



## Solana: 'The button has been reset'

But nuclear talks with Iran will wait until election upheaval is resolved, EU foreign policy chief says.

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BRUSSELS — The man in charge of European Union foreign policy believes the Obama Administration has succeeded in recasting the U.S. relationship with Russia.

“The button has been reset,” declared Javier Solana, a day after presidents Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev agreed to reduce nuclear arsenals and increase coordination and cooperation.

In a wide-ranging interview with GlobalPost, Solana explained that Europe had been watching the events in Moscow very carefully — and with “great enthusiasm.”

“For us, a good relationship between Russia and the United States is fundamental,” said Solana. “And therefore what we’re seeing so far is very positive.”

The progress in clearing up tension between Washington and Moscow will have positive consequences for European-Russian ties as well, he said. Those ties were seriously strained last year when Russia went to war with Georgia, an EU aspirant, and cut off European fuel supplies in the dead of winter due to a dispute with the transit company in Ukraine.

“Let me tell you, sometimes it’s easier to be a strategic partner with Russia than be a neighbor,” said Solana with an ironic smile. “We have to work on both sides, and the United States has to work on one.”

Plus, Europe depends on Russia in a way the U.S. does not. “It’s a reality, we have dependence [on] Russia on gas,” said Solana.

The Spanish physicist and politician said that another key issue of concern to the three allies, is the polarizing debate over missile defense with planned installations in Poland and the Czech Republic. That finally has a chance for resolution, Solana said. He praised Obama’s position on missile defense and his emphasis that the shield would protect “Europe and Russia also and the United States.”

“It has been discussed for years in completely different circumstances than today,” Solana said. “I hope very much that it will be resolved.”

Solana also welcomed the Russian agreement to open transit routes into Afghanistan, allowing the use of Russian airspace — rather than just the previous train routes — to move troops and supplies into Afghanistan.

“This is very important for everybody,” Solana said, emphasizing that all countries should be doing their utmost “to stabilize Afghanistan, in particular at this very moment when elections are going to take place.”

Solana said he will travel to Afghanistan the third week of July, in part to assess the preparations for voting scheduled to take place August 20, and that he will visit Islamabad as well.

While the focus has been on Moscow this week, Solana said he is keeping a close eye on Tehran in the violent aftermath of the country's contested elections of June 12. He serves as the envoy for nuclear talks with Iran on behalf of the United Nations Security Council's Permanent Five members (Britain, China, France, Russia and the U.S.) and Germany. His mandate is to talk the Iranian regime into beginning international negotiations on its nuclear program, which the U.S. and others believe is aimed at producing nuclear weapons.

Although Solana, like the Obama Administration, has expressed hope that a post-election Iranian government would soon agree to hold talks, in this interview Solana clarified that there are conditions on his willingness to move forward.

"I think that the idea of maintaining a sense of commitment with them to get engaged and resolve the nuclear issue is fundamental," he said, but underscored that this would not be before election results are verified to the satisfaction of the international community. "I don't think 'tomorrow' we'll have talks with them," he said.

In addition to the disputed election results and the ensuing government crackdown on protesters and the press, the Iranian regime has provoked EU ire by detaining employees of the British embassy as well as a French teacher. Solana said that indications were good that the final embassy worker still detained would be freed. In the meantime, EU officials in Tehran filed the latest in a string of demands for these releases to take place immediately, or the "EU will take further action."

Nevertheless, Solana rejects criticism that the EU approach to the situation, which has been similar to that of the U.S., has been too reserved.

"I think we've handled the situation with a lot of wisdom," he said, "trying to denounce what has to be denounced but at the same time knowing that Iran is an important country and (on) some of the issues — in particular, the nuclear issue — we have to get engaged and try to resolve it. Don't forget what we're talking about, a nuclear issue of great concern to the region and the world at large."

As for the international negotiator himself, he announced over the weekend that when his current term as High Representative for EU Foreign and Security Policy ends in October, he will not seek a third one. While not entirely unexpected, Solana's departure does lead to the question of what will happen with the Iranian nuclear negotiations entrusted in him personally.

"Let us hope it's resolved by then," he said wryly.