

EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference Fourth Plenary Session - The Iranian Nuclear Issue

The final session of the EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference was the most compelling. It focused on a growing crisis that, in the view of several participants, could lead to war in the months ahead. Recognising this urgency, the session focused on peaceful solutions and a face-saving exit strategy. The situation was seen to be grim, but not yet decided. Several participants anticipated that any solution would have to include some degree of enrichment in Iran, albeit strictly controlled. There was also a strong view that other major stakeholders, especially Turkey and Saudi Arabia, should be involved in talks on the issue.

[Pierre Goldschmidt](#), Belgium-based non-resident senior associate of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and formerly head of the Safeguards Department at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), had little doubt that Iran aimed to become at least a nuclear threshold state, with the ability to produce one or more nuclear weapons within a year of deciding to do so. He offered a set of ideas as to how Iran could be dissuaded from taking that decision. These included the adoption of what he called a 'temporary complimentary protocol', designed to allow the IAEA to draw conclusions about the absence of undeclared nuclear materials and activities in a state such as Iran that had been found to be in safeguards noncompliance. In return for Iran's agreement, there should be a freeze on the imposition of new sanctions. He also suggested that Iran be given a grace period during which it could acknowledge past violations without incurring new penalties.

Goldschmidt proposed that Iran be allowed to continue production of enriched uranium up to 5%, but that it commit to exporting this low-enriched uranium (LEU) every six months, with foreign cooperation in fabricating fuel assemblies. To supplement Iran's comprehensive safeguards agreement with the IAEA, he advocated facility-specific verification measures that would not expire even if a country withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Meanwhile, he suggested the E3+3 should negotiate with Iran how best to expand upon the long-term cooperation agreement tabled in 2008. If the IAEA were able to draw a conclusion about the absence of undeclared nuclear activity, the LEU export condition could be removed along with the progressive lifting of existing UN Security Council sanctions. But the Security Council should also draw up a list of activities which would automatically trigger additional sanctions: if Iran were to produce highly enriched uranium or separated plutonium, withdraw prematurely from the NPT, proceed with nuclear weaponisation activities, or divert nuclear material. Such an approach, he argued, would make Iran responsible for any negative consequences of its own decisions and would help those in Iran who are not determined to reach a nuclear-weapon capability to make a more compelling case to follow a different course.

[Maurizio Martellini](#), Secretary General of the Landau Network-Centro Volta, offered a set of negotiating principles, as well as a three-step preliminary action plan designed to avoid war by creating mutual respect and confidence. Noting that he had reviewed his ideas with an important Iranian interlocutor, he stressed that the international community must create a path for Iran to have sustainable, proliferation-resistant and safe civilian nuclear energy, and that the IAEA should have a negotiating mandate to reach this end state. The E3+3 should set the framework, benchmarks and goals, based upon which the IAEA should be the sole negotiator of the nuclear file. He suggested that negotiations should not focus on whether Iran can be allowed to enrich uranium at all, but instead on how such enrichment could be monitored and voluntarily constrained, and confidence in the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme be restored. In addition, parties should adopt language akin to the Shanghai Communiqué of 1972 between the US and China, setting a 'relation context'.

Martellini's proposed principles also included: not attaching preconditions or limiting the scope of negotiations, avoiding humiliating or demonising language or behaviour, and keeping nuclear issues as the priority but allowing for the incorporation of other issues. Meanwhile, as an interim solution to dampen tensions, he proposed: i) a voluntary confidence-building measure whereby Iran would discreetly signal to the IAEA that it was slowing down production of LEU and the E3+3 would plan for a nuclear fuel-supply agreement to meet Iran's future needs; ii) an agreement on the disposition of Iran's stockpile of 20% enriched uranium, with reciprocal actions by the E3+3 to refurbish the Tehran Research Reactor, provide a particle accelerator for the production of radioisotopes and resolve Iran's longstanding complaint that Eurodif had voided its contract to supply enriched uranium; and iii) a voluntary transparency measure under which Iran would allow visits to centrifuge manufacturing workshops and agree to an accounting mechanism to provide assurances that centrifuges were not being transferred to a non-declared facility.

[Erzsebet N. Rozsa](#), Executive Director of the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs, spoke about the impact of EU sanctions on Iran, recognising that these restrictions were only a subset of the sanctions Iran faced and that the regime's overriding priority was its survival. She drew attention to a sermon by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei the previous day in which he said technology denial by foreign countries had enabled Iran to develop its own domestic capabilities. In her view, this might imply a drawing away from negotiations, even though there was a debate within the Iranian political elite over the nuclear-weapons option. There was also a major political transformation under way, which had side-lined reformists and pitted Khamenei against President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. As a counter-move to sanctions, the Iranian parliament was considering banning oil exports to Europe even before the EU oil-import cut-off came into effect in July 2012. Meanwhile, Turkey, India, China, Pakistan and others continued trading with Iran and finding ways around the sanctions, a situation that

discredited the EU. Iran had already 'defanged' the attempt to shut off its access to refined petroleum by becoming self-sufficient in gasoline production. The EU sanctions had had a strong financial impact, contributing to a 40–50% loss in value of the rial over the previous 2–3 months, though severe punishments for domestic money changers had stemmed the haemorrhage, at least temporarily. The social impact of sanctions had been felt most strongly by the middle class, who had debts in foreign currencies and was the population segment upon which the outside world pinned its hopes for change. She concluded that the EU's Iran policy was counterproductive and should be altered.

Further suggestions were made during the [discussion period](#) including by Mohamed Shaker of the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs, for internationalising or regionalising enrichment technologies. Though the idea was seconded by N. Rozsa, Goldschmidt noted that this was a long-term solution and not of practical need until there were more reactors in the region. Anton Khlopkov of the Center for Energy and Security Studies in Moscow, advocated addressing maritime-security issues as a first order of business in order to avoid a military crisis, and, in the nuclear field, applying international efforts to deal with the Arak heavy-water research reactor. Li Hong from the China Arms Control and Disarmament Association agreed with Martellini's notion that the E3+3 should play only a political role and that the IAEA should take the lead. Vladimir Orlov, director of the PIR Center in Moscow, suggested nuclear-safety measures as a confidence-building measure for the region.

An Iranian participant, Mohammad Taghi Hosseini, from the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, made the case that Western perceptions of the Iranian system and nuclear activities were wrong. Iran should be treated like other non-nuclear-weapon states and not denied its rights, he said, otherwise it would see no use for the NPT. However, the world should rest assured that Iran would not withdraw from the treaty or be unfaithful to it. As a rejoinder, Stephan Klemant from the European External Action Service noted that the 2008 offer tabled by the E3+3 clearly stated that once confidence had been restored, Iran would be treated equally to other NPT parties. The problem was how to reach that point. He emphasised that the E3+3 had constantly sought to persuade Iran to return to negotiations to discuss the nuclear issue without preconditions. Goldschmidt underscored that Iran's safeguards violations made its case different from other NPT parties. The IAEA needed to confirm whether all of Iran's existing nuclear activities were legal, but to do this Iran's cooperation was essential. 'The solution is in Iran's hands.' He agreed that sanctions would not solve the problem but argued that they were necessary for the credibility of the non-proliferation regime. He urged parties to focus on positive elements, an outlook that was underscored by Mark Fitzpatrick, Director of the IISS Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Programme, in his closing remarks.