foreign investment.

The entire Iranian political establishment, including Rouhani, is well aware of the duplicity of the US and its European allies. In the early 2000s, under President Khatami, Iran privately supported the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, only to face intense pressure from the Bush administration over its nuclear program.

Rouhani served as Iran’s top nuclear negotiator in talks with Britain, France and Germany and agreed to suspend uranium enrichment in return for European promises of a comprehensive package of economic and diplomatic measures. Tehran was bitterly disappointed by the European offer, after the US effectively vetoed any significant concessions.

The US had repeatedly demonstrated that it will tear up any agreement that cuts across its imperialist ambitions. Having backed the Iraqi regime of Saddam

Hussein in the 1980s in its war against Iran, Washington invaded Iraq in 1990– 91 and again in 2003, leading to the capture and execution of Hussein. The US also reached a rapprochement with Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi after he renounced his WMD programs in 2003, but then launched a war against Libya in 2011 that ended in Gaddafi’s murder by US-backed militias.

Whatever the outcome of the latest moves towards negotiations with Iran, US imperialism has not abandoned its plans for regime-change—either in Damascus or Tehran—which it regards as obstacles to its untrammelled domination of the Middle East.



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