

SