



Iran's Scientific Diplomacy: Can the World Unite to Explore the Universe for the Sake of Science or is it Just a Dream?

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Featured image: One of the most significant thinkers of the Islamic Golden Age, Avicenna, who is considered a national icon in Iran.

Since the West (the P5 +1) and Iran agreed to a nuclear deal, there has been criticisms from Israeli hardliners like Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have been relentless. Netanyahu called it a "very bad deal" fearing that Iran can develop a nuclear weapon capable of reaching Israel or even the U.S. despite the fact that they signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Time and time again, Iran has maintained that their agenda is for peaceful purposes. Sixteen U.S. intelligence agencies had confirmed that Iran had "abandoned its nuclear weapons program years earlier" according to a 2012 New York Times report. Despite all of the negative publicity the Iran Nuclear Deal had received from both Western and Israeli hardliners, there is a positive aspect to Iran's growing science and technological industry currently taking place.

The minister of science, research and technology since 2014, Dr. Mohammad Farhadi wrote an article for the *Tehran Times* on Iran's science and technology industry and what it offers to the world:

« Iran is now a nation of 78 million people, with about 4.5 million university students, 2500 higher education institutions, 36 science and technology parks, 400 nongovernmental scientific associations, more than 800 research centers, and 1000 scientific journals. Our scientists publish about 30,000 international scientific papers annually, a growth of at least 20-fold since 1979. These achievements could not have been reached without the intensive participation of individual scientists and scientific societies and government support. This participation sprang from a model of development for post revolutionary Iran that respects the rights of all Iranians to have access to higher education. It is this philosophy that has helped the country weather internal and external disturbances. Sanctions on Iran, for example, pushed its science, industry, and service sectors to cooperate in new and fruitful ways and also forced scientists to work more creatively and promote a knowledge-based economy for the first time in Iran's history. This environment further spurred science-driven political discourse in the country. A prominent example is the role of the scientific community in the recent negotiations on Iran's nuclear program. This could not have materialized without the participation of scientists to provide technical expertise and to clarify scientific language. »

Iran has 2,500 higher education institutions with 4.5 million university students with over 800 research centers and more than 30,000 international scientific journals places Iran as one of the world's most important countries for scientific research and technology. There is also the fact that 70% of Iran's science and engineering students are women who are also creating new startup companies. In an interesting article by Forbes magazine in 2015 titled *'Set To Take Over Tech: 70% Of Iran's Science and Engineering Students Are Women'* about the rise of women in Iran's science and technology fields:

The common myth about women in Iran is that they are seen, but not heard, that they're not permitted to drive, that they are second-class citizens, and that entrepreneurship and positions of power are out of reach. These notions are wrong. For years, women in Iran have owned and managed businesses, many of them in male dominant industries like oil and gas, construction, mining, and now tech. And now, with such a high number graduating with degrees in science and engineering, there's a push to get women more involved in Iran's blossoming startup scene

According to an article by www.iranreview.org back in 2010, Iran's scientific advancements *"have grown 11 times faster than any other country in the world."* The article titled *'Iran's Fast Scientific Advancements'* explains why a Montreal-based Science-Metrix, a company that evaluates the quantitative and qualitative measurements of science, technology and innovation has placed Iran as one of the world's leading countries with the fastest growth rates in science:

« In the report, Science-Metrix says the number of scientific publications listed in the Web of Science database shows that the standard growth in the Middle East, particularly in Iran and Turkey, is nearly four times faster than the world average.

"Iran is showing fastest worldwide growth in science," said Eric Archambault, who authored the report. "Asia is catching up even more rapidly than previously thought, Europe is holding its position more than most would expect, and the Middle East is a region to watch," he added

Archambault went on to say that Iran's imposed sanctions by Washington have led to scientific advancements in aerospace engineering, medical development and nuclear science:

Despite more than thirty years of Western-imposed sanctions, Iran has made great strides in different sectors, including aerospace, nuclear science, medical development, as well as stem cell and cloning research.

