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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.



[\(/bio/john-mecklin\)](#)

JOHN MECKLIN
[\(/BIO/JOHN-MECKLIN\)](#)

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...

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INVITED EXPERT COMMENTARY

William H. Tobey, senior fellow, Harvard's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs

21 JULY 2015



Mark Hibbs, senior associate, Carnegie Nuclear Policy Program

20 JULY 2015



Oliver Meier, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP)

20 JULY 2015



The nuclear deal adopted the E3/EU+3 and Iran on July 14 is a political game changer, in many ways. Successful implementation could pave the way for a reintegration of Iran into the international community. It could foster a more constructive role of Tehran in efforts to tackle some of the many regional security problems. Failure would likely lead to increased isolation of Iran and poison US-Iran relations for many years, if not decades.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) could also provide an urgently needed boost for nuclear non-proliferation efforts. Should Iran for the next 15 to 25 years faithfully restrict its nuclear program and provide additional transparency, suspicions of regional neighbors about Iran's intentions may be alleviated. The risk of a regional nuclear arms race would decrease. One key milestone in this regard will arrive soon. By December 15, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will deliver a "final assessment" of Iran's past nuclear weapons-related activities. A transparent, comprehensive account by Tehran of efforts to develop a nuclear weapons capability is one litmus test for the JCPOA.

The E3/EU+3 and Iran declare in the JCPOA's preamble that the agreement "should not be considered as setting precedents for any other state or for fundamental principles of international law and the rights and obligations under the NPT and other relevant instruments." Legally speaking, this is a wise statement because it limits the applicability of the accord to the unique case of Iran. But at the same time, it is difficult to underestimate the political importance of the JCPOA for global nonproliferation efforts.

Successful implementation of JCPOA over the next 15 to 25 years would set the precedent of a non-compliant state rebuilding international confidence in the peaceful nature of its nuclear program, without regime change. Many of the mechanisms and instruments detailed in the JCPOA would surely be reference points for future attempts to resolve similar problems.

The Joint Commission of the E3/EU+3 and Iran is the most innovative part of this overall effort to bring Iran back into the nonproliferation regime. The commission and its technical working groups will simultaneously serve as a clearing-house, a monitoring mechanism, and a decision-making and implementing body. This large and diverse portfolio is likely to complicate proceedings. And great care will have to be taken that the Joint Commission's decisions do not undermine the authority of the IAEA.

Germany is the only member of the Joint Commission that is a non-nuclear weapon state in good standing under the NPT. Berlin will thus have to represent the interest of the 186 NPT non-nuclear weapon states. Berlin and the EU's high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, who will be the commission's coordinator, bear special responsibility; they will have to counter the impression that NPT nuclear weapon states who are also permanent members of the Security Council—China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States—exploit their already privileged positions to steer implementation of the JCPOA to suit their interests.

The JCPOA could also demonstrate the effectiveness of nonproliferation instruments that do not yet enjoy universal support. Thus, monitoring and verification hinge on procedures detailed in the Additional Protocol, which Iran has pledged to apply and later ratify. The JCPOA's implementation plan incentivizes Iran to cooperate with the IAEA beyond the Additional Protocol, so the Agency can draw "broader conclusions" about the absence of undeclared nuclear activities, at an early date. This would strengthen the IAEA's case for using tailor-made "state level" verification approaches. The JCPOA contains many other novel and important elements that might be emulated. These include the conversion of the heavy water reactor in Arak to a proliferation-resistant design and using international cooperation on nuclear research to reduce the likelihood of military misuse.

To be sure, from the perspective of the global non-proliferation regime the JCPOA also has shortcomings. For example, Tehran has been offered nuclear assistance even before the process of reestablishing international confidence is completed, and even though it will not give up its enrichment plans. This is likely to undermine efforts to convince other states, in the context of nuclear cooperation agreements, to waive the right to reprocess used nuclear fuel and close the nuclear fuel cycle.

The JCPOA will take the NPT into a new era. The nuclear accord carries in it the seeds of a more effective non-proliferation regime. Should the agreement withstand the tests of time, it is likely to be cited in the future as proof that even the toughest non-compliance cases can be resolved through diplomacy, within the NPT framework. Should the deal collapse, the impression could prevail that treaty violations are best dealt with through sanctions and military force. This danger alone justifies every effort to make the JCPOA work.

Emily B. Landau, senior research fellow and head of the Arms Control and

- Regional Security Program, Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv**
17 JULY 2015
- Chuck Freilich, former deputy national security adviser in Israel and current senior fellow, Harvard's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs**
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- Zia Mian, Program on Science & Global Security, Princeton University**
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- Sharon Squassoni, director and senior fellow, Proliferation Prevention Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies**
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- Lawrence Korb and Katherine Blakeley, senior fellow and policy analyst (respectively), Center for American Progress**
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- 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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mortuccio • 7 days ago

If you really believe that Iran should not have nuclear weapons then you have to cut off the major artery to producing one-- national enrichment, either by buying out and removing the infrastructure or converting the facility to multinational ownership that can be extended eventually to create a Middle East WMD free, including Israel. This is not a new idea proposed earlier by Egypt and Iran but ignored by the UN. The current deal does not prevent Iran from obtaining a bomb.

