

Iran Nuclear Deal: Correcting Misconceptions

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As presidential candidates Donald Trump (R) and Hilary Clinton (D) are questioned on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran, some misconceptions about the Iran deal are surfacing. This sheet is intended to reduce the spread of misinformation as the election nears.

1. Misconception: The Iran Deal included a U.S. payment of \$150 billion to Iran

The Facts:

The money that Iran receives from complying with the agreement is not a direct payment from the U.S. government. Instead, the funds are Iranian foreign assets, which the international sanctions regime prevented Iran from accessing. Under the JCPOA, these nuclear-related sanctions were waived after Iran verifiably completed its [initial obligations](#).

The \$150 billion figure is also inaccurate. The amount of money Iran could access from these foreign reserves is about \$100 billion. Of this amount, about half of it is tied up in Iranian foreign debts. As Treasury Secretary, Jacob Lew, [testified](#) before Congress, the actual amount that Iran would be able to use is about \$50 billion.

2. Misconception: The Iran deal included a ransom payment for hostages

The Facts:

After implementation of the Iran Deal, the United States sent \$1.7 billion to Iran. Some are now claiming this was a ransom payment for the return of American citizens that were being held hostage by Iran.

Lisa Grosh, a legal advisor for the Department of State, [testified](#) before Congress that the \$1.7 billion was comprised of \$400 million that Iran had placed in a U.S. Foreign Military Sales trust fund and \$1.3 billion in interest. At the time of the Iran deal negotiations, the United States and Iran were involved in a legal arbitration case over the amount of interest the U.S. owed on this fund.

As for the fact that the payment coincided with the hostages' release, Suzanne Maloney of the Brookings Center [explains](#) that "the settlement and the prisoner release were two separate channels." Once the settlement of the claim was determined, the U.S. simply did not issue payment until the separately-negotiated prisoner release was completed.

3. Misconception: "Breakout time" is the time needed to develop a nuclear bomb

The Facts:

Under the JCPOA, Iran's "breakout time" is evaluated to be at least one year. But there is an important distinction between the "breakout time" and the amount of time needed to develop a credible nuclear weapon. A country's "breakout time" is the time required to produce enough weapons-grade uranium or plutonium for one nuclear weapon. The International Atomic Energy Agency estimates this amount to be about [25kg](#) of highly enriched uranium (90% or more of enrichment). However, even if Iran had the required amount and enrichment level of uranium for a nuclear bomb, it would still need time to develop a viable weapon. This includes miniaturizing a nuclear weapon to be attached to a missile and producing a missile that functions accurately and reliably. Both of these developments are challenging and time-consuming. Furthermore, one untested nuclear weapon is not enough for a credible deterrent.

4. Misconception: The Iran Deal stopped Iran's Nuclear Program

The Facts:

The objective of the JCPOA was to verifiably constrain Iran's nuclear program and impede progress towards a nuclear weapon. However, the agreement does permit Iran to keep a comparatively small amount of monitored low-enriched uranium. Thus, the Iran Deal does not extinguish all Iranian nuclear activity, but constrains and restricts Iran's ability to obtain a nuclear weapon. To learn more about Iran's obligations under the agreement, view the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation's [factsheet](#).