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Ahmadinejad adviser Mojtaba Samareh Hashemi: U.S. sanctions against Iran failed

By Thomas Erdbrink and Kay Armin Serjoie

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TEHRAN - More than a year has passed since [the last negotiations between Iran and world powers](#), which were followed by increasingly tough Western sanctions, military threats and alleged technological attacks on the Islamic republic's nuclear program.

Now, as [Iran prepares for new negotiations tentatively scheduled for Dec. 5](#), a top adviser to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad says that measures designed to pressure [Iran](#) have been useless and that it is time for the United States and other Western nations "to stop fooling themselves" over their effectiveness.

Mojtaba Samareh Hashemi, 52, a foreign policy expert and longtime confidant of Ahmadinejad's, said [in an interview Monday](#) that actions such as the banning of Iranian ships from European ports, a fuel blockade against Iran Air and increasing financial restrictions have had "no noticeable effect" and that the failure of the sanctions has propelled the West to restart talks - a direct contradiction of the U.S. view.

"The delay in the negotiations has been a good opportunity for the other side to realize the effects of its political decisions," Samareh Hashemi said. "We hope they will make the best use of" it.

His words shed light on Iran's probable stance when it meets with the United States, [Russia](#), [China](#), [France](#), [Britain](#) and [Germany](#) next month for the first time since October 2009.

Tehran has signaled that it will want to broaden the discussions beyond its nuclear program, asking its six counterparts to declare their positions on [Israel's](#) alleged possession of nuclear weapons and their commitment to nuclear disarmament.

Samareh Hashemi elaborated on that request. "If they do not state any response on these questions, it means they have not chosen the path of friendship," he said, adding that this would not preclude talks but would force Iran to take a tougher position. "Not answering these questions will mean they have decided not to commit to nuclear disarmament and support the Zionist regime being armed with nuclear weapons."

It has been difficult to gauge the effect of the sanctions because of the global economic crisis and the Iranian government's erratic economic policies. What is clear is that the U.S. campaign aimed at persuading nations and multinational companies to stop doing business in Iran has not led to any official change in Iran's position regarding its nuclear program.

Samareh Hashemi said, however, that Iran's negotiators will consider proposed changes to a [plan to swap nuclear material](#) that failed after last year's talks.

Under that plan, Iran was to receive special nuclear fuel for a 43-year-old U.S.-built medical reactor in Tehran in exchange for shipping out 2,645 pounds of its low-enriched uranium stockpile. Washington says Iran reneged on the arrangement after initially agreeing to it. In Iran's view, the deal - backed by the United States, Russia and France - fell through after all the parties involved could not agree on the details. [A similar deal struck in May by Turkey, Brazil and Iran](#), in which Iran would ship the uranium to neighboring Turkey, was not accepted by Western countries.

U.S. officials have said they now plan to ask Iran to ship a higher amount of low-enriched uranium out of the country, something Iran rejected last year. But such a suggestion would now not be turned down immediately, Samareh Hashemi said. "It is not like we don't listen to new proposals."

He said, however, that any deal would not stop Iran from producing higher-enriched uranium, up to a level of 19.75 percent, needed for running the medical reactor. Iran now buys from Russia and Turkey the medical isotopes that the reactor normally produces.

Samareh Hashemi said Iran wants to be able to make the fuel, despite the technical challenges involved. "Just because you can purchase something from abroad does not mean you should not produce it yourself," he said.

Efforts to produce the higher-enriched uranium have [raised suspicions](#) that Iran is attempting to increase enrichment to weapons-grade level under the guise of addressing medical needs.

Samareh Hashemi's remarks came a week after [U.S. Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said](#) that the sanctions had caught Iranian leaders by surprise and are causing a rift between Ahmadinejad and Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"Such statements are uninformed and illustrate the wishful thinking of this American secretary of defense," Samareh Hashemi said. "It is surprising a person at such a high level in the U.S. government can be so uninformed."