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xexon • 8 days ago

Until you make Israel become a team player and open their facilities to the SAME inspections as Iran, anything we accomplish with Iran is going to be buggered by our own hypocrisy...

And I think that's how much of the world sees this.

These negotiations are far, far more about Israel maintaining it's military superiority in the region than it is anything else.

Beside Iran doesn't need the bomb. Because neither Russia or China is going to allow anything to happen to them. Do we really want to wake up the Russian bear or the Chinese dragon?

No, boys and girls. We do not.

But we can de-escalate this by restoring diplomatic relations with Iran. They do have legitimate concerns with us. They need to be talked out. And we need to make Israel sit in the corner while we do.

x

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



ConnieHinesDorothyProvine • 8 days ago

Israel likes to portray itself as the victim of Iranian aggression, but opening back up to Iran will be good for Israel. And anyway, it's Israel that's the Mideast's military superpower. It could wipe out every other country in the region in a few minutes (and would probably like to).

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



RobGoldston • 8 days ago

The deal between the P5+1 and Iran is extremely good for Israel. It is vastly better than the world Israel will face if the US Congress prevents the US from signing on. For example, a maximum 24-day delay for inspections anywhere is vastly better than no inspections, no-where, no time. It takes much longer than 24 days to build up to, or clean up from, an enrichment facility. 5060 centrifuges and 300 kg of 3.5% enriched uranium hexafluoride are much better than 25,000 centrifuges and 12,000 kg of UF6. Zero weapons-grade plutonium production is much better than one or two bomb's worth per year.

If Congress scuttles the deal, both the international sanctions and the monitored limits on Iran's program will quickly evaporate. This is the worst of all possible worlds. There will be no coherent restraints on Iran, and Iran will want to show its resolve, just as it has done before. So in a few months we will be back at the red line PM Netanyahu warned about at the UN in 2012.

See <http://blogs.timesofisrael.com...>



3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



R Spitzer • 8 days ago

Now we learn the US, UK, France and China are EXCLUDED from inspecting the sites forever. Iran will not allow representatives of these countries to inspect their sites. The US allows Russian inspectors in to US nuclear sites.

Please one reputable response explaining to me how we can have inspections without members party to the agreement inspecting the sites?

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Jay → R Spitzer • 5 days ago

The five countries that are party to the deal, the P5, members of the U.N. Security Council, is a representative body of the U.N. and therefore of the world. That US, UK, French and Chinese inspectors are excluded should not be a deal breaker. The IAEA, the body that will be conducting inspections, is not lacking in nuclear experts from other countries. Besides nothing prevents experts from the excluded countries from instructing, supervising or checking work done by allowed inspectors.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Desert8Eagle9 • 8 days ago

Sig Hecker, former director of Los Alamos National lab and an expert in plutonium metallurgy, skips over the relationship between the type of international scientific and technical cooperation Iran wants to choose... and its relationship to the scientific basis to design, test and build miniaturized warheads and three-stage thermonuclear bombs with yields up to 10 megatons.

Plasma physics is very important to understanding what happens when the primary fission point explodes and transfers energy through gatings and intermediate structures to trigger the secondary and then on.

Neutron science is important to every stage of the weapon.

Modeling criticality in nuclear fission is an import stage of weapon design.

And studying fusion takes scientists in high energy-density research.

Iran has proposed, and Dr. Moniz has agreed, that any nuclear weapons state can send nuclear scientists to teach Iranian scientists and build advanced equipment. There is no restriction on China or Russia or North Korea to not send a nuclear scientist with past nuclear weapons experience.

And recruits for the nuclear weapons program have always been drawn from those who trained in academic nuclear physics and worked on high energy equipment.

2 ^ | v | • Reply • Share ›



pfbonney → Desert8Eagle9 • 8 days ago

Wow. No one else is talking about that.

^ | v | • Reply • Share ›



Paul Sa • 9 days ago

More responsibility and control for nuclear weapons, because it is possible that in the near future, with the serious international crises that are entering (climate change, scarcity of resources, global warming, overpopulation, extremist ideologies), there are chances that some countries or extremist militant group, use nuclear weapons to counter the opponents.

^ | v | • Reply • Share ›



pfbonney • 10 days 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 "hugging their children with

see more

1 ^ | v | • Reply • Share ›



Charles Carey → pfbonney • 8 days ago

Rubbish-not one word about the deal in this comment. This is the tact of those against the deal.Trident II subs? really? UFB

1 ^ | v | • Reply • Share ›



pfbonney → Charles Carey • 8 days ago

I did reference the deal, indirectly. You just weren't reading closely enough.

What did you want for me to say about it, anyway?

1 ^ | v | • Reply • Share ›



pfbonney → pfbonney • 8 days ago

Okay. Anyway. I'll go ahead and say what it is that I think is important about the deal. I think anyone can figure out from what I have written already that I don't support it. But, specifically:

Obama declared that the agreement was "built on verification," not trust.

