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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-...

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### INVITED EXPERT COMMENTARY

**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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The Iran nuclear deal is not a grand historic mistake as some have called it, but much hard work lies ahead to make it a historic opportunity. Even so, the Iran nuclear deal was hard-won and is better than any other reasonably achievable alternative.

Negotiations over the past 20 months have already curtailed Iran's nuclear technical capacity; the agreement calls for significant additional scaling back of the most sensitive parts of Iran's nuclear program, making it more difficult, but not impossible, for Iran to pursue the bomb. Iran agreed to considerably greater restrictions on its program than what I thought was possible, based on a Track II meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Iranian technical experts before the Joint Plan of Action was signed in November 2013.

During the past 20 years, Iran has already developed the requisite technical capabilities for an option to build a bomb. The hard work ahead must now focus on convincing Iran not to exercise that option. An intrusive monitoring and inspection regime is being put in place. It will also be imperative that the international community develops a credible and decisive response in the event of an Iranian violation of the agreement

These measures are necessary, although they are inherently adversarial. The most effective approach to dissuade Iran from pursuing the bomb is to mount a parallel, positive effort to integrate Iran's nuclear program through international scientific and technical cooperation. The best hope is to make the civilian path so appealing—and then successful—that Tehran will not want to risk the political and economic consequences of that success by pursuing the bomb option. In other words, implementation of the deal has to provide both incentives and disincentives.

On a final note, there will be endless questioning about the technical details of the complex agreement. I take some comfort that this agreement was one of the most technically informed diplomatic negotiations I have seen. Although US Secretary of State John Kerry and Zarif were in the spotlight, they had at their sides two world-class nuclear scientists, US Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz and head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, Ali-Akbar Salehi. They, in turn, had the advice of nuclear experts in their laboratories at their fingertips. Scientific resources will be just as critical during implementation of the agreement, if it is to turn into a historic success.

**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 seems 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

△ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›



**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.

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**RobGoldston** • 2 days ago

Indeed! Next we need an Israeli-Palestinian agreement.

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**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?

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**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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