
New Round of US-Iran Talks Crucial For Russia

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Iran's Defense Minister Mostafa Mohammad Najjar visited Moscow on 15-17 February to start implementation of Tehran's new foreign policy. Also in February German ex-Chancellor Gerhard Schröder arrived in Iran to discuss not only economic and energy issues but a general strategy of cooperation between Berlin, Brussels and Tehran. A delegation from Iran, headed by a vice president, visited Kabul occupied by NATO forces. Iranian Foreign Minister came to Baku to discuss cooperation between Tehran and Yerevan on a whole range of political and economic issues. Apart from this, Kazakhstan opened its consulate in northern Iran...

This foreign policy course aimed to break US-led strategic occupation of Iran and Tehran's intentions to stand up for its interests in the region have brought some progress already. Russia welcomes Iran's participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), says Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexei Borodavkin. The West keeps close eye on Tehran's ties with foreign countries and makes some notable remarks. The Obama administration has softened its anti-Iranian rhetoric, while NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer has even promised Iran a right to play its role in stabilization in Afghanistan.

Of course, this all can be nothing but an attempt to get Tehran involved in Afghan campaign in accordance with the Western scenario of permanent 'low intensity conflicts' between Iran and all its neighbors. However, Tehran will hardly accept the rules invented by the U.S...

On 3 February, addressing religious minorities of Iran, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad repeatedly announced that there was no such country in the world which could prevent Iran from implementation of its tasks. He also unveiled his country's plans to launch some ambitious military programs, including the construction of an unmanned aircraft. In view of this, Mostafa Najjar's visit to Moscow took on a special meaning. Judging from his speech after the negotiations, we may conclude that the minister discussed not only issues of military-technical cooperation but also the details of energy partnership (including Iran's participation in a 'gas OPEC' and construction of an atomic power plant in Bushehr). While in Moscow, Mr. Najjar said vast oil and gas resources Russia and Iran can boast give the two countries brilliant chances for cooperation. It sounds fair since Russia and Iran are taking the lead on the global gas market. "Thus our cooperation in gas industry may satisfy demands of both producers and consumers worldwide", Mr. Najjar believes. "That is why we consider a 'gas OPEC' an issue worth attention today, and we have already achieved some progress here", he added.

Iranian Deputy Oil Minister Djashnsaz reported that the National Iranian Oil Company and one of the world's leading energy companies, German E.ON, had intensified talks on joint production of liquefied natural gas and development of new gas fields. He also told journalists that on 19 February E.ON officials visited the 2d and the 3d units of a gas plant in the South Pars natural gas field and unveiled some details of future cooperation. First of all, E.ON aims to invest in the Iran LNG liquefied gas project and in some other Iranian gas fields. The South Pars natural gas field is one of the milestones of Russia-Iran energy cooperation, and a sign of a long-term energy alliance between Moscow and Tehran and with active participation of the EU. Turkey and Armenia may be join the project as transit countries.

Naturally, this leaves Washington very few chances to lobby its energy projects in the region aimed at using Azerbaijan and Georgia as the so-called 'Caucasus communication corridor'.

At first sight, US attempts to please Tehran seemed unexpected. Washington implies it could revise its missile plans in Eastern Europe if Moscow demonstrated a more 'constructive' stance on Iran's nuclear program. During his recent visit to Moscow, U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs William Burns said that if US cooperation with Russia and other partners diminished or even removed Iran's nuclear threat, Washington would be ready to revise its missile plans.

Moscow reacted promptly by saying it appreciated positive signals coming from US and expected a new round of productive bilateral anti-missile defense cooperation. After that we see eye-catching headlines in the Internet: "Russia-US missile talks depend on Iran", "A deeper dialog between Russia and US on missile issue may begin as soon as there is enough evidence of peaceful character of the Iranian nuclear program"... But do the journalists really believe that relations between Moscow and the "peace keeper" Obama could improve if the Americans with their 1 trillion Security Budget had no fears about Iran's missiles (their radius of destruction being not more than 2,000 kilometers)?

What was the aim of such methods? Do they really believe that Obama, unlike his predecessor, is ready for an open and constructive dialog or just invented those headlines to conceal their true expectations concerning Tehran?

Why the world turns a blind eye on the idea of a non-nuclear Middle East?

Why it is being ignored amid the current political situation in Israel, where radical factions are very likely to ascend to power (Israel's influential Yediot Aharonot newspaper already called Iran a major threat to the Jewish state in 2009), amid growing instability in Afghanistan and Pakistan and during the implementation of US secret program to sabotage Iranian nuclear program?

Is it possible that the statements made by US officials are aimed at cheating Moscow and Tehran (and some other countries)? Are they trying to make Russia believe that Washington may revise its missile plans in Poland and Czech Republic?

Likelihood is rather big. In view of this, Russia should analyze the importance of the current situation not only for its bilateral cooperation with US but also for its own future. Of course, we must do it if we see Russia as a sovereign country and not a puppet state.