For starters, there is no clear path to inspections. There is no assurance that you can do any inspection, any time, for anything. There is no indication that, after the agreement's term, that Iran is going to then agree that they (Iran) is not going to pick up the pursuit of nuclear weapons.

As is so often the case, President Obama is misleading the American people. The fact is there will be no 24/7 "anywhere, anytime" inspections allowed of undeclared suspicious sites. The fine print of the final

see more

^ | v | • Reply • Share ›



Jay → pfbonney • 5 days ago

The center of your critique seems to be that Iran has a say in the inspections request process, and that the process allows room for enough delays for Iran to prepare for the inspection.

Both are valid points. However, I think there's sufficient reason not to be worried about those potential loopholes.

Before I elaborate, I'll quickly address one of your other critiques...about "no anywhere, anytime" inspection. No one can blame Iran for not allowing that. I understand their concern about such a provision allowing inspection of other non-nuclear related areas and revelation secrets, which they're fully entitled to as a sovereign country. I mean, think about it, do

see more

^ | v | • Reply • Share ›



pfbonney → Jay • 4 days ago

I do appreciate your measured, reasoned response.

I certainly do hope they find whatever we need to be finding. myself. Iran has never been

to be making, myself. Iran has never been forthcoming and straightforward on much.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Jay → pfbonney • 4 days ago

And I don't think anyone is blind to Iran's mendacious tendencies or expects them to be forthcoming. That's why the burden of proof is on us to prove whatever we're accuse them of. The P5 and the rest of the world got on board with the crippling sanctions that brought Iran to the negotiating table in the first place because we made a compelling case. We provided the evidence of secret activities. So rather than "hope", I'd encourage you to inquire of your elected representatives of efforts to ensure that our agencies have those tools and resources that they need to do their work.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



iharry → Jay • 4 days ago

Ok, so, if the Iranians store properly shielded (more than 10cm in thickness) HEU at what becomes a suspected site, do you think those inspectors will find anything?

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Jay → iharry • 4 days ago

Now you're asking the kind of questions that anyone who is really concerned, and I hope Congress, will be asking.

First, I don't know Iran even has any "HEU" or weapon-grade uranium. The news often talk about them having "enough uranium for x number of bombs. But everything I've read says that Iran's most "potent" stock is of 20%-enriched uranium, which is good enough for medical applications, but no where near the 90-95% enrichment needed for a bomb.

Second, as I intimated in a previous comment, detecting Iran's clandestine activity is totally on us (as in the collective world "us" represented by the IAEA). We have no choice but to trust the international institutions that we are part of. The

comment at this point should be made to the comment

see more

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



iharry → iharry • 4 days ago

forgive me. I meant assuming the Iranians move the shielded HEU before the inspectors arrive (which of course they would do).

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Charles Carey → pfbonney • 8 days ago

What ,exactly , is wrong with it other than references to the Rosenbergs, and Trident subs. Actually , Reagan faced the same naysayers with the arms limitation deal.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



pfbonney → Charles Carey • 8 days ago

Now, I'm not following YOU. Before, you were sounding critical, now you're sounding sympathetic. I almost didn't pick up on the fact that you were the same person I had just replied to.

[Edit] Okay. I re-read it twice more and finally got your meaning. You were so angry you couldn't write clearly. But, had I put force the necessary effort, I could have (and did) get your meaning.

1 ^ [] • Reply • Share >



boonteetan • 10 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?

^ [] • Reply • Share >



Scott in VA → boonteetan • 8 days ago

The "nutshell"?

As you know, the devil is in the details, such as NO wherever/whenever inspections and immediate release of hundreds of millions of dollars to a terrorist nation.

1 ^ [] • Reply • Share >



David Szabo • 11 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

1 ^ [] • Reply • Share >



hans • 11 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.

3   • Reply • Share ›



dinkydave → hans • 17 hours ago

If Saudis really feel need for nukes, they seem to have agreements in place with their Wahabi buddies in Pakistan. Fun, wow!

^  • Reply • Share ›



Gunnar Westberg • 11 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

1   • Reply • Share ›



General_Chaos → Gunnar Westberg • 10 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.

4   • Reply • Share ›



pfbonney → General_Chaos • 10 days ago

Yeah. This guy is as gullible as they get.

2   • Reply • Share ›



Boleslaw Bierut → pfbonney • 3 days ago

not just gullible; he's a conspirational anti-Zionist or, to put it simply, an antisemite.

1   • Reply • Share ›



pfbonney → Boleslaw Bierut • 3 days ago

Yeah. Probably that's a lot closer to the truth.

^  • Reply • Share ›



R Spitzer • 11 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.

4   • Reply • Share ›



RobGoldston • 11 days ago

Indeed! Next we need an Israeli-Palestinian agreement.

1   • Reply • Share ›



pfbonney → RobGoldston • 10 days 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.

1   • Reply • Share ›



RobGoldston → pfbonney • 9 days 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 • 9 days 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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