

Statement from Nuclear Nonproliferation Experts on the Iran Nuclear Deal

September 2017

More than two years after the conclusion of negotiations on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) by the United States, its international negotiating partners (EU, China, France, Germany, Russia, and the United Kingdom), and Iran, the agreement has proven to be an effective and verifiable arrangement that is a net plus for international nuclear nonproliferation efforts.

The JCPOA is also considered an important success of multilateral diplomacy, the full implementation of which is critical to international peace and security.

Since the nuclear deal was implemented in January 2016, the JCPOA has dramatically reduced the risk posed by Iran's nuclear program and mandated unprecedented monitoring and transparency measures that make it very likely that any possible future effort by Iran to pursue nuclear weapons, even a clandestine program, would be detected promptly. By blocking Iran's potential pathways to nuclear weapons, the JCPOA has also decreased the likelihood of destabilizing nuclear competition in the region.

To meet its JCPOA obligations, Iran dismantled more than 13,000 centrifuges, placed them in monitored storage, and shipped out more than 11 tons of low-enriched uranium. Since implementation day, Iran has met its commitments to enrich uranium only up to 3.67 percent uranium-235, retain no more than the equivalent of 300 kilograms of uranium enriched to 3.67 percent in its stockpile, and enrich using only 5,060 first generation, IR-1 centrifuges.

Taken together these restrictions ensure that Iran's capability to produce enough bomb-grade uranium sufficient for one weapon would be approximately 12 months for a decade or more. This conclusion was underscored by Daniel Coats, Donald Trump's Director of National Intelligence, who stated in the May 2017 Worldwide Threat Assessment, that the JCPOA has "enhanced the transparency of Iran's nuclear activities" and "extended the amount of time Iran would need to produce enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon from a few months to about a year." Prior to commencing negotiations with Iran in 2013, that timeline would have been 2-3 months.

The JCPOA has effectively eliminated Iran's ability to produce and separate plutonium for a nuclear weapon for at least 15 years. Iran removed the vessel that would hold the core of the Arak reactor, filled it with cement, and is working with the EU3+3 on new core reactor design in which plutonium production would be reduced ten-fold. Iran also committed not to research how to reprocess spent fuel, much less engage in it, which would delay even more significantly Iran's ability to ever extract plutonium from any nuclear fuel it possesses. Additionally, Iran agreed to ship its spent fuel out of the country for 15 years.

Since implementation day in January 2016, Iran's compliance with its obligations has been effectively verified by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) through an intrusive, multilayered monitoring regime that spans Iran's nuclear supply chain. The JCPOA mandates

continuous surveillance of key activities, such as uranium mining and centrifuge production, and application of Iran's Additional Protocol, which gives inspectors additional information about, and access to, Iran's nuclear facilities. Iran's enrichment levels are also monitored in real time.

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 JCPOA has proven flexible and responsive to implementation problems that emerge. When Iran's supply of heavy water twice marginally exceeded the limit set by the JCPOA, the IAEA noted the excess and Iran promptly rectified the situation, which never posed a proliferation risk. While exceeding the limit by any amount is unhelpful, the way it and other definitional disagreements have been promptly rectified demonstrates the effectiveness of mechanisms established by the deal to resolve technical concerns. As of August, no international organization or national government has made any allegations of Iranian violations.

We firmly support vigorous efforts to monitor and enforce compliance with the JCPOA, but we are concerned by statements from the Trump administration that it may be seeking to create a false pretext for accusing Iran of noncooperation or noncompliance with the agreement in order to trigger the re-imposition of nuclear-related sanctions against Iran.

Abandoning the deal without clear evidence of an unresolved material breach by Iran that is corroborated by the other EU3+3 partners runs the risk that Tehran would resume some of its nuclear activities, such as enriching uranium to higher levels or increasing the number of operating centrifuges. These steps would decrease the time it would take for Iran to obtain enough nuclear material for a warhead.

Furthermore, unilateral action by the United States, especially on the basis of unsupported contentions of Iranian cheating, would isolate the United States. In doing so, the United States would discourage Iran and others—including Washington's EU3+3 partners—from supporting any U.S. proposal for negotiations on a new agreement while simultaneously damaging the agreement in place. Such an approach would also impede the United States' ability to seek future nonproliferation agreements, both with Iran and in the broader international community.

As long as Iran continues to fully implement the JCPOA, the nuclear deal advances the security interests of the United States, its EU3+3 partners, states in the region, and the entire international community. Abandoning the deal would also increase the likelihood of wider conflict in the Middle East and could trigger a destabilizing nuclear competition in region.

We strongly urge all parties to the JCPOA to meet their respective obligations under the terms of the agreement and to refrain from actions and statements that undermine its continued and effective implementation.

Furthermore, we urge the Trump administration and the U.S. Congress to continue to fulfill Washington's commitments under the accord and to refrain from actions that undermine U.S. obligations in the agreement.

Sincerely,

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