



The Real Facts on the Iran Nuclear Deal

Opponents of the deal to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran make arguments based on fiction. No one on either side of the debate wants to see Iran with a nuclear weapon. But the merits of the deal come down to a few simple questions: will the world be safer with the deal than without? Is the deal better than the status quo? **The answer is yes on both accounts. Now, here are the real facts.**

Claim 1: Iran can't be trusted and won't keep its end of the deal.

The Facts:

The deal is not based on trust. It is based on verification. No one can predict the future; it's impossible to know whether or not Iran will keep its end of the deal. But no deal means no verification, and without inspections and verification we are in a far worse position to curtail Iran's nuclear program.

It is also important to keep in mind the alternatives, or lack of alternatives, to this diplomatic solution: 1) we bomb Iran, 2) we implement new sanctions on Iran, or 3) we do nothing. U.S. intelligence does not think Iran is currently seeking nuclear weapons. Walking away from the negotiations leaves three terrible options that might *encourage* Iran to race for the bomb—and set off an arms race in the Middle East.

Our best option for a nuclear weapons free Iran is not to trust, but to verify, that Iran is complying with its side of the deal. Even if Iran cheats, with the deal, we'll know far more about Iran's nuclear activities than we do now. And that will mean that all of the alternatives—including the least desirable, military action—will be more effective.

Claim 2: The deal, if implemented, will expire after 10 or 15 years and allow Iran to build a nuclear weapon at that time.

The Facts:

According to the comprehensive agreement, for at least 15 years, Iran will not enrich uranium up to 3.67 percent (uranium enriched at 20% or lower is considered low enriched uranium (LEU); uranium enriched above 90% is weapons grade.) This does not, however, mean that on day one of year 16, Iran will have enough weapons-grade uranium to build a bomb.

And yes, after 15 years Iran *could* begin enriching uranium beyond 3.67 percent. But without this deal, Iran *could* head for a bomb *tomorrow*.

Some aspects of the agreement will last 25 years, including the monitoring of Iran's uranium mines and supply chain. Other aspects, such as the implementation of robust IAEA safeguards and access to investigate suspicious sites for illicit nuclear activity, are permanent.

Ultimately, the deal buys us time. It gives us complete oversight on Iran's enrichment capabilities for at least 15 years. Without a deal, we'd have no oversight. The deal buys the United States and its allies more than a decade to curtail Iran's regional adventurism and address any attempts to develop a nuclear weapon.

Claim 3: A good deal must force Iran to reveal the specifics of all of its past nuclear activities.

The Facts:

Under the deal, Iran must submit a full report to the IAEA regarding its nuclear history before it can receive any sanctions relief. The IAEA will have a chance to review the report and follow-up with Iran in order to conclude its investigation.

While this process is an important step for understanding the technical nature of Iran's nuclear program, knowledge of *all* of Iran's past nuclear activities is not necessary to ensure Iran is in compliance with the stipulations of the deal.

U.S. intelligence has determined the extent to which Iran has pursued nuclear weapons in the past, and knows that Iran stopped pursuing research on a potential nuclear weapons program in 2003.

We can't change the past, but we can verify that Iran is complying with the parameters of the deal as their implemented, to ensure those pre-2003 activities are over for good. Verification of Iran's nuclear activities over the next 20 years is far more important to our national security than what happened 20 years ago.

Claim 4: Unfettered access to Iran's military facilities is necessary to catch Iranian violations of the deal.

The Facts:

Inspections will be critical to the verification process. But no sovereign nation would give IAEA inspectors *unrestricted* access to sensitive sites, including military facilities, arbitrarily. According to Jim Walsh, international security expert at MIT and Council for a Livable World Board Member, "Achieving the objective of timely notice does not require that IAEA have instant or all encompassing knowledge of everything that Iran does. Rather it requires the ability to collect information on potential violations such that the United States and the international community can take actions to end and reverse non-compliance before Iran is able to acquire a nuclear weapon."

Furthermore, under the comprehensive agreement between the P5+1 and Iran, Iran will implement an Additional Protocol, which sets requirements and provides the legal authority for IAEA inspectors to access all nuclear and suspected nuclear facilities in perpetuity.

Claim 5: 24 days is more than enough time for Iran to cover up its illicit nuclear activities.

