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WISE TALK – 3 NUCLEAR IRAN



Interview with
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Every country is free to produce nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. It has been long known that Iran has a nuclear program for years and there is no solid evidence showing the production of nuclear weapons in Iran, yet. Then, why do regional and global actors start to perceive the idea of a nuclear Iran as a threat?



Iran does not produce nuclear weapons now but it has an ongoing uranium enrichment program. Producing nuclear energy does not require that amount of enriched uranium but it is essential to have a nuclear weapons production capacity. Given

the fact that Iran is willing to start a plutonium enrichment program, there is no doubt that Iran's nuclear program aims nuclear weapons production. Moreover, we know that Iran has middle and long range missiles. These missiles are used only to carry nuclear warheads. This is why there are concrete evidences that current Iranian nuclear program is aimed at producing nuclear weapons.

We should also point out that Iran is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Signatory countries agree to not to produce nuclear weapons. Thereby, should Iran produce nuclear weapons, it would be a violation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. It is all about preventing the spread of nuclear weapons. India and Pakistan have been bad enough nightmares for the international community and therefore In addition to its nuclear capabilities, Iran has been resented by regional and global actors due to its support to Hamas and Hezbollah, efforts to penetrate Iraq, influential role in the Gulf and denial of the Holocaust.



Iran, with its declining economy, sharp political divisions, social upheavals and isolation from the outside world has been anathematized by the international community. How powerful is Iran in your opinion?

Iran went through turmoil in the last presidential elections but the regime itself is still very strong. As you know,

Iran has two armies: one is the national army and the other one is only to protect the regime and the religious leaders. Also, Iran has very rich energy resources and a great culture rooted in the history. Its regime, though not compatible with our age, is still very strong and will not be shattered in the near future. One of the most serious problems of Iran is its unstable economy. For instance, it has vast petroleum resources but imports the refined petroleum because it does not have refineries; it has rich natural gas fields but cannot invest enough to process them due to lack of financial and technological capabilities. Furthermore, many Iranians fled the country during and aftermath of the Islamic Revolution. Iran lost many of the educated people and scientists in that period. That is a big handicap for Iran.

Women play a very important role in the Iranian society. When we compare Iran's regime with the Taliban's we see that both regimes are based on religion. However, while Taliban bans women to get education or go out to the streets, Iran does the opposite. It increases the venues for women to get education which allowed a degree of liberalization even under a chador. I foresee that, in the next step of the evolution of Iran, women will play very important roles both as regime supporters and dissidents.

Overall, such a regime cannot be sustained forever but it would be wrong to say that it will collapse in the near future. It should also be noted that Iran is a country that surprises the world. Fall of the Shah was not highly anticipated, too.

Does the possibility of a nuclear-armed Iran constitute a global or a regional threat?

Saying that it is a global threat would be an exaggeration. Iran is not a global but a regional threat. However, the US takes it very seriously. Plans for a nuclear missile shield over Poland

and Czech Republic have been suspended for now. Recently, plans for a naval system founded partially on the Black Sea are under development. In that framework, Turkey is one of the countries to be considered for the nuclear shield. There is no official US attempt to discuss these plans with Turkey but Obama's invitation to Erdogan for September 29 makes me think that the US might be trying to figure out Turkey's stand on the issue of deterring a nuclear Iran.

What is the core motive behind Iran's nuclear program?

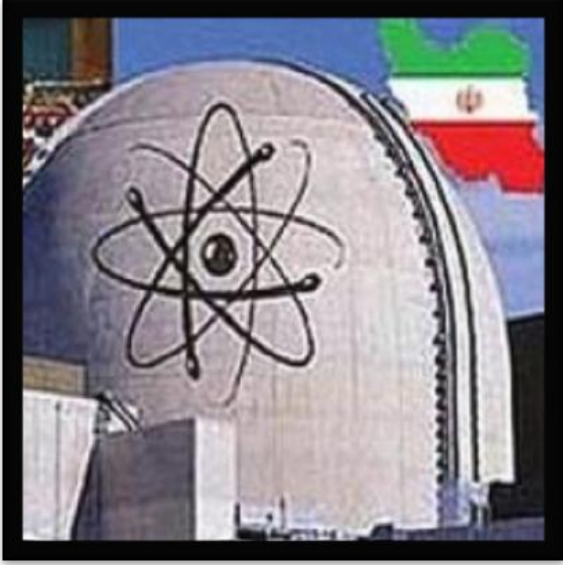
The primary goal of Iran is to end the Israeli nuclear weapons monopoly in the region and restrict Israel by creating a nuclear threat against it. Secondly, Iran aims to become the leader in the region by expanding its sphere of influence.

Dou you think that, a nuclear-armed Iran would bring peace and stability to the region based on the nuclear peace thesis?

