President Obama’s engagement policy or war:

Since the birth of the Islamic Republic, 33 years ago, the relations between the United States and Iran have been marred with animosity and distrust, while in 2012, hostilities have reached unprecedented levels, bringing the two nations to the brink of war. Even though there was genuine hope in Tehran for ending three decades of hostilities with the election of President Barack Obama in 2009.

Born to a Kenyan Muslim father and an American mother, having been exposed to both the Muslim and Christian faiths, having grown up in a third world country and having the middle name Hussein-the name of one of the most revered figures in Shia tradition-Obama, simply put - offered a unique opportunity.

Regrettably, President Obama’s engagement policy with Iran failed due to overwhelming pressures from Israel, the Congress, Arab allies, and skeptics within his own administration coupled with radical rhetoric of Iranian president against Holocaust and Israel.

During President Obama’s tenure, “economic war”, “cyber war”, “covert war” and “intelligence war” has already begun. If the objective was to prevent Iran from enrichment know-how and capability, it has already failed because Iran has mastered both. If the objective was to provoke a third war, they have been successful as Tel Aviv and warmongers in Washington are currently pressing the US for military strike.

Notwithstanding, all those involved should stop here, have a deep breath, rethink, rewrite the past strategy and correct their mistakes. No doubt, a third war in the Middle East would be the most strategic mistake for Israel and the US.

Four reasons why we do not need another war:

1. No Nuclear Bomb in Iran

Based on the US intelligence and the IAEA reports, Iran has neither a nuclear bomb nor diverted toward military purposes. Iran has remained committed to the NPT and the number of IAEA inspections in the country is unprecedented in the history of the agency. Furthermore, majority of IAEA technical ambiguities have been resolved.

2. Religious Fatwa:

Besides an international commitment to NPT, Iran has religiously obligated itself against nuclear weapons. Based on Ayatollah’s Khamenei’s fatwa, the use of nuclear weapons and all other types of
WMD is haram (prohibited), a sin, useless, costly, harmful and dangerous, posing a serious threat to humanity.

3. **US failure in Iraq and Afghanistan:**

The US invaded Iraq on the wrong pretext that it possessed WMD, while none was found. The invasion of Afghanistan has also entangled the US and the allied forces in a long-drawn conflict. Thus far, the wrong intelligence and strategic miscalculation has cost the US trillions of dollars\(^1\), approximately 6,400 deaths and about 38,000\(^2\) injured. The civilian cost in Afghanistan and Iraq has been devastating, with the death toll estimated to be more than 170,000 including\(^3\), 2.1 million internally displaced, 2.8 million refugees\(^4,5\). In case of a war with Iran, these figures would be 10-fold higher.

4. **Iran’s weapon:**

Iran’s weapon is not WMD, nuclear bomb or even nuclear capability, rather the “oil price” and the recent development in the Middle East. The oil price is increasing even without closing the Strait of Hormuz. So far, there has been a 20% average increase in oil prices following the US and EU announcement of oil sanctions. Furthermore, Western and U.S. allies in the Middle East are collapsing and the Islamists forces are winning the elections even without Iranian interference.

**How to build the future:**

Certainly the disputes between Iran and the West are not limited to the nuclear issue. The fact is that a major root cause of hostilities is mistrust; but we need to understand that the mistrust is mutual. You have heard, with great exaggeration, the West’s reasons for not trusting Iran. Whereas Iran’s side of the story is hardly covered - **firstly**, let me give you a taste of the Iranian side:

1. Western opposition to Iranian nuclear program is reminiscent of Iran’s oil nationalization in early 1950s that led to its referral by the US and the UK to the UNSC as a threat to international peace and security resulting in pressures and sanctions.

2. The US and UK orchestrated 1953 Coup, removing democratically elected Prime Minister Mossadeqh and installed a dictator. This act uprooted democracy in Iran for decades to come.

3. The US and the West gave their full support to the dictator, Shah, for a quarter century. The Iranian revolution in 1979 was a natural reaction to the West’s policy in Iran.

4. Following the revolution, the West unilaterally withdrew from its contractual commitments and left Iran with billions of dollars of unfinished industrial and nuclear projects.

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\(^1\) Based on conservative estimates from the Center for Defense Information
\(^2\) Based on conservative estimates from DoD
\(^4\) [http://costsofwar.org/article/afghan-refugees](http://costsofwar.org/article/afghan-refugees)
\(^5\) [http://web.mit.edu/humancostiraq/](http://web.mit.edu/humancostiraq/)
5. In 1980, Saddam Hussain invaded Iran, sparking an 8-year war costing the lives of 300,000 Iranians and damages amounting to a trillion dollars. The US and the West supported the aggressor.

6. Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons and long-range missiles, and the West provided the know-how and material.

7. In 1988, during Iraq’s invasion of Iran, the US launched the largest American naval combat operation since World War II, striking Iranian oil platforms in the Persian Gulf.

8. In 1988, the US Navy shot down Iranian civilian plane, killing 290 innocent civilians including 66 children.

9. During Rafsanjani’s presidency in 1989, Iran welcomed “goodwill begets goodwill” proposal of President Bush and demonstrated it by facilitating the release of American and Western hostages. Paradoxically, the US in return responded with heightening pressures and hostilities.