Among the country's most recent accomplishments, which has garnered international acclaim, was the February 2 launch of Kavoshgar 3 (Explorer 3) satellite carrier into space with living organisms — a rat, two turtles and worms — onboard »

Archambault spoke about the advancements in animal cloning in Iran (which I disagree with no matter what country it's taking place in), nuclear chemistry, medical science and agriculture development. What is interesting is what Iran has to offer in terms of research including *"archaeology, desert studies, ecological studies, and study of the fauna and flora of the Irano-Turanian region"*. Iran has hosted numerous International Science Festivals including the *International Kharami Festival* which presents the basic sciences and the *The Annual Razi Medical Sciences Research Festival* which exhibits original new research in

various scientific fields. Iran also has invited prominent figures in science including Nobel Prize recipients in science such as F. Sherwood Rowland, Kurt Wüthrich and the author of 'A Brief History of Time' and the Director of Research at the Centre for Theoretical Cosmology at the *University of Cambridge*, Stephen Hawking. Several Iranian Universities has hosted prominent scientists for public lectures from all over the world.

Dr. Farhadi's article also mentioned Iran's history from the 13th Century where hundreds of scientists from many parts of the world collaborated and established the Maragheh Observatory which:

"can be vivid guides for science diplomacy in all areas of science, research, and technology. Iran plans to have big science projects, such as the Iranian National Observatory, which will bridge Iranian scientists with the international science community."

The Maragheh Observatory was built under the leadership of *Nasir al-Din al-Tusi* who was an astronomer, biologist, mathematician, philosopher, physician and physicist which is located in the heights west of Maragheh, East Azerbaijan Province, Iran. Iran has also contributed to Astronomy in the early 10th Century where Astronomer *Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi* who was the first to record another galaxy outside of our own galaxy calling the Andromeda galaxy the "little cloud." These are some of the examples of how Iran has contributed to scientific knowledge throughout its history.

There are endless possibilities

✘ "We invite scientists from all over the world to initiate a collaborative program with our scientists. Iran is ready" wrote Farhadi. What if the Western powers (U.S -NATO) were to stop its wars over natural resources with weapons of mass destruction in order to control the world and focus on productive scientific discoveries that can help advance humanity? The world would definitely be a better place.

The recent discovery of a new planet by *National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)* in 2014 confirmed a new planet called the Kepler-186f:

« NASA's Kepler Space Telescope, astronomers have discovered the first Earth-size planet orbiting a star in the "habitable zone" — the range of distance from a star where liquid water might pool on the surface of an orbiting planet. The discovery of Kepler-186f confirms that planets the size of earth exist in the habitable zone of stars other than our sun »

Just imagine if all countries from every region on earth including Iran contributed their knowledge and expertise to launch a mission to Kepler-186f and find out if there are any forms of life on that newly discovered planet. Can it ever happen? The late American comedian Bill Hicks spoke about changing the world for a "better ride":

"The world is like a ride in an amusement park, and when you choose to go on it you think it's real because that's how powerful our minds are. The ride goes up and down, around and around, it has thrills and chills, and it's very brightly colored, and it's very loud, and it's fun for a while. Many people have been on the ride a long time, and they begin to wonder, "Hey, is this real, or is this just

a ride?" And other people have remembered, and they come back to us and say, "Hey, don't worry; don't be afraid, ever, because this is just a ride." And we ... kill those people. "Shut him up! I've got a lot invested in this ride, shut him up! Look at my furrows of worry, look at my big bank account, and my family. This has to be real." It's just a ride. But we always kill the good guys who try and tell us that, you ever notice that? And let the demons run amok ... But it doesn't matter, because it's just a ride. And we can change it any time we want. It's only a choice. No effort, no work, no job, no savings of money. Just a simple choice, right now, between fear and love. The eyes of fear want you to put bigger locks on your doors, buy guns, close yourself off. The eyes of love instead see all of us as one. Here's what we can do to change the world, right now, to a better ride. Take all that money we spend on weapons and defenses each year and instead spend it feeding and clothing and educating the poor of the world, which it would pay for many times over, not one human being excluded, and we could explore space, together, both inner and outer, forever, in peace"

If all nations were to respect each other's sovereignty, its cultures and traditions, we all would be able to explore the universe and beyond, cure diseases instead of inventing them or even find new methods to create energy and the list goes on. It does seem like a distant dream since the West and its allies (or Vassal States) are determined to dominate the Middle East and other regions in the world including space. Perhaps it is just a ride as Bill Hicks said. It's a shame that humanity has taken this route instead of thinking about the big picture, but then again, for Dr. Farhadi, a dream to unite the world for the sake of science may be just a dream after all.

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