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Current Events Summer Assignment

Karimi, N. (2013, August 12). Iran's president says it's time to get 'serious'. *Valley Times/Bay Area News Group*, pp. 8A.

Summary: According to remarks made by Iran's newly elected president, Hasan Rouhani in early August 2013, his country is ready to conduct discussions with world powers over Iran's controversial nuclear program. Rouhani, a moderate, won the June 2013 presidential election and took his oath of office on August 3. He seemed willing to move forward on talks with Western nations, including the United States, but cautioned that he would not tolerate threats or pressure from other countries regarding Iran's nuclear program.

Rouhani replaced Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who took a hard-line approach when dealing with the West on Iran's nuclear program. The country's leadership has denied U.S. and other Western countries' allegations that it is trying to develop a nuclear weapon. Iran's leaders maintain their program is for peaceful purposes, such as power generation and the development of medical isotopes.

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Iran's political decisions are actually controlled by the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, but a strong president can influence the decision-making. President Rouhani said even before he was sworn into office that he would make it his priority to get Western sanctions against Iran – imposed because of concerns over a nuclear weapons program underway – lifted. Rouhani has been quoted repeatedly as saying that he believes it's possible to come to an agreement with the West that would assure them of Iran's peaceful intent while still enabling his country to keep enriching uranium – which is at the center of the nuclear controversy.

Analysis: If Iran can re-engage in talks with Western nations over its nuclear program (after 4 rounds of talks with poor results since last year) and be honest about the program, this would improve relations between Iran and the U.S. significantly, and it could lead to a lifting of sanctions that is seriously hurting the Iranian economy. However, it is unclear how much influence the new Iranian president has in his country, even though he won a landslide in the voting in June. Leaders in many nations would like to know what exactly Iran is up to in its nuclear program, and these talks could be a starting point.

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Questions:

1. Should Iran or the 5 permanent member countries of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany – who have been negotiating with Iran previously – commit to scheduling the talks? Why?
2. What type of information would be important for Iran's leaders to provide about the country's nuclear program in order for the Western countries, including the U.S., to believe them?