

Analysis: Understanding the Iran Nuclear Deal

On July 14, 2015 the United States and its international negotiating partners (P5+1: United Kingdom, France, Russia, China, and Germany) announced a [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action](#) to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. Our analysis, (largely shared by [other nonproliferation experts and scientists](#)), is that this deal is an effective, comprehensive solution for preventing a nuclear-armed Iran.

The Deal

To reach the agreement, Iran made considerable concessions and will maintain a constrained nuclear program that is useful only for peaceful purposes for more than a decade—and likely well beyond. Iran’s nuclear program will be subject to an intrusive inspections and monitoring system to ensure Iran will not have the ability to obtain a uranium or plutonium bomb covertly.

In exchange, Iran will receive economic relief from U.S., E.U., and U.N. sanctions that directly targeted Iran’s nuclear program. Other sanctions aimed at Iran’s sponsorship of terrorism and human rights violations will remain in place.

The Details

Below are specific provisions from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which will ensure that Iran cannot build or cheat their way to a nuclear bomb.

Preventing a Uranium Bomb

- Iran will maintain a stockpile of less than 300 kg of uranium hexafluoride (or the equivalent in other chemical forms) for 15 years. (Down from 10,000 kg)
- Iran will only enrich uranium up to 3.67% for 15 years. (90% is weapons-grade)
- Iran will reduce its installed centrifuges by two-thirds and only operate its most primitive centrifuges for 10 years.
- Iran will not have nuclear material or conduct enrichment at the underground Fordow facility for 15 years.
- Iran will not build any new nuclear enrichment facilities for 15 years.

Preventing a Plutonium Bomb

- Iran will never have any weapons-grade plutonium at Arak (Permanent).
- Iran will not reprocess spent fuel for at least 15 years.
- Iran will ship all spent fuel from the Arak reactor (Permanent).
- Iran will not develop any additional heavy water reactors for 15 years.

Monitoring, Verification, and Transparency

- Iran will implement the [Additional Protocol](#) to allow increased access to inspectors, including to military installations where nuclear activity is suspected. (Permanent)
- Iran will implement the Modified Code 3.1, which requires Iran to provide notification and details regarding future plans to build nuclear facilities (Permanent)
- Iran will submit answers to questions regarding the possible military dimensions of its nuclear program by October 15, 2015. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will submit its final assessment by December 15, 2015.
- The IAEA will monitor Iran’s uranium supply chain for 25 years and centrifuge production chain for 20 years.

- Iran will purchase nuclear material & equipment through a designated and monitored procurement channel.

Longevity:

- While some aspects of the deal are phased out after 10 years, other important verification capabilities are supported for 15, 20, and 25 years while others will exist in perpetuity. Iran has committed to ratify the Additional Protocol, which will permanently grant inspectors advanced access to Iran's nuclear facilities and the ability to investigate suspicious activity.

Sanctions:

- Iran receives no "signing bonus" for agreeing to a deal. Instead, Iran must take verified steps towards implementing the deal before receiving any sanctions relief.
- U.S. sanctions related to Iran's sponsorship of terrorism, human rights abuses, and missile activities, will remain in place.
- A sanction infrastructure will be left in place to snap sanctions back if Iran violates the deal.
- Regarding arms embargos, the UN sanctions on conventional weapons and Iran's missile program that were tied to Iran's nuclear program will not be lifted for five years and eight years respectively. National sanctions on Iran's conventional weapons and missile capabilities will remain in place.

Accountability and Enforcement:

- All parties will fulfill their requirements incrementally, verifying mutual compliance at each step.
- A dispute resolution mechanism is in place to resolve conflicts in a timely and effective manner.
- If there is a perceived violation, a Joint Commission will have 15 days to resolve the issue.
- If the issue is not resolved, it can be escalated to the ministers of foreign affairs and/or a three person advisory board, who will have 15 days to address the issue.
- If the issue is still not resolved, parties may notify the UN Security Council of the significant break in the agreement.
- The UN Security Council will then have 30 days to consider and vote on a resolution to continue the sanctions lifting.

The Alternatives

States unilaterally attempted to increase sanctions pressure; it would likely have fractured the international sanctions network. This result would have alleviated the economic pressure on Iran without restricting its nuclear program: a win-win for Iran and an unfortunate blunder for the United States.

Some opponents believe Iran cannot be negotiated with at all, ignoring the U.S. bipartisan history of negotiating with adversaries - including Reagan with the Soviet Union and Nixon with China. Instead, they advocate for military intervention to destroy Iran's nuclear infrastructure. This approach has been resoundingly opposed by U.S. military leaders who suggest that [military action offers no long term solution](#) to the issue. At best, [military action could create a few years delay](#) before Iran could pursue nuclear weapons. Worse, it would likely create another protracted war in the Middle East.

This good deal is significantly better than the bad alternatives.