

Iran's moderate new leader vows to make nuclear process more transparent but says he **WON'T** give up enrichment

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Iran's newly-elected president has promised to follow a 'path of moderation' and bring more openness over the country's nuclear programme, but sided with the hard-line Islamic establishment that refuses to consider halting uranium enrichment.

However, the overall tone of Hasan Rowhani's first post-election news conference, will be viewed by the West as further evidence that his victory last week could open new possibilities for dialogue to ease tensions over Tehran's disputed nuclear operations.

Mr Rowhani also had a dual message for the U.S. He urged for no additional tensions and said both countries should 'look to the future.' But he repeated past statements from Iran's leadership that one-on-one talks are only possible if the U.S. vows to 'never interfere in Iranian affairs.'



Iranian President elect Hasan Rowhani (right) is accompanied by Hasan Khomeini, grandson of the late revolutionary founder Ayatollah Khomeini, during a visit to his

AP

Iranian President elect Hasan Rowhani (right) is accompanied by Hasan Khomeini, grandson of the late revolutionary founder Ayatollah Khomeini, during a visit to his shrine, just outside Tehran

Many other questions remain. Mr Rowhani sidestepped the issue of Iran's close alliance with Syrian president Bashar Assad, saying only that the efforts to end the civil war and restore stability rest with the 'Syrian people.'

He does not have authority to set major policies, such as the direction of the nuclear programme or relations with the West. All those decisions rest with the ruling clerics and the powerful Revolutionary Guard, which have so far appeared to embrace him but could easily turn against him if he is perceived as a threat to their grip on power.

Mr Rowhani, however, can use the strength of his landslide victory and his influential connections, including with former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, to try to sway policies. He also will serve as Iran's main international envoy and is almost certain to present a much milder tone than his combative predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who is to formally give up power in August.

This could help lower political friction between Iran and the West and also undercut calls by some factions in Israel and the US to study military options against Iran's nuclear facilities.



Rowhani can use the strength of his current popularity, seen by his landslide victory to try to sway Iranian domestic and foreign policies

The 64-year-old Mr Rowhani - the only cleric in the presidential race - described his election as opening a 'new era' and said he would 'follow the path of moderation and justice, not extremism.'

'We have to enhance mutual trust between Iran and other countries. We have to build trust.'

He also said dealing with the economy was among his priorities, in a clear reference to how Western sanctions over Iran's nuclear efforts have helped spike inflation to more than 30 per cent and slashed vital revenue.

Previously, Mr Rowhani - a former nuclear negotiator - criticised Iranian positions that have led to increased sanctions but also described the economic pressures as 'oppressive.'

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'The Iranian nation has done nothing to deserve sanctions. The work it has done has been within international frameworks . If sanctions have any benefits, they will only benefit Israel. They have no benefits for others,' he said.



64-year-old Rowhani said his election was a 'new era' and that Iran has to 'build trust' with other countries

He promised to encourage 'step-by-step' measures to reassure the West over Iran's nuclear ambitions. The West claims that Iran is seeking a nuclear weapon. Iranian leaders insist Iran seeks reactors only for energy and medical applications.

Enriched uranium is used as fuel for energy and research reactors but it can be further boosted to make a nuclear warhead.

'The first step will be showing greater transparency. We are ready to show greater transparency and make clear that the Islamic Republic of Iran's actions are totally within international frameworks,' he said.

'The second step is promoting mutual confidence. We'll take measures in both fields. The first goal is that no new sanctions are imposed. Then, that the (existing) sanctions are reduced.'

On Syria, he said the ultimate responsibility to resolve the more than two-year-old civil war should be in the hands of the 'Syrian people.'

'We are opposed to foreign intervention,' he said. 'We hope peace and tranquillity will return to Syria through the cooperation with countries of the region and world.'