

Iran Daily: Two major issues of contamination and P2 centrifuge remain for clarification by Iran, according to IAEA Chairman Mohamed ElBaradei. How will, or should, Iran present these for argument or evidence?

Dr. Salehi: Concerning P2, the IAEA inspectors in Iran have said that all the information needed by the agency were supplied to them. Therefore regarding the P2 and for all practical purposes, we think the issue is closed because there is no other question that could have been raised by the agency which has not been answered.

We think the P2 issue, at least from our perspective, is over. Had it been otherwise, they (IAEA) would have to pose other questions, which we have not received.

About contamination, we have good news. The information supplied earlier by Iran, and as time passes and results of the sampling show, fortunately has been approved.

For example the 54% contamination which was a question raised previously has now been cleared and there remains only the 36% contamination which we are now in the process of resolving.

Previously they (inspectors) raised the question as to why the 36% contamination was found only in one room. We insisted they take more samples from other places, and when they did that they found out that the contamination had been found in other places.

The only question that remains now is the 36% which is crucial. In other words, you see the 36% particles in few places in a bigger concentration than this same contamination on the imported parts of centrifuges that we imported from outside. There you see less of a concentration while in those rooms that previously they had sampled; they see more of a concentration of the 36%.

So we told them the centrifuge parts which we imported from abroad number in the thousands and have come from different parts of a facility somewhere in the world and were supplied to us through an intermediary. When it comes from different parts of an installation, it means different parts or equipments may have different contaminations.

So they may have sampled the parts of imported

36% Contamination Is a Crucial Issue

Nuclear Weapons Do Not Bring Security, Credibility



Iran's former representative to the IAEA, Dr. Ali A. Salehi (l) in talks with Iran Daily executive editor, Amin Saboohi. (Photo by Mehdi Khoshnevis)

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machines that were not as much contaminated with the 36, and we are insisting that they should take further samples from other parts of the imported machines, so that hopefully they will see the uniformity of the 36% contamination all across starting from the room that they started with in Kala Electric and on the imported centrifuge parts that may have come from different parts of the installation of a previously enrichment installation somewhere in the world.

What is the quality of relations between us and the IAEA at this point in time?

I think there is a mutual confidence and this is important. It is true that the agency on and off has been complaining about the piecemeal-wise supplying of information. But for the past few months, specifically after we delivered on October 21 a comprehensive report of our activities to the agency, we have been in very close contact with the agency in supplying information they may need and in the fastest possible manner.

For example, the 1,033 pages of declaration we submitted to the agency just one or two weeks ago, that's a lot of work. We did that within the past few months, and I can say there is mutual confidence between the agency and Iran.

Of course during the process there may be some complains from either side, but that is usual and normal. But on the whole, I would say the cooperation is appreciated to both sides and the relationship close and appreciated by both sides.

When do you anticipate a permanent solution to this whole nuclear dispute?

This is both an easy and a difficult question. It is easy from the perspective of legal and technical points. But difficult from the political perspective.

From the technical and the legal point, I'm very hopeful that in one or two meetings of the board of governors, the issue will be closed. In other words, there will not be any major issue or further questions that would be outstanding or not answered by Iran.

We do not expect any further questions because all the possible questions have already been asked by the agency.

At least from what I see, and from what I know and from the information that has been supplied to the agency, I think we are at least en-route to see that this whole file is closed.

But with respect to the political side, it is difficult to say. I don't think we will witness in the very near future that this issue get more eased up. I think it will probably keep its momentum to some extent. But if the issue is legally and technically closed, it will certainly have an impact on the political part. But I think the political part will continue until some day in the future there is a political détente between Iran and its adversaries.

How much of nuclear power do you think is about politics?

Well, for Iran, I would say the crux of the matter is politics, because our adversary is looking for all kinds of excuses and allegations to put pressure on Iran. These allegations are internationally sensitive and one which you could really turn on or turn off based on the dynamics of the political situation in the world.

We are in a region which is full of problems. Iraq on one side, the Palestinian-Israeli issue on the other, Afghanistan and the issue of terrorism. Iran is in the middle, and I think Iran is the golden key to the resolution of all these issues.

The adversaries would like to see Iran surrender, or at least come to total submission in one way or another to their wishes. I think the most valuable thing that Iran has gained after the revolution is not to be the lackey of any power in the world.

Iran is an independent country. It will not make political decisions based on submission, but in line with its national sovereignty and national interest. I think the adversaries are realizing the fact that there is no other way but to coordinate themselves with Iran.

I see that probably in the future they will come to their senses and take more pragmatic decisions concerning their relationship with Iran.

Consistency and transparency is the name of the game. Do you believe we have been steadfast and straightforward in our dealings?

If for a while I were to forget myself in the position I

If we are threatened we too have the right to defend ourselves with whatever means available

am, and forget myself as an Iranian and look at the problem from outside, I would say that we could have taken more pragmatic, logical and opportune steps prior to the blowing up of all this issue.

I think we missed some opportunities. We made the right decisions but did not make them at the right time and that had an impact on this whole issue, and of course put us for some time, in an awkward situation. Fortunately the country very quickly made up for this shortcoming and was able to get itself on the right path.

You will agree that our country has got some very real and serious concerns about our stability and security and the threats from the US and Israel. Israeli politicians and generals have given themselves the liberty to say that they "reserve the right" to attack Iran's nuclear research centers. Why hasn't the international community taken these foreign threats and our concerns seriously? Or is it that we have not done the job properly?

