



November 26, 2013

## **BACKGROUND: IRAN AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

### **What's at stake and why does it matter?**

Iran is rapidly closing in on the ability to make a nuclear weapon. This is a concern because:

- Iran is within striking distance of Israel and its leaders have made many statements about destroying Israel.
- Iran can currently target US troops stationed in the Middle East and parts of Europe with conventional weapons. In the future, is quite possible that Iran could obtain the capacity to hit the US with a ballistic missile as well.
- Iran is a major state sponsor of terrorism. Iran or its proxies have committed acts of terrorism against the United States and Israel around the world.
- Iran could transfer technology and materials to terrorist groups such as Hezbollah, which has attacked Israeli and American interests around the world.
- Some believe that Iran is a rational actor and would not strike Israel knowing that its destruction would be assured, along the lines of the US and Soviet Union during the Cold War. However, others point out that if the Iranian regime in Iran feels threatened enough for its survival, it will have nothing to lose.
- It would affect the balance of power and could embolden Iran's already aggressive and hostile foreign policy. Other Middle Eastern countries are concerned about Iran's hegemony and threats in the region and may enter a nuclear arms race. Saudi Arabia has already made such statements. This could have far-reaching effects on stability in the region and beyond.

### **"First Steps Understandings": What does the interim agreement do?**

Talks between Iran and the P5+1 countries (US, France, Britain, Russia, China and Germany) have led to an interim agreement or "first step" deal. It is a six month agreement, with options for extension and renewal. In the agreement, Iran must:

- Halt uranium enrichment above 5% and dismantle the technical connections required to enrich above 5%.
- Neutralize its stockpile of near-20% uranium.
- Halt progress on its enrichment capacity
- Stop progress on the growth of its 3.5% stockpile so that it is not greater at the end of six months than it was at the beginning.
- Make no further advances in its activities at Arak and to halt progress on its plutonium track.
- Provide additional access for IAEA inspectors to inspect its nuclear facilities, centrifuge production, assembly and storage facilities, and information on and more access to the Arak reactor.

In return for these steps, the P5+1 will:

- Provide limited, temporary, targeted, and reversible relief from sanctions. As Iran fulfills its commitments, \$4.2 billion from Iranian oil sales will be allowed to be transferred in installments.
- Not impose new nuclear-related sanctions for six months, if Iran abides by its commitments under the terms of this deal, to the extent permissible within their political systems.
- Suspend certain sanctions on gold and precious metals, Iran's auto sector, and Iran's petrochemical exports, potentially providing Iran approximately \$1.5 billion in revenue.
- License safety-related repairs and inspections inside Iran for certain Iranian airlines.
- Allow purchases of Iranian oil to remain at their currently significantly reduced levels – levels that are 60% less than two years ago.
- Allow \$400 million in governmental tuition for students.

If Iran fails to meet its commitments, the sanctions relief will be revoked.

This interim agreement includes basic parameters for a final agreement, which appear to include a “mutually defined enrichment program”.

To read further details of the agreement, see: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/11/23/fact-sheet-first-step-understandings-regarding-islamic-republic-iran-s-n>

### **What are the concerns with the interim agreement?**

- There is no true “freeze” or rollback of Iran's march toward nuclear weapons. Instead, the interim agreement will impede or limit progress. Many of Iran's centrifuges will continue to spin.
- It legitimizes Iran's nuclear enrichment program. The interim agreement, and reportedly the parameters of the final deal include acceptance of Iran's enrichment program, with accepted limits. This is problematic because:

- Allowing Iran to continue enrichment at any level would enshrine Iran's "right" to enrich uranium.
- The ability to enrich uranium is one of the methods of acquiring a nuclear weapon. Low-enriched uranium is used for power production in light water reactors (typically 3-5%). Enrichment above 20% is highly enriched and weapons grade uranium is enriched at approximately 90%.
- According to experts, little time is needed to jump from 20% to 90%.
  - There is concern about Iran retaining this "breakout" ability by amassing large quantities of low-enriched uranium that remains below the allowed amount but could quickly be converted to weapons grade.
- Through retaining the ability to enrich uranium (and the potential to have a clandestine program that produces highly enriched uranium), Iran could become a "nuclear threshold" state—one that could have nuclear weapons, affecting the balance of power in the region and Iran's ability to threaten other countries.
- The agreement runs contrary to six (binding) UN Security Council resolutions under Chapter VII of the UN Charter that called on Iran to suspend all uranium enrichment.
- By lifting some sanctions (and the possible erosion of others), Iran will no longer have the incentive to reach a final agreement, thus making the interim agreement permanent.

#### **What is Israel's position?**

- Israel says that any agreement must include the following:
  - Dismantling of all centrifuges
  - Removal of all enriched uranium
  - Cessation of the activities of the heavy water reactor at Arak
- Israel has vigorously opposed the interim agreement; Prime Minister Netanyahu called it a "historic mistake."

For more details on the Israeli position, see:

<http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Issues/Pages/Geneva-Agreement-between-P51-and-Iran-24-Nov-2013.aspx>

#### **Where do the US Administration and Israel agree?**

- Both the US Administration and Israel do not object to Iran's peaceful use of nuclear energy.
- Both agree that Iran should not be allowed to obtain a nuclear weapon.
- Both agree that diplomacy is preferred over a military strike to stop Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons.
- Both agree that Iran should not be allowed to bully the international community with a nuclear threat.

#### **Where do the US Administration, Israel and the US Congress differ?**

- The US Administration believes that Iran must be stopped from having a nuclear weapon; Israel believes Iran must also be stopped from having nuclear weapons capacity.

- Israel believes that sanctions should be relaxed only when a good final agreement is reached; The US Administration believes that the sanctions relaxation in the interim agreement proposal are modest and that the vast majority of punishing sanctions will remain in place and will continue to be significantly damaging to Iran's economy if a final agreement is not reached, keeping in place the incentive to reach a final deal.
- Many in Congress believe that the pressure should be kept up through new sanctions and other legislative actions to limit parts of the agreement and force Iran to accept a "good" agreement. The US Administration believes that new sanctions would harm the negotiations process and has asked Congress to hold off on new sanctions, even those only triggered by Iran's non-compliance.
- The US Administration wants to test whether moderate voices in Iran will emerge and create real change; Israel looks at Iran's long history of deceit, hostility and threats and sees no indication of real change at this point.