

Tehran Responds to US-NATO-Israeli Threats

Iran's Disarmament Conference: The Power of Logic

By [Eric Walberg](#)

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Iran's disarmament summit upstaged Obama's and breathes life into next month's NPT conference in New York

The logic of power is still overriding the power of logic, quipped the head of Iran's Atomic Organisation Ali Salehi at the "Nuclear Energy for all, Nuclear Weapons for None" disarmament conference in Tehran last weekend, referring to US foreign policy, in particular, nuclear. Taking this elegant formulation a step further, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad says nuclear-armed states such as the United States should be removed entirely from the IAEA and its Board of Governors. Iran's president called for the formation of a new international body to oversee nuclear disarmament, or at least the reinvigoration of the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Twenty-four foreign and deputy foreign ministers and official representatives from 60 states, including China, Russia, Pakistan, India, Iraq, and Turkey came to Teheran, with the glaring exception of the US and Israel, though they were invited along with everyone else. The conference was a direct reply to Washington's refusal to invite Iran to its own Nuclear Security Summit last week, which attracted the attention of 47 leaders, and focused — more cynically — merely on international control of all nuclear-related activity.

Obama's conference was limited to efforts to protect weapon-usable nuclear materials (notably spent fuel from Ukraine) to safeguard against nuclear terrorism, and endorsed Obama's call for securing all nuclear materials around the globe within four years to keep them out of the grasp of terrorists.

This is an echo of the 1946 Baruch Plan by the US to force a prostrate world into accepting US control of nuclear power/ weapons. A threadbare demand by the only country which has actually used nuclear weapons in battle — against innocent civilians. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei said, "The one and only nuclear criminal in the world now falsely claims to be fighting against the spread of atomic weapons but has definitely not taken and will not take any serious action in this regard."

This counter-conference was a coup for Iran — a truly international platform for challenging Washington's assertion that it wants to see a world without nuclear weapons. "The conference expressed its concerns about the continued existence of Weapons of Mass Destruction — nuclear arms in particular — as well as their application or threat to apply them," the closing statement said.

Iran's Joint Armed Forces Chief of Staff Hassan Firouzabadi said the Washington summit actually worked against the purpose of non-proliferation: "Its result was that nuclear weapons should be safeguarded and this was in conflict with the NPT and disarmament." He pointed out the hypocrisy of Washington's Nuclear Posture Review which claims it does not seek first use of nuclear weapons — except against Iran and North Korea, asking sarcastically what makes Iranian and North Korean citizens different from the rest of the world. Iran's UN ambassador Mohammad Khazaee dotted the "i"s, calling Washington's new nuclear weapons policy "state terrorism".

Salehi led the criticism of the NPT where "in the past 40 years most of the activities have been focusing on the non-proliferation and then on the peaceful use of nuclear energy and not on the disarmament. So, we have not seen any positive or hopeful steps in the disarmament issue." He complained that there is no "watchdog for the disarmament. We want to have specific date, specific date, announced for the complete disarmament of the countries that have nuclear weapons. We are after the power of logic but unfortunately still the rule of jungle is prevailing."

Iran's top nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili said, "In order to achieve disarmament and non-proliferation, we must promote the NPT and prevent powers from exerting their influence on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)." Iran's top envoy to the IAEA, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, noted that the conference will play a significant role in the outcome of next month's NPT conference in New York.

Iran's call for real nuclear disarmament is supported, oddly enough, by Germany, which called for the removal of all US nuclear weapons from Europe last year. The removal of all nuclear weapons from the Middle East, of course, was on all participants' minds. All agreed that Israel must be pressured to join the NPT, completing the work that Obama's conference should have done. There, only Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan and Egypt's Foreign Minister Ahmed Abul Gheit dared raise the issue of Israeli nuclear weapons.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Rybakov told the Iranian conference, "We need to achieve the goal of the establishment of a zone free from weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East and here Israel's role is crucial. Without their due involvement, nothing would be possible." Ayatollah Khamenei was less restrained: "If the US claim of fighting the spread of nuclear weapons is not a lie, how can the Zionist regime manage to avoid international regulations — in particular the NPT — and turn occupied Palestine into an arsenal of nuclear weapons?"

Foreign ministers from Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon supported the Organisation of Islamic Conference head, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, in calling for a nuclear weapon-free Middle East. Their presence no doubt irked Washington, as did Turkey's role in both conferences. As a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, member of the Non-Aligned Movement and NATO, EU candidate, and Iran's Muslim neighbour, Turkey has suddenly emerged from its US shadow as an important regional mediator.

In a jab to Washington for spurning the conference, Rybakov effused: "It is an excellent opportunity to have a free-flowing exchange of views on some critical issues. We are discussing the way to go forward to this [nuclear weapon-free] goal."

On Iran's nuclear programme, delegations from Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq voiced their

support for Iranian nuclear activities, which they described as peaceful. Rybakov said the international community is well aware that “atomic bombs are against Iran’s religious beliefs and defensive doctrine,” but urged Iran to resolve the current stand-off in a way “that may be considered satisfactory to the US and some other countries” so that “full confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear programme.” Paul Ingram, executive director of the British American Security Information Council, said “The Tehran conference will undermine US strategies in forming a front against Iran.”

This counter-conference highlighted the real reason for targeting Iran: more than any other country, it exposes Washington’s real agenda, its imperial agenda. As if responding to the conference’s success, a secret memo penned by Defence Secretary and well-known peacenik Robert Gates in January was leaked as the conference closed, calling for new options against Iran including invasion, Bush’s tired policy of “leaving all the options on the table”.

But like the US conference, much of the real activity was going on behind the scenes, and it was not all nuclear. Pakistan and China were low-key, but nonetheless their presence was a snub to Washington. Iran is China’s key energy partner, importing 12 per cent of its oil from Iran, and is busy helping build the Peace Pipeline to carry Iran’s natural gas to Pakistan (and in the future to India and China), despite US attempts to force Pakistan to cancel the project and cooperate on a pipeline through Afghanistan to Central Asia. India and Iran are jointly constructing power plants and plan to exchange electricity via Pakistan. Tehran is already exporting electricity to Turkey, Armenia and Afghanistan. With Iraq’s oil industry in disarray, and as Iran’s nuclear power plants begin work in August, Iran is poised to become the energy powerhouse in Central Asia.

That, along with the likes of Iran’s disarmament conference, is doing much more for regional peace than US invasions and threats. Such nuclear-armed countries as India and Pakistan would be happy to give up their nukes if everyone else did, making them natural allies of Iran — and the world at large. Actions speak much louder than words in politics, and Iran’s current diplomatic and economic demarche is showing up the empty White House rhetoric at each turn.

Eric Walberg writes for Al-Ahram Weekly <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/> You can reach him at <http://ericwalberg.com/>

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About the author:

Canadian Eric Walberg is known worldwide as a journalist specializing in the Middle East, Central Asia

and Russia. A graduate of University of Toronto and Cambridge in economics, he has been writing on East-West relations since the 1980s. He has lived in both the Soviet Union and Russia, and then Uzbekistan, as a UN adviser, writer, translator and lecturer. Presently a writer for the foremost Cairo newspaper, Al Ahram, he is also a regular contributor to Counterpunch, Dissident Voice, Global Research, Al-Jazeera and Turkish Weekly, and is a commentator on Voice of the Cape radio. Eric Walberg was a moderator and speaker at the Leaders for Change Summit in Istanbul in 2011.

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