

ROUHANI TO NBC: “US PRESENCE IN REGION EXACERBATES TERRORISM CRISIS”

NBC News’ Ann Curry interviewed Iranian President Hassan Rouhani yesterday in her second extended interview with him. She had been the first Westerner to interview Rouhani after his election. Remarkably, the story put up by NBC on their website to accompany the video seen above did not mention the part of the interview that Mehr News chose to highlight in Iran. From Mehr News:

Iran’s president has denounced ISIL terrorist group for its savagery and said US presence in the region has exacerbates [sic] the terrorism crisis since 2001.

That comment about US presence in the region exacerbating the terrorism crisis appears nowhere in the NBC article. The article does, however carry Rouhani’s accusation that the US approach to fighting ISIS is cowardly:

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, in an exclusive interview with NBC News’ Ann Curry, denounced ISIS for its savagery but also branded the U.S.-led coalition against the terror group as “ridiculous.” Speaking from the presidential palace in Tehran ahead of his visit to the United Nations, Rouhani questioned President Obama’s decision to go after ISIS with airstrikes.

“Are Americans afraid of giving casualties on the ground in Iraq? Are they afraid of their soldiers being killed in the fight they claim is against terrorism?” Rouhani said.

“If they want to use planes and if they want to use unmanned planes so that nobody is injured from the Americans, is it really possible to fight terrorism without any hardship, without any sacrifice? Is it possible to reach a big goal without that? In all regional and international issues, the victorious one is the one who is ready to do sacrifice.

Rouhani’s accusation that the US wants to carry out this fight without sacrifices seems to be a very accurate description of the approach by the Obama Administration.

Further evidence for the “ridiculous” charge comes in this Huffington Post story about a Congressional briefing on US strategy:

One Democratic member of Congress said that the CIA has made it clear that it doubts the possibility that the administration’s strategy could succeed.

“I have heard it expressed, outside of classified contexts, that what you heard from your intelligence sources is correct, because the CIA regards the effort as doomed to failure,” the congressman said in an email.

“Specifically (again without referring to classified information), the CIA thinks that it is impossible to train and equip a force of pro-Western Syrian nationals that can fight and defeat Assad, al-Nusra and ISIS, regardless of whatever air support that force may receive.”

He added that, as the CIA sees it, the ramped-up backing of rebels is an expansion of a strategy that is already not working. “The CIA also believes that its previous assignment to accomplish this was basically a fool’s errand, and they are well aware of the fact that many of the arms that they provided

ended up in the wrong hands," the congressman said, echoing intelligence sources.

Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, already in New York for the beginning of talks on the nuclear deal and the opening of the UN General Assembly, told NPR that he still favors a deal with the P5+1 group of nations:

On the subject of negotiations over Iran's nuclear weapons program, Zarif said all the "wrong options" have already been tried and that "we are ready" for an agreement.

Zarif is fully cognizant of the forces allied against reaching a deal, though:

"The only problem is how this could be presented to some domestic constituencies, primarily in the United States but also in places in Europe," because "some are not interested in any deal," he said.

"If they think any deal with Iran is a bad idea, there is no amount of – I don't want to call it concession – no amount of assurance that is inherent in any deal because they are not interested in a deal, period," Zarif said.

In sharp contrast with what U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other political leaders have said about no deal being better than a bad one, Zarif said: "I think if you compare any deal with no deal, it's clear that a deal is much preferable."

Gosh, considering how the US is working closely with anti-Iran groups, even to the point of interfering in lawsuits to prevent disclosure of how the government shares state secrets with

them, Zarif seems to have a very clear grasp of the problem a deal faces.

Despite his harsh comments about the US (and harsh comments about ISIS, as well), Rouhani also held out hope that the P5+1 final agreement can be reached.