It is almost impossible to bring peace via proliferation. A nuclear Iran is a serious threat for the peace in the Middle East due to the insecurity created by the spread of nuclear weapons. It is



hard to use nuclear weapons in democracies due to the public opinion and transparency. The acquisition of nuclear weapons by closed regimes, like Iran's, is highly frightening. As a matter of fact, we all see this in the case of Pakistan. In unstable countries, the possibility of irresponsible people acquiring nuclear weapons is considerably high and worrisome. This is why; the use of nuclear weapons should be under very strict control. The missile facilities I visited in the US reflect the significance of this issue. The authorized military officers have to be married with children and must not have consumed alcohol in the last two days. Approvals from the President and the Chief of Air Forces were to be taken in order to fire the missiles. The two military officers guarding the missiles were armed so that should one of them behave irrational, the other would shoot and stop him. Well, who will keep the nuclear weapons under control in Pakistan when the government is shattered? What will happen when the terrorists get access to these weapons?



In that respect, Obama has made a significant vision change. Until now, the shared opinion was that only the listed five countries can have nuclear weapons and the rest cannot. This is the statement made in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Obama brought the vision of a nuclear-free world. He expressed his sorrow by stating that the US is the only country that used nuclear weapons.

Negotiation and diplomacy have been proved useful in solving nuclear crises both during and aftermath of the Cold War. Do you think that these tools will work in the case of Iran?

The development of missile defense systems was restricted during the Cold War due to the Mutually Assured Destruction. That was the real deterrent. Responsibility was shared by the both sides. The balance was more durable back then whereas today, there are many countries with nuclear weapons and with the possibility of terrorists to get access to them. Therefore, we are in a more unstable system.

I believe diplomacy will work in the Iranian case, too. Obama started a negotiation round and we will all wait and see the results. Small but positive steps have been taken so far. For instance, Iran opened its nuclear facilities in Qum to the International Atomic Energy Agency inspections and accepted to buy the enriched uranium it needs for medical studies from abroad. Of course, Iranians are very good at diplomacy and gaining time using diplomacy. We will see how far it will go.

While the EU opposes military intervention of any sort, Obama stated that “all options are on the table” signaling the American considerations of using military means. Is the option of military intervention against Iran a viable scenario?

If there is anyone who will do something about this crisis, it is the US not the EU. I think the military intervention option for the USA is a realistic one. The US is capable of destroying the nuclear facilities in Iran. Actually, even Israel can carry out such a military intervention against Iran. As a matter of fact, Israel bombed the nuclear plants in Iraq and Syria in the

past. But still, Obama Administration seems far from choosing to use the military means against Iran.

Turkey and Israel seems to be the only countries in the Middle East who oppose the nuclear programs of Iran. Why do you think the Arab states in the region do not react against Iran?

Arab countries in the Middle East have certain fears. Especially the Gulf countries are afraid that Iran would punish them in case of a possible US or Israeli military intervention. Iran is capable of damaging the oil production plants of the Gulf countries without using nuclear weapons. Therefore, the Arab countries have nothing much to do against Iran.

What do you think about Turkey's relations with Iran?

I find our relations with Iran very interesting. On the one hand, we are close friends with shared interests but on the other hand we are competitors. For instance, the economic relations between Turkey and Iran has been very good, there are reciprocal high-level visits and Turkey imports energy from Iran. However, we are competing about the future of Iraq. We are both trying to expand our respective spheres of influence in the Northern Iraq. Turkey is getting closer with the Local Kurdish Administration in the region and planning to open a consulate general in Erbil as well as a new border gate. The Kurdish Administration is willing to improve relations with Turkey, too. These are all positive developments for Turkey. However, if Turkey does not act on time, it will be Iran to fill that power vacuum which is contradictory with the interests of Turkey.

How should Turkey take a stand against a nuclear Iran?

Turkey will have two difficulties on that issue. First of all, Turkey is a temporary UN Security Council member now and if the parties in the 5+1 Meetings will not be able to reach an agreement then Turkey will have to vote in the Security Council for the sanctions against Iran. What will turkey do in that situation? We do not want Iran to become a nuclear power but we also have good relations with it. How will Turkey vote? Secondly, a nuclear-armed Iran would be a security threat for Turkey. Turkey has bought the patriot missiles but we do not how effective will they be against Iran's missiles. If Iran produces nuclear weapons, we do not have to produce ours but at least we should be able to stop the Iranian missiles in the air.



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- 1961–64: Undersecretary at the Washington Embassy.
- 1964–68: Director General and Assistant Secretary General at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- 1968–72: Ambassador of Athens.
- 1972–75: Permanent Representative at the United Nations.
- 1979–80: Assistant Secretary General at the United Nations.
- 1980–83: Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- 1984–88: Permanent Representative at the United Nations.
- 1988–91: Ambassador to Paris.
- 1991–96: Assistant Secretary General at the United Nations and General Commissioner of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees.
- Vice President of Wise Men Board, Wise Men Center for Strategic Studies.
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- İlter Türkmen worked as a columnist for Hürriyet Daily in Turkey between 1999 and 2008.

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Born in 1986, Istanbul. She graduated from Ataköy High School, Istanbul in 2005. She completed the double degree program for Business Administration and International Relations in Koc University, Istanbul. She graduated in February 2010 with distinguished academic success and honor rank. She is fluent in English and beginner in Russian. She conducted a research project titled “State-Religion Relationship: Is It Religion or Politics? Comparative Analysis of Orthodoxy in Russia and Islam in Turkey” in the field of comparative politics at Koc University. She has another research project titled “Democracy in Russia: Historical Evolution, Present Condition, Future Prospects” in the area of democratization.