10. During Khatami’s presidency, Iran was among the first countries to condemn the 9/11 terrorists attacks and cooperated with the US on the “war on terror,” leading to the removal of Taliban and Al Qaeda from Afghanistan in 2001, in return, the US rewarded Iran by designating it as “axis of evil”.

11. Last but not least, during Ahmadinejad’s presidency, and just in 2011:
   - Iran offered to invite the US representative in Afghanistan for talks on cooperation in Afghanistan,
   - Iran welcomed the “Russian Step by Step Plan” on nuclear dossier,
   - Iran offered 5 years of full supervision to IAEA, in an effort to remove the technical ambiguities,
   - Iran freed the American hikers,
   - Iran offered to halt 20% enrichment, limiting it to 5%, if provided with fuel rods for TRR,

However, the US and the West responded to all these unprecedented overtures with mounting pressures, sanctioning oil and Central Bank and advancing UN resolutions that condemn Iran on terrorism and human rights.

The second point relates to the current concerns regarding Iranian nuclear program and the US and Western depiction of Iran as the major threat to international security, however the people in the Middle East have a different view.

Let me read to you the result of a recent pole in 12 Arab countries:

- By a 15-1 ratio that equates to 94%, Israel and the US are seen as more threatening than Iran.
- 84% reject the notion of their state's recognition of Israel.
- 55% see Israel's possession of nuclear weapons as justifying for other countries in the region to also possess them.
- 80% of Egyptians support Iran acquiring nuclear weapons, as a balance to Israeli nuclear monopoly.

Nevertheless Iran’s nuclear issue could serve as an opportunity rather than a threat since it has the potential to revive the Middle East Nuclear Weapons Free Zone initiative after 40 years of no progress.

The third point is to use the experience in dealing with the Iranian nuclear issue as a model for other countries with breakout capability. In this endeavor, Iran’s nuclear case can contribute greatly to non-proliferation.

There are currently 14 countries operating or building enrichment plants, while 10 possess reprocessing facilities; with worldwide power plants totaling 440 and 600 more in the pipeline, due to the interest of 60 nations to pursue nuclear energy. There is also growing concern that in the near future, 10 to 20 more countries will master the technical capability to produce nuclear weapons, while there is sufficient enriched uranium stockpile worldwide to produce 200,000 nuclear bombs.

The fourth point addresses the necessity to end Western double standards as exemplified by their strategic relations with non-NPT and nuclear weapon states, such as Pakistan and Israel; while placing severe sanctions and pressures on a member of the NPT and a non-nuclear weapon state, namely Iran.

Last point delves into diplomacy:

It is important for P5+1 to understand that sanctions, covert actions, sabotage and attempts at regime change are not a solution and would not compel Iran to change its nuclear policy. Furthermore, no future Iranian government, of any political stripe, is likely to abandon the nuclear program, since it is a matter of national consensus and pride.

Noble intention is the key. If the intention is to deprive Iran from its legitimate right under NPT and to bring regime change, the result of such negotiations will continue to fail. This is not merely the conclusion reached by Iranian Leadership, other credible international figures such as the former director of IAEA Mohammad ElBaradei and more recently the Russian President-elect Vladimir Putin, also confirmed that the US and the West are after regime change.

However, if the main concern is about a possible diversion of nuclear material toward nuclear weapons program, an amicable solution is possible. The new round of negotiations should focus on the bottom lines of both parties.

In the upcoming negotiations, there is an urgent need for a realistic package:

- A compromise that would cool down the heightened tensions and warmongering. Iran can accept to halt 20% enrichment and cap it at 5%, in return P5+1 could provide fuel rod for TRR and suspend oil and Central Bank sanctions, scheduled to come into effect in June 2012.
- A long-term framework for solving the nuclear standoff based on the following:
• Iran would adhere to all international nuclear conventions and treaties at the maximum level of transparency defined by the IAEA. Additionally, Iran would cooperate with the IAEA to remove all remaining ambiguities.

• In response and to ensure Iran’s bottom-line is met, the P5+1 would:
  o Respect the rights of Iran under the NPT, including enrichment
  o Lift the sanctions
  o Normalize nuclear cooperation with Iran

Simultaneously, a comprehensive package on Iran-US bilateral relations is essential. Rapprochement between Washington and Tehran will be possible only when and if, for the duration of engagement policy:

1-The dual track policy is ceased,

2-The language of threats and heated rhetoric is set aside,

3-Hostile actions, sanctions and other forms of coercive pressures are put on hold,

4-Agreement on a comprehensive agenda, including all bilateral, regional and international issues, demonstrating the “entire game plan,” while implementing through a “phased approach plan”,

5-Issues of common interest are given priority in the talks,

6-Domestic political factions in both countries are convinced to cooperate, at least temporarily, while negotiations are conducted,

7-Both Tehran and Washington should recognize the spoilers and be determined to prevent them from obstructing and derailing rapprochement efforts.