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Solar programme for Iran

Could renewable energy stop Iran from building a nuclear bomb?

The consequences of an Iranian war would be devastating: from the risk of lasting, large-scale radioactive contamination and the destruction of regions and human lives to the further destabilisation of the Gulf region and the possible destabilisation of world peace. These fears are shared by a number of stakeholders who want to prevent a potential war.

Officially, Iran justifies its nuclear activity by citing the need to build up its energy supply, and it is true that Iran needs to expand its electricity supply for development reasons. Yet however much we accept its need for adequate energy supplies, we must remember that there is no need at all to use nuclear energy to that end.

Iran not only has extensive fossil fuel energy resources, although in fact it uses them mainly for export, but more importantly it also has enormous potential for using renewable energy. Like its threats of war, Iran also keeps employing its oil and natural gas for political purposes, so the rest of the world would be well advised to make itself less dependent on Iranian oil and natural gas. The best and quickest way to achieve that is for countries to turn to their own renewable energy sources. In the same way, Iran would benefit from making wide use of its own renewable energy resources because that would be a cheaper and faster way to cover its growing electricity demand than opting for the difficult and expensive development of nuclear energy or producing fuel for power stations from its own refineries. So it makes good sense to use and promote the renewable energy potential at both global and Iranian level. That should be the key strategy of world politics.

Under international law Iran too has the right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. But that right by no means implies an obligation to use nuclear energy. The development of renewable energy sources in Iran does not affect the right to use nuclear energy but simply makes it unnecessary to do so.

It is right to focus on diplomacy in the current conflict, in order to prevent a war in the region. However, diplomacy should always bring every peaceful option into play, which includes making an offer to Iran on the use of renewable energy.

The Renewable Energy Organization of Iran ([SUNA](#)) is currently examining Iran's potential. But even now the international community is free to offer Iran active and solid support for the development of renewable energy. That does not even require a UN decision. Individual players such as the EU, in fact even states such as Germany could offer Iran advice and logistical support for the development of renewable energy or for expanding its own production, if in return Iran abandoned its nuclear programme. At any rate, at present an offer of that kind can no longer be rejected on the grounds that it is not feasible: a wide range of renewable energy technologies is available: for instance, solar thermal, geothermal,

wind, small-scale hydroelectric, biogas, coastal wave and now also photovoltaic energy are available on a commercial, industrial scale. They could satisfy Iran's need to generate more electricity faster and more cheaply than nuclear energy. The electricity-generating costs of new wind turbines and photovoltaic plants have now become lower than the cost of new nuclear power plants. The argument that only nuclear energy can meet Iran's development needs is wrong and easy to refute.

Iran could react in two ways to a concrete offer of a solar programme accompanied by extensive support for its practical implementation, provided Iran refrained from developing nuclear energy. Iran could:

1. reject it. Consequence: Iran would find it very difficult to justify rejecting the offer of international support for the development of renewable energy sources, although the electricity-generating costs would be considerably cheaper than in the case of new nuclear reactors. If Iran stood by nuclear energy in spite of being offered a solar programme, it would become easier for the international community to increase the pressure on it: Iran's claim that it only wanted to use nuclear power for the production of energy would look less credible.
2. accept it. That reaction would be a peaceful step on the way to resolving the problem. Iran would no longer seek to build nuclear reactors and the international community or individual nations would actively assist Iran in resolving its energy problems on the basis of a solar programme.

Western governments should certainly seek to formulate a strategy of that kind. Instead of governments working against each other, we need nations to work with each other. Renewable energy is the technology of peace that can bring them together, whereas nuclear energy is divisive and introduces unnecessary risks into the international community.

Berlin, 21.5.2012