The Facts:

The IAEA can request access with 24-hour notice to any suspected nuclear facility (or any site inspectors suspect might be conducting illicit nuclear activities). If Iran denies access, the JCPOA offers a new process to ensure access: a joint commission comprised of one representative from each P5+1 country plus Iran, conduct a majority vote to grant the IAEA access. Unlike the UN Security Council, no one party gets a veto on this commissions. That means Russia, China and Iran can't prevent inspections.

This approval process takes, at most, 24 days to complete. But 24 days is not enough time for Iran to deconstruct any substantial enrichment architecture. [According to](#) Gary Samore, Executive Director for Research at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University, "that wouldn't be enough time to hide evidence of the uranium enrichment facilities Iran would need to create the fissile material required for a bomb."

The half-life of nuclear material is thousands of years. If Iran had *ever* had material that could be used to make a nuclear bomb at a given location, inspectors would be able to find traces of it.

The physical structures needed to enrich weapons-grade uranium or plutonium won't be easy to covertly deconstruct in 24 days. Furthermore, international intelligence apparatuses will surely have their eye on any facility they suspect is conducting illicit nuclear activities.

Claim 6: Sanctions relief for Iran should be tied to Iran's support for terrorism and human rights abuses.

The Facts:

Tying sanctions to Iran's alleged illicit activities is outside the scope of the nuclear negotiations. The purpose of the deal is to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. Period. Marrying issues unrelated to Iran's nuclear program, such as terrorism and human rights, would quash any prospect for success on the nuclear front. Furthermore, all sanctions related to Iran's history of human rights abuses and connections to terrorist organizations will stay in place if the deal is implemented.

Congress already rejected tying sanctions relief to a requirement that the administration declare that Iran is not supporting terrorism against Americans – an amendment offered by Senator Barrasso (R-Wyo.) to the Iran Nuclear Review Act passed in April. The bill passed without this and other poison pill amendments.

Claim 7: Iran will use sanctions relief to pursue regional hegemony and further support terrorism.

The Facts:

An Iran with a nuclear weapon, and a nuclear umbrella to extend over its terrorist connections, would be disastrous for stability in the Middle East and the world. This deal eliminates that threat.

Furthermore, according to [a report](#) recently released by the CIA, Iran will use most of the released funds it receives from sanctions relief into its economy, not into militant groups it supports. In addition, the funds Iran does use to supplement its destabilizing activity will not be enough to tip the balance of power in the region.

Iran has a lot of economic recovery and development to do. Iranian President Rouhani has promised to revive the economy by completing formerly halted development projects and bringing down the rate of inflation— for which the Iranian people have been demanding.

According to Richard Nephew, Program Director of Economic Statecraft, Sanctions and Energy Markets at the Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University, “the issue of Iranian support for terrorism is not whether they have the financial resources to do it but rather whether they have the political will, opportunity, and foreign policy incentive ... to do so. A nuclear deal will not change this.”

Claim 8: So-called “snapback” sanctions are a major concession to Iran.

The Facts:

The Iran deal includes a “snapback” mechanism for re-imposing U.N. sanctions on Iran if they fail to comply with their obligations. Critics have mischaracterized it as a concession to the Iranians. The IAEA will monitor Iran’s nuclear facilities and report back to the United Nations Security Council its findings. If a violation is reported, the snapback mechanism kicks in and sanctions are re-imposed. Snapback sanctions are by no means a concession to Iran—Iran only gets relief if it plays by the rules.

Also worth noting, the “snapback” process, which occurs via a vote to continue the lifting of sanctions, cannot be stopped by a veto from Russia or China. Instead, a veto automatically reapplies sanctions.

Sanctions against Iran aren’t homogenous; different sanctions will affect Iran’s economy in different ways. Easing restrictions on Iran’s ability to compete in foreign markets, for instance, *could* greatly impact Iran’s economy, but that will take years, if ever, to happen. And thanks to the Iran Nuclear Review Act, Congress will have 60 days to review the details of the agreement before any congressionally enacted sanctions are lifted.

Sanctions are not a replacement for any other alternatives. As President Obama said in a press conference in July 2015, “we haven't given away any of our military capabilities. We're not in a weaker position to respond... And so why wouldn't we at least make sure that for the next 10, 15 years they are not getting a nuclear weapon and we can verify it[?]”

Claim 9: Lifting the UN embargo on conventional arms transfers to Iran will embolden Iran and lead to further instability in the region.

