

The Comprehensive P5+1 Nuclear Agreement With Iran: A Net-Plus for Nonproliferation

Statement from Nuclear Nonproliferation Specialists
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The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is a strong, long-term, and verifiable agreement that will be a net-plus for international nuclear nonproliferation efforts.

It advances the security interests of the P5+1 nations (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States), the European Union, their allies and partners in the Middle East, and the international community.

When implemented, the JCPOA will establish long-term, verifiable restrictions on Iran's enrichment facilities and research and development, including advanced centrifuge research and deployment. Taken in combination with stringent limitations on Iran's low-enriched uranium stockpile, these restrictions ensure that Iran's capability to produce enough bomb-grade uranium sufficient for one weapon would be extended to approximately 12 months for a decade or more.

Moreover, the JCPOA will effectively eliminate Iran's ability to produce and separate plutonium for a nuclear weapon for at least 15 years, including by permanently modifying the Arak reactor, Iran's major potential source for weapons grade plutonium, committing Iran not to reprocess spent fuel, and shipping spent fuel out of the country.

The JCPOA is effectively verifiable. The agreement will put in place a multi-layered monitoring regime across Iran's entire nuclear supply chain, including centrifuge manufacturing sites (for 20 years), uranium mining and milling (for 25 years), and continuous monitoring of a larger number of nuclear and nuclear-related sites.

The JCPOA requires Iran to implement and ratify the additional protocol to Iran's comprehensive safeguards agreement, which significantly enhances the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) inspection regime. Among other measures, this will give international inspectors timely access to any Iranian facility of proliferation concern, including military sites, which the JCPOA will ensure cannot be stalled more than 24 days without serious consequences.

In addition, the JCPOA puts in place safeguards that require early notification of design changes or new nuclear projects by Iran (the modified code 3.1 provision). The additional protocol and code 3.1 monitoring and verification measures will remain in place indefinitely.

The JCPOA also requires that Iran cooperate with the IAEA to conclude its long-running investigation of Iran's past activities with possible military dimensions (PMDs) and permanently prohibits certain dual-use activities, which could contribute to the design and development of a nuclear explosive device.

Taken together, these rigorous limits and transparency measures will make it very likely that any future effort by Iran to pursue nuclear weapons, even a clandestine program, would be detected promptly, providing the opportunity to intervene decisively to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon.

The agreement requires that Iran undertake major steps—including to reduce its uranium enrichment capacity, modify the Arak reactor, allow for more intrusive international monitoring, and cooperate with the IAEA’s PMD investigation—before UN Security Council, U.S., and EU economic and financial sanctions are suspended or terminated, and it provides for swift consequences in the event of noncompliance.

If all sides comply with and faithfully implement their multi-year obligations, the agreement will reduce the risk of a destabilizing nuclear competition in a troubled region – giving time and space to address other regional problems without fear of an Iran armed with nuclear weapons—and head off a catastrophic military conflict over Iran's nuclear program.

Though all of us could find ways to improve the text, we believe the JCPOA meets key nonproliferation and security objectives and see no realistic prospect for a better nuclear agreement.

We urge the leaders of the P5+1 states, the European Union, and Iran to take the steps necessary to ensure timely implementation and rigorous compliance with the JCPOA.

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