

# Iran: The Ambassador Speaks

*Javad Zarif*

*In November 2004, the International Atomic Energy Agency alleged 'that Iran had failed in a number of instances over an extended period of time to meet its obligations under its Safeguards Agreement with respect to the reporting of nuclear material, its processing and its use, as well as the declaration of facilities where such material had been processed and stored.' Subsequently, there has been intense contact between the Agency and Iran. Now, the head of the Agency, Mohamed El Baradei, has issued a statement to the effect that 'Iran does not represent an "immediate" nuclear threat'. Mr El Baradei also said that he believed the Iranian authorities were 'willing to negotiate'. Here, the Iranian Ambassador to the United Nations, Javad Zarif, gives his account of recent developments.*

The controversy over Iran's peaceful nuclear programme has obscured one point in particular: there need not be a crisis. A solution to the situation is possible and eminently within reach.

Lost amid the rhetoric is this: Iran has a strong interest in enhancing the integrity and authority of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It has been in the forefront of efforts to ensure the Treaty's universality. Iran's reliance on the non-proliferation regime is based on legal commitments, sober strategic calculations and spiritual and ideological doctrine. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the leader of the Islamic Republic, has issued a decree against the development, production, stockpiling and the use of nuclear weapons.

Let me be very clear. Iran defines its national security in the framework of regional and international cooperation and considers regional stability indispensable for its development. We are party to all international agreements on the control of weapons of mass destruction. We want regional stability. We have never initiated the use of force or resorted to the threat of force against a fellow member of the United Nations. Although chemical weapons have been used on us, we have never used them in retaliation – as United Nations reports have made clear. We have not invaded another country in 250 years.

Since October 2003, Iran has accepted a robust inspection regimen by the United Nations. We have allowed more than 1,700 person-days of inspections and adopted measures to address past reporting failures. Most of the outstanding issues in connection with uranium conversion activities, laser enrichment, fuel fabrication and the heavy water research reactor programme have been resolved.

Even the presence of highly enriched uranium contamination – an issue that some say proves the existence of an illicit weapons programme – has been explained satisfactorily. Don't take it from me. According to the International Atomic Energy Agency, its

findings tend ‘to support Iran’s statement about the foreign origin of most of the observed highly enriched uranium contamination.’

It is worth noting, too, that Iran has gone beyond its international obligations and allowed the Atomic Agency to repeatedly visit military sites – and to allow inspectors to take environmental samples. The Agency did not observe any unusual activities; the samples did not indicate the presence of nuclear material at those locations.

Most important, the Agency has concluded time and again that there is no evidence of an Iranian nuclear weapons programme. In November 2003, for example, the agency confirmed that ‘to date, there is no evidence that the previously undeclared nuclear material and activities were related to a nuclear weapons programme.’ A year later, and last September, it concluded again that ‘all the declared nuclear material in Iran has been accounted for, and therefore such material is not diverted to prohibited activities.’

Another point has been obscured: Iran is ready for negotiations. Since October 2003, Iran has done its utmost to sustain and resuscitate negotiations with Britain, France and Germany, the three European countries responsible for negotiating with us. Since August 2004, Iran has made eight far-reaching proposals.

What’s more, Iran throughout this period adopted expensive and costly confidence-building measures, including a voluntary suspension of its rightful enrichment activities for two years, to ensure the success of the negotiations.

Over the course of negotiations, Iran volunteered to do the following within a balanced package:

- Present the new Atomic Agency protocol on intrusive inspections to the Iranian Parliament for ratification, and to continue to put in place pending ratification;
- Permit the continuous on-site presence of Atomic Agency inspectors at the conversion and enrichment facilities;
- Introduce legislation to permanently ban the development, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons;
- Cooperate on export controls to prevent unauthorised access to nuclear material;
- Refrain from reprocessing and producing plutonium;
- Limit the enrichment of nuclear materials so that they are suitable for energy production but not for weaponry;
- Immediately convert all enriched uranium into fuel rods, thereby precluding the possibility of further enrichment;
- Limit the enrichment programme to meet the contingency fuel requirements of Iran’s power reactors and future light water reactors;
- Begin putting in place the least contentious aspects of the enrichment program – like research and development – in order to assure the world of our intentions;
- Accept foreign partners, both public and private, in our uranium enrichment programme.

Iran has recently suggested the establishment of regional consortiums on fuel cycle development that would be jointly owned and operated by countries possessing the technology and placed under Atomic Agency safeguards.

Other governments, most notably the Russian Federation, have offered thoughtful possibilities for a deal. Iran has declared its eagerness to find a negotiated solution – one that would protect its rights while ensuring that its nuclear programme would remain exclusively peaceful.

Pressure and threats do not resolve problems. Finding solutions requires political will and a readiness to engage in serious negotiations. Iran is ready. We hope the rest of the world will join us.