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The experts assess the Iran agreement of 2015

John Mecklin

After serially breaking a variety of self-imposed deadlines, six world powers and Iran reached agreement on plans for long-term limits on the Iranian nuclear program and the easing of international economic sanctions on that country. The five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany (or P5+1) and Iran signed off on the complex agreement, more than 80 pages in length, Tuesday in Vienna. Negotiations were slowed for days by disagreements about the timing of sanctions relief, the degree of access international inspectors would gain to Iranian military sites, and, particularly, a UN ban on conventional weapons sales to Iran, which includes a ban on ballistic missile-related transactions.

The agreement reached this week places restrictions on a broad array of Iranian nuclear activities—including uranium enrichment and plutonium separation—and calls for the International Atomic Energy Agency to monitor the country's nuclear sites. The restrictions and monitoring regime aim to prevent Iran from producing nuclear weapons. As the restrictions take effect, a complex regimen of economic sanctions against Iran will start to be unwound.

The agreement will almost certainly face contentious US congressional review and heated debate around the world. The *Bulletin* has asked top international security experts with a variety of perspectives and backgrounds to offer their assessments of the agreement. Their comments will be published over the course of several days, as they have time to study the complex, lengthy, and unprecedented document.



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JOHN MECKLIN
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John Mecklin is the editor of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. Previously, Mecklin was editor-in-chief of *Miller-McCune* (since renamed *Pacific Standard*), an award-winning magazine.

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INVITED EXPERT COMMENTARY

Sharon Squassoni, director and senior fellow, Proliferation Prevention Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies

15 JULY 2015

Lawrence Korb and Katherine Blakeley, senior fellow and policy analyst (respectively), Center for American Progress

15 JULY 2015

The preliminary accord that six world powers and Iran reached earlier this year outlined the parameters of a deal that would curtail Iran's nuclear program; it was one of the most comprehensive and detailed nuclear arms agreements ever reached. If anything, the deal finalized this week in Vienna is even more restrictive. However, this has not satisfied the hardline critics of the deal in either Iran or the United States, many of whom appear to have criticized it even before reading it. A good look at the three main legs of the agreement shows that this deal is, in fact, a good one, for the United States and for the international community.

First of all, it precludes Iranian development of a nuclear weapon by shutting down all of

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the pathways Iran might use to accumulate enough nuclear material to make a weapon. It does this by limiting the amount of fuel that Iran can keep for the next 15 years, by cutting its current stockpile of low-enriched uranium by 98 percent, by reducing the number of centrifuges by two-thirds, by and modifying the core of its heavy-water reactor at Arak.

Moreover, Iran will still be subject to the constraints of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), which precludes it from developing nuclear weapons. It was Iran's violations of the NPT that provided the legal underpinnings and international consensus for the current sanctions regime. Despite real tensions between some of the P5+1 countries, non-proliferation is an area of rare international consensus. If Iran attempts to develop nuclear weapons after the deal has run out, it could once again face devastating international sanctions.

Second, the deal places International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) monitoring and verification in place to ensure that Iran doesn't cheat. While the inspections allowed in the agreement may not be anytime, anywhere inspections, they are pretty close. The inspectors will have 24/7 access to Iran's nuclear facilities at Nantaz and Fordow and its entire nuclear supply chain, including its uranium mines and mills, its conversion facility for producing uranium hexafluoride, the feedstock for uranium enrichment, and its manufacturing and storage facilities for the centrifuges that have been involved with Iran's enrichment program. With electronic sensors and continuous monitoring of seals on the centrifuges, the IAEA will know instantly if Iran has tampered with them. The deal also allows the IAEA to enter a suspect facility within 24 days of suspicions being reported. In other words, the agreement calls for as-needed, where-needed access—and failure to grant it will be considered a violation that could lead to renewed sanctions. And Iran has agreed to the IAEA's Additional Protocol, which allows monitoring and inspections of declared or undeclared sites in perpetuity.

Third, sanctions will not be lifted immediately, but will be phased out as Iran meets its commitments. The nuclear-related sanctions will be lifted only after the IAEA verifies that Iran is in compliance with the deal. The UN Security Council will reinstate certain other sanctions for specified periods of time: The sanctions related to sensitive nuclear equipment will be reimposed for 10 years, missile technology for eight years, and conventional arms for five years. Finally, the agreement contains a simple mechanism for snapping-back sanctions if Iran cheats—one that even Iran, Russia, and China acting in concert could not derail—and does not eliminate sanctions related to Iran's support for terrorist groups.

Is the deal perfect? Of course not. Does Iran get some benefit? Of course. That is what negotiations are all about. But on balance, the United States and the world have gained much more. Not only will Iran's nuclear program be curtailed, but the nonproliferation commitments of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty regime will be rejuvenated, Iranian energy supplies will return to the world market, and there is a probability that Iran will become a more responsible member of the international community. With a strong IAEA verification regime in place and long-term monitoring to make sure Iran does not re-start a nuclear weapons program, this is a great deal for the international community.

Kingston Reif, Director for Disarmament and Threat Reduction Policy, Arms Control Association

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Siegfried S. Hecker, Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University

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Ambassador Seyed Hossein Mousavian, research scholar and former diplomat, Princeton University

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12 Comments

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pfbonney • a day ago

I guess we are really supposed to be thankful that Obama didn't give the Iranians one of our TRIDENT II submarines fully equipped with 24 nuclear-armed missiles, to incentivize the Iranians to quit their quest for nuclear

weapons.

Conspicuously absent from the above assessments are any that condemn the agreement. Obviously, comments were solicited only from those people who are of the belief that a bad deal is better than no deal.

And as such, further confirms the American political right's belief the political left wants ONLY the West to disarm.

For those not familiar with the issue, it was the left, led by Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, that gave the Soviet Union the bomb, stealing the design from the United States. Then, once the Soviets had successfully detonated their first atomic bomb, the left started protesting ONLY the West's nuclear weapons, emphasizing the need to engage in nuclear disarmament, which, of course, would leave all the non-western, anti-American countries with nuclear arms. (Do THOSE countries succeed in

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boonteetan • 2 days ago

The deal has finally arrived. Curb of nuclear activities in exchange for sanction relief, that is the nutshell of deal. Nothing concrete as yet, US congress has to approve first. Also, how would IAEA carry out its supervision on Tehran effectively? Could Israel sit quietly? Will Saudi not react?

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David Szabo • 2 days ago

Peace is a word that has many meanings in the middle east.

religion

land

energy

you can share religion

you can share land

you can share energy

only then can you have peace

middle east is swimming with money that can be used for the benefit of all

better life better homes more water more food

Israel has turned the desert into a breadbasket to feed it,s people that knowledge can be shared

and energy from uranium must be phased out and oil as well

the sun is abounded in the middle east Saudi Arabia is already starting on this venture

as for Iran it is a strong hold for the right,s of humanety but you will not get it with force only allah can do that it is true that we have the messangers of good that come to us from the Creator he is known by many names let us hope we can show him that we can live in Peace and he will forgive us because we are after all his children

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hans • 2 days ago

the next world war is coming thanks to idiots that call themself educated. well i am not but war and reading about war is a big hobby. Iran is the biggest sponsor of terror against Israel and the west. So thinking this averds war is stupid.

Saudi Arabia is seeking nukes through Russia, that looks for money. So "peace" is nothing but a word on paper.

2 △ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›



Gunnar Westberg • 2 days ago

REJOICE - WITH TREPIDATION.

Gunnar Westberg

How I would like to say: Peace is saved! I would like to go out in the summer evening and sing: Blessed be the steps of the peacemakers.

I will do so. Yes, I will.

But there are fears in the recesses of my mind: Is the deal really safe from the warmakers in the US Senate? It ought to be because if they say No, the rest of the world is likely to go on and stick to the deal, and the US would be the great loser, losing trade and influence. But I do not know what tricks the US senators may have up the sleeve. After all, their defeat will be difficult to bear.

And Netanyahu, what can he do? He will look for ways to make it seem that Iran is about to attack Israel. There are ways to produce subterfuge. Groups under Israeli influence may kill Israeli diplomats or blow up a building in Israel. Israeli terrorists could launch an attack on a US embassy, or a US passenger plane, making it look as an attack from Iran.

I do hope my fears will not come true. I do, I do, I do

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General_Chaos > Gunnar_Westberg • 2 days ago

And you have no worries about what Iran will do with sanctions relief? Might it not increase its support for the murderous Assad regime, the Quds Force, the IRGC efforts underway in several countries? This deal will hand over billions of dollars for the largest state-sponsor of terror on the planet, and a state that the IAEA last week says is still not complying with its obligations...and you are worried about the US Senate. Wow.

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pfbonney > General_Chaos • a day ago

Yeah. This guy is as gullible as they get.

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R Spitzer • 2 days ago

All this deal means with a 14 day delay between request and inspection is a Arab/Sunni Bomb.

Even if the Iranian's keep this deal and the West believes them, the Sunni Arab states are on record they expect the exact same deal.

Then the West can not control the end result in that circumstance.

2 △ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›



RobGoldston • 2 days ago

Indeed! Next we need an Israeli-Palestinian agreement.

1 △ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›



pfbonney > RobGoldston • a day ago

We've already been down that road. Yassir Arafat never showed up. The Palestinians voted in Hamas only because they saw Hamas as being the most uncompromising of the candidates, not because they saw Hamas as the best administrators, e.g., keeping taxes low, attracting jobs with a living wage, establishing low-crime policies, promoting the "Lawn of the Month" awards, etc..

Besides, the last thing we need from this administration is another bad one like this one.

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RobGoldston > pfbonney • 13 hours ago

Just to be clear my point was that we need an Israeli-Palestinian agreement before we can expect to negotiate a NWFZ in the Middle East. As I understand it, this is - more or less - the position of the State of Israel. How we get to an Israeli-Palestinian agreement is another question. Got any ideas?

1 △ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›



pfbonney > RobGoldston • 11 hours ago

None.

While what you say is true, about that being a

prerequisite for a deal, as intransigent as the Palestinians are (in view of the failed prior deal with Arafat, where he was to receive all of his stated goals for not much in return) and as much as Israel needs security deals due to her precarious situation, I'm thinking the whole thing is a lost cause.

The chain of events have already been set in motion for some degree of calamity. Let's hope not nuclear.

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