The Facts:

The conventional arms embargo was adopted as a part of UN Security Council resolution in 2010. Because the embargo was included in the sanctions against Iran’s nuclear program, the comprehensive agreement permits a phased lifting of the United Nations embargo on conventional arms transfers to Iran. The embargo won’t be lifted right away, though; it will continue for at least 5 more years.

Critics claim that the eventual lifting of these sanctions will facilitate Iran’s “imperial surge.” However, many of Iran’s staunchest foes, including Israel and Saudi Arabia, have much more advanced weaponry than Iran. The United States will continue to offer military assistance to these countries to counter Iran.

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia spends more than four times what Iran spends on its military. And Saudi Arabia plus the United Arab Emirates, two of the United States’ strongest allies in the region, spend a combined 60% of the Middle East’s overall military spending.

Claim 10: Iran gets to have its cake and eat it, too: sanctions relief and keep its nuclear program.

The Facts:

Abolishing Iran's entire nuclear program—including its nuclear energy infrastructure—[was never on the table](#). And arguing for zero enrichment is something of a unicorn argument, and it isn't part of the final agreement. Yes, Iran gets to keep a very low level of enriched uranium for power. But the JCPOA will cut off all paths to a nuclear bomb: uranium, plutonium, and covert action. Without a deal, Iran's path to a bomb is unobstructed.

Sanctions relief for Iran is tied to verification by the IAEA that Iran is complying with the parameters of the deal. As Iran incrementally completes its responsibilities under the deal, it receives economic relief from nuclear-related sanctions. Sanctions related to Iran's support for terrorism and human rights abuses will remain in place.

Claim 11: Iran's nuclear infrastructure will cause a nuclear cascade throughout the Middle East.

The Facts:

Iran has had a nuclear program since the 1980s. If Iran's nuclear program were going to cause regional proliferation, it would have already happened.

Many countries in the Middle East are [exploring](#) nuclear power; but nuclear energy programs aren't cheap. Developing a nuclear power plant costs \$4-10 billion dollars and would likely require financial assistance from the West. Peaceful nuclear programs are not a proliferation threat, and civilian nuclear programs are acceptable under the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Treaty (NPT), of which every single country in the region, except Israel, is a party. Also, the United States provides security assistance to many of Iran's neighbors and can use this leverage to prevent nuclear proliferation. Saudi Arabia, for example, would likely not risk its alliance with the United States in order to pursue a nuclear weapon to counter Iran's constrained nuclear program.

Claim 12: The Iran deal will fail just like the Agreed Framework with North Korea failed.

The Facts:

Comparing the outcome of the Iran nuclear negotiations with the North Korea negotiations is like comparing apples to dragon fruit. They're both fruit, but that's about it. For starters, the Agreed Framework with North Korea was four pages long. The Iran deal is 159 pages.

The framework with North Korea only addressed the plutonium pathway to bomb, whereas the Iran deal blocks all three paths to a bomb: plutonium, uranium, and covert action.

According to Paul Pillar, a CIA veteran and a senior fellow at Georgetown University and the Brookings Institute, "The Agreed Framework was a sketchy four-page document that provided for little in the way of monitoring and enforcement. In contrast, the leading feature of the agreement being negotiated with Iran is

its unprecedented degree of monitoring and inspections. The final agreement will have an enforcement and dispute resolution mechanism consistent with the Additional Protocol pertaining to work of the International Atomic Energy Agency."

Finally, the North Korea framework was a bilateral arrangement between the U.S. and North Korea. The Iran deal is inherently stronger because more parties were involved in the negotiations process, and will be involved in its enforcement.

Claim 13: The Iran Deal does not deter small violations of the deal.

The Facts:

Assuming that the P5+1 would not punish Iran for small violations of the deal for fear of collapsing the entire agreement is unduly pessimistic. The United States and its allies still have every tool in the toolbox for responding to an Iranian violation of the deal. If Iran does violate the agreement, the United States and its international partners can reimpose sanctions to incrementally and proportionally apply pressure on Iran. The United States has stacked the dispute resolution process so no coalition between Iran, Russia, and China can prevent the reapplication of sanctions.

Iran, like all parties to the agreement, can walk away at any time. But if Iran were to leave the agreement after being punished for violating the deal, the international community would be justified in applying the full weight of sanctions to bring Iran back into compliance. We would then be back where we started before the deal, except that Iran would have considerably less centrifuges and nuclear material, while the IAEA will have more insight into the history and current status of Iran's nuclear program.