

That is why the US has focused on this demand. (See *Briefing 95: Designed To Be Refused*.) The Iranian leadership has responded by resolutely refusing to suspend enrichment **before** negotiations take place, but agreeing to suspend **during** negotiations, both processes starting simultaneously.

The first hint of such a breakthrough came (demonstrating the new consensus) from President Ahmadinejad. When asked by a reporter from *Etelaat* newspaper if Iran might announce the suspension of uranium enrichment during Kofi Annan's visit to the country, he said: 'Please accept you will receive an answer later.' (*FT*, 30 Aug., p. 8)

## NEGOTIATING SUSPENSION

The West demands that Iran suspend enrichment. In 2004, Western negotiators spelled out 'suspension' in detail. In June 2006, the demand has been left vague. 'Diplomats involved in the talks said that Iran's six potential negotiating partners—the United States, Russia, China, France, Britain and Germany—left the definition of suspension vague to maintain unity on their side and to lure the Iranians back to the negotiating table.'

Defined **narrowly**, 'suspension' could mean allowing Iran to continue running the centrifuges, but in a vacuum, without injecting uranium gas, and therefore without actual enrichment. (For more details of the enrichment process, see *JNV Catalogue: Drawing Paradise on the 'Axis of Evil'*.) (Note that even running centrifuges in vacuum can increase skills and knowledge for operating large-scale enrichment programmes. <[tinyurl.com/g3zyy](http://tinyurl.com/g3zyy)>)

Defined **broadly**, suspension could mean halting the spinning centrifuges (risking their damage or destruction), ending the production of centrifuges and their parts, and so on. (*NYT*, 18 June <[tinyurl.com/q8jx6](http://tinyurl.com/q8jx6)>)

Iran is in effect seeking pre-negotiations on such questions, while holding out the offer of up to two months' suspension. (See Iran's very important official response to the 6 June proposals <[tinyurl.com/oh6ea](http://tinyurl.com/oh6ea)>.) Iran is attempting to negotiate a way out of the crisis. **The US is not.**

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JNV artist **Emily Johns** is touring a **NEW EXHIBITION** about Iran, based on her peace delegation there in May 2006.

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# IRAN CRISIS NEGOTIATING PEACE

JNV Anti-War Briefing 96 (18 September 2006)

## CUTTING THROUGH THE CONFUSION

The Iran nuclear crisis has been subject to government propaganda, media misrepresentation, and straightforward confusion. The US Government has made alarming allegations. For its part, the Western media has reinforced such propaganda, and seriously misrepresented the Iranian scene.

To cut through the confusion, we need to understand the structure of power in Iran, and the actual foreign policy orientation and negotiating strategy of the Iranian leadership. The 'Supreme Leader' of Iran is committed to a negotiated solution to the current crisis, and his leadership is willing to give up many of Iran's nuclear ambitions to achieve this objective, despite the bluster we have sometimes heard from President Ahmadinejad.

We also need to see through US propaganda. For example, Condoleezza Rice's highly conditional offer to sit down with Iran at the negotiating table was **not** a serious attempt to create a diplomatic solution, but an effort to isolate Iran, and to derail any possible diplomatic solution.

Much now turns on minute details obscured by both sides.

## THE SUPREME LEADER

As we pointed out in *Briefing 87*, in Iran, 'It is the Supreme Leader, not the president, who controls the armed forces and makes decisions on security, defence and major foreign policy issues.' (BBC, <<http://tinyurl.com/mklrc>>)

We know that the current Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, offered the US a 'grand bargain' in 2003 in a fax sent directly to the US State Department. Flynt Leverett, then a senior director on the US National Security Council, saw the proposal, which he described as 'a serious effort.' Iran wanted an end to US sanctions, full access to peaceful nuclear technology, and a recognition of its 'legitimate security interests.' In return,

Iran was willing to offer nuclear safeguards, 'decisive action' against terrorists, coordination in Iraq, an end to 'material support' for Palestinian militias, and support for the Saudi initiative for a two-state Israeli-Palestine solution. (*Washington Post*, 18 June 2006 <[tinyurl.com/pfota](http://tinyurl.com/pfota)>)

This is far from the angry rhetoric of Ahmadinejad, but it continues to be the basic position of the Iranian leadership, which is far from 'fanatical'. This was confirmed during the visit of former Iranian President Mohammad Khatami to the US in Sept., when Khatami re-affirmed Iran's acceptance of the two-state solution: 'I think Hamas itself, which has come to power today in a democratic process, is ready to live alongside Israel... Of course whatever Palestinians think is respected by us.' (*FT*, 5 Sept. 2006, p. 12)

## 100 CENTRIFUGES

Gareth Smyth, *Financial Times* correspondent in Tehran, is well-connected. On 19 June, two Iranian 'insiders' told him 'a majority in the leadership would, once talks developed, accept a compromise over the nuclear programme that allowed it to keep some uranium enrichment in Iran'.