I think this is an important issue about our sovereignty, national interest, the region we live in and the threats, specifically from countries like Israel.

Of course Israel is an extension of the US; I don't see Israel as an entity by itself. It is an extension; an arm of the US in the Middle East.

But, more realistically, if we are threatened we too have the right to defend ourselves with whatever means available. So I personally do not take that threat as serious as it may appear. They know what the reaction would be. I mean they have information about how strong the reprisal and reaction of Iran could be to the threat you mention.

What do you think Iran will do, for instance, if Israel attacks the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant now under construction?

From what I know, there are a number of means available for Iran. Should Iran decide to utilize those means, Israel would be in a very terrible predicament if it ever tries to carry out its threat. What I can say for sure is that the entire region will be in a very difficult situation.

Going back to the threats, let me add that Iran was the first country in 1974 that raised the issue in the United Nations calling for a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons. We still insist on that position.

The understanding we had with the three European countries (France, Germany, UK), one of the issues that were discussed and they understood the fact that they should pay more attention to it, is freeing the Middle East of weapons of mass destruction.

That includes Israel of course and that means putting pressure on Israel. So I think we are going to witness

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more international pressure on Israel. As you may have heard, Mr. ElBaradei has recently raised the issue of Israel's nuclear capability and has asked the international community to put pressure on Israel to submit itself to NPT or at least to inspections by the IAEA of its nuclear facilities.

When you see Egypt and other Arab countries that are raising the issue very strongly, when you see that America is being singled out for its double standards, in the sense that it is putting a lot of pressure on countries like Iran, Brazil... but is silent about Israel, then one sees that the US' double standard policies are now becoming clear to almost the entire international community. If it (US policy) was implicit before, now it is becoming explicit.

As time passes, we will see the pressure on Israel building up. This does not mean in the few years Israel will submit itself to this international will. The mere fact that the pressure is increasing, is a good indication.

I think it is in the interest of all countries in this region to have a region free of all weapons of mass destruction. One good reason to do so is that as we move on in time we see that knowledge and technology are becoming

more proliferated. With the advent of Internet access to knowledge is available to almost every single person who has access to Internet. Taking this into consideration, I think it would be very dangerous, with all this international effort in fighting terrorism, to see this knowledge and technology all of a sudden ending up with a group of terrorists who have no limits of using it to attain their goals.

I think Iran's policy is based on the fact that whatever international treaty that would support and enhance the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, will be supported and Iran will be the forerunner in accepting and promoting such treaties.

It is for that reason that Iran was among the first signatories of the CTBT, we were amongst the first signatories of the Chemical Weapons Convention, and we are a forerunner in the Biological Weapon Convention which has not yet come into effect.

With such treaties, if they become widespread and if all the countries in the region accede themselves and adhere to it, we will have a region which will be more safe.

We do not want to see treaties like the NPT come under any doubt, or cracks appear in these treaties despite the fact that we believe the NPT is discriminatory. Nevertheless despite these shortcomings, we believe it is still a very good treaty that we have to maintain its integrity and not let any member or country to harm it.

Have your views changed after you left office?

No. I have been consistent in my views. I was the first official in the country that raised the issue of the additional protocol. I faced a lot of criticism by members of news media and different political lobbies. As the issue progressed, others realized that it was wise to go towards the additional protocol because the entire international community was moving towards that goal.

Today we have over 90 countries that have signed the additional protocol and even the US has signed and ratified it. Although the protocol maintains some exceptionality for the five nuclear powers, but nevertheless they have the additional protocol also applicable to them.

With Iran acceding, I think we set an example and our

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accession has been a turning point for the treaty.

Now that Iran has acceded, the way is open for others to do likewise. I have said consistently that the additional protocol is for the good of my country, for the good of the international community, and therefore I am one of its promoters.

Do you have anything to say to those in and outside our country who strongly believe that nuclear weapons bring prestige?

I am not among those who believe that nuclear weapons bring prestige. I mean we have to assess the situation of a country. A country like Iran cannot have prestige by acquiring nuclear weapons. I think a country like Iran would raise more threats against it, not get security, by having nuclear weapons. We can not buy more security with nuclear weapons, only invite more threats against ourselves.

We have Russia to the north. Suppose we have a nuclear weapon, our nuclear weapon of course will not be as good as those developed by the Russians, nor will it be able to compete with the nuclear weapons of Israel and by extension of the US.

With our neighbors Pakistan and India we have no problems. So what is the purpose of a nuclear weapon? We have absolutely no problem with India or Pakistan. They are friendly countries. So there is no country surrounding us that could be an immediate or major threat. So I think the strategy of getting nuclear weapons for Iran is not a right strategy for the reasons I've mentioned above.

But nuclear technology is different. If a country has access to the cutting-edge nuclear technology, it can produce. Take Switzerland which has about six million people. Can one compare this country with the volume of knowledge and technology it has with another country that can hardly feed its people but boasts that it has a nuclear bomb?

It was surprising that major changes took place in our representative office in Vienna when we were involved in tough talks with the IAEA.

Usually when you are appointed to a foreign mission, it is for three years. I had already overstayed that period and was there for five years as I was asked by the president (Mohammad Khatami) to continue because of the sensitivity of the issue.

I am happy that now I do not have that responsibility, but this does not mean that I am not working as an adviser to the government. I am also advising our National Security Council.