



Rouhani to Strike Softer Tones at UN

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Iranian President Hassan Rouhani will address the United Nations General Assembly for the first time at Tuesday's opening session. After setting a reformist tone throughout his early days in office, expectations are high for Iran's new leader, who is taking a less aggressive approach to nuclear talks.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry says Iran's new president could signal a new way forward.

"I think Rouhani's comments have been very positive, but everything needs to be put to the test, we'll see where we go," said Kerry.

Iran's nuclear program is what most concerns the United States, because Washington believes Tehran is trying to develop a nuclear weapon. Iran says its atomic activities are for peaceful, civilian purposes.

President Rouhani has taken the lead in trying to soothe those tensions, saying that his country will never develop nuclear weapons and that he wants "the swiftest resolution of this issue in the framework of international standards."

That sort of message represents a major shift from former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who routinely threatened those opposing Iran's nuclear program. Former U.S. Ambassador Adam Ereli says it is a decidedly more-diplomatic approach.

"Rouhani is a very different personality than Ahmadinejad. He's much more sophisticated. He's much more cosmopolitan. He's much more of a politician and less of a populist," said Ereli.

However, Ereli points out this is more form than substance; real power rests with Iran's religious leaders.

"The fundamental tenets of the regime are constant. And the intentions of the regime haven't changed, whether it be their nuclear program, whether it be their support for terror," said Ereli.

Israel has long called for tougher international action against Iran's nuclear program and does not believe President Rouhani offers anything new. Israeli government spokesman Mark Regev feels the current warm words coming from Iran are merely a ploy.

"What we heard from the Iranian leadership is unfortunately just sugar-colored words. Words designed to deceive. Words designed to lull the international community into a complacency," said Regev.

Ploy or no, at the very least President Rouhani's overtures give Washington time to step back from confronting Iran at a time of instability in Syria and Egypt, says Cato Institute analyst Doug Bandow.

"I'm sure they want to put this off. I think the new government in Iran is the best reason for them to do so. To be able to say, 'Look. We don't know where this is going but there's much more hope today with someone who within the Iranian system is a moderate,'" said Bandow.

However, some experts, such as former ambassador Erel, doubt that Rouhani is truly a moderate at all.

"We have a more capable adversary in Rouhani, not a more responsible partner. And so we should be doubly alert to him and what he is trying to do on behalf of the regime just because he's going to be better at it," opined Erel.

While there are no plans for President Rouhani to meet with President Obama at the U.N., his foreign minister will meet with Secretary Kerry and other international diplomats as part of Security Council talks on Iran's nuclear program.