There was some uncertainty over numbers. 'One of the insiders said Iran might settle for a limit as low as three cascades of 164 centrifuges [**492 centrifuges** in total], with the vast bulk of uranium for its planned nuclear reactors enriched in Russia, as Moscow first proposed last year.' The other 'insider' said: 'Around 70 per cent of senior people' might accept a limit of '**hundreds or thousands**' of centrifuges—'adding that President Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad was in the minority'. (*FT*, 19 June, p. 8 <[tinyurl.com/fddcz](http://tinyurl.com/fddcz)>)

Originally, Iran wanted **54,000 centrifuges**. <[tinyurl.com/nk2wf](http://tinyurl.com/nk2wf)>

A few days later, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei 'established a new body to supervise foreign policy in a move seen by some politicians in Tehran as a way to **counterbalance** the government of President Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad.' The head of the new 'Strategic Committee for Foreign Policy', Kamal Kharrazi, former Foreign Minister under reformist President Khatami, spoke of 'including experts from previous governments.' The former Vice-President Mohammad Ali Abtahi 'said the body's composition meant "the continuation of detente"'. (*FT*, 28 June, p. 13)

Interestingly, the Supreme Leader said that the new body should 'help facilitate macro-decision making... find new horizons... and **make use of intellectuals**.' Khamenei also said the term 'principle-ist', usually claimed by fundamentalists such as Ahmadinejad, should apply to anyone 'of any

trend... committed to the principles of the revolution'. (*FT*, 28 June, p. 13) Ahmadinejad (like Bush) is noted for ignoring the intelligentsia (see Smyth, 'Iran's intellectuals left in cold by populist president', *FT*, 21 June, p. 13)

In setting up the new Strategic Committee for Foreign Policy, Smyth reported, 'Ayatollah Khamenei may also be acting to build consensus within Iran's leadership, where different tactics have been aired in recent months over how to proceed with the nuclear programme.' (*FT*, 28 June, p. 13)

In late Aug., Smyth reported: 'after public disagreements among top officials over policy earlier this year, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, has quietly built a consensus among the political elite, including the leadership group of about eight that takes key decisions.'

At the end of Aug., Smyth reported that Iranian officials had 'closed ranks over the country's nuclear programme', quoting Mohammad Atrianfar, editor of *Shargh*, the reformist newspaper: 'The leadership is thinking together, with the leader at the core.' (*FT*, 31 Aug., p. 7)

The consensus was expressed in terms of the suspension of enrichment (see below), and the low number of centrifuges Iran was willing to accept. 'In July, Sadegh Kharazmi, a former ambassador to Paris... told the *FT* the leadership was ready to negotiate a deal in which Iran limited enrichment inside the country to "**some 100" centrifuges**.' (13 Sept., p. 9) This is completely inadequate for the production of weapons-grade uranium. (See US nuclear designer R. Garwin <[tinyurl.com/lbba6](http://tinyurl.com/lbba6)> for relevant figures.)

## NUCLEAR SUSPENSION

A lot of the recent controversy has turned around the issue of suspending Iran's uranium enrichment programme before negotiations can begin. Under US pressure, this demand was incorporated into UN Security Council Resolution 1696 <[tinyurl.com/j8v76](http://tinyurl.com/j8v76)>. Iran, in contrast, (correctly) sees uranium enrichment as its legal right, under Article IV of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty <[tinyurl.com/87t7x](http://tinyurl.com/87t7x)>. This is a popular, nationalist issue. The *Guardian's* Simon Tisdall reports from Tehran: 'For Ahmadinejad and the heirs to Khomeini, the nuclear issue is about much more than nuclear bombs. It is about **national pride**.' (8 Sept., <[tinyurl.com/fk49n](http://tinyurl.com/fk49n)>)

Iranian national pride suffered a real blow when the government suspended uranium enrichment between Nov. 2004 and Jan. 2006 with no tangible benefits. It therefore became politically impossible in Tehran to accept the demand for suspension-before-negotiations.