

IRAN REPORTS TALKS ON RESUMING CONSULAR RELATIONS WITH UK

On Sunday, PressTV quoted Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Consular, Parliamentary and Iranian Expatriates Affairs Hassan Qashqavi as saying that Iran and the UK are in talks to resume consular relations. Yesterday, Mehr News further reported details on how the relations would begin working. As of this writing, I can find no mention of this development in UK or US media.

Recall that the UK expelled all Iranian diplomats and closed down its Tehran embassy after students stormed the British embassy in late November of 2011.

Here is the PressTV report on resumption of consular relations:

Deputy Foreign Minister for Consular, Parliamentary and Iranian Expatriates Affairs Hassan Qashqavi says Tehran is in talks with London to resume consular relations.

"We are working with the UK for the resumption of consular services," Qashqavi said on Sunday.

The article went on to note that despite the closure of the embassies in Tehran and London, "Iran's Foreign Ministry Department for Consular Affairs has successfully handled more than 80 percent of cases submitted by Iranians residing in Canada and the UK". It also noted that Oman represents Iran's interests in London.

The Mehr News article repeats the same information, adding that Iran has "agreed with the British government that Sweden host its Interests Section in Tehran".

What stands out to me from the Mehr News article is this paragraph:

British Foreign Secretary William Hague withdrew British diplomats and shuttered the Tehran embassy after it was attacked in 2011 by a mob, which he claimed had the backing of the government. Iranian diplomats in London were also expelled.

It seems interesting that Iran would repeat Hague's accusation that the storming of the British embassy had the backing of the Iranian government. They clearly leave it as an accusation from Hague, but they also take no steps to refute the accusation. I wonder if public acknowledgment of the government's involvement in the storming was one of the conditions for moving ahead on relations.

Going back to the storming of the British embassy in 2011, BBC had this to say regarding the cause:

Tuesday's attack by hundreds of protesters followed Britain's decision to impose further sanctions on Iran over its nuclear programme.

With the US in the lead, the sanctions against Iran have only continued to tighten since then, and PressTV reported last summer that the Iranian parliament was against improving diplomatic relations with the UK at that time.

We can only hope that the move now to improve diplomatic relations between the UK and Iran is a sign that the P5+1 process may finally be making headway on a diplomatic solution to Iran's nuclear activities. At the very least, it should be noted that Iran's claim of improving diplomatic relations comes at the same time as yesterday's technical background meeting in the P5+1 process. Although neither Western nor Iranian news reports on yesterday's meeting claimed breakthroughs were made, the fact of the technical meeting was noted, along with stating

that it provides important detail leading up the
upcoming negotiating meeting next month. Will
there be good news from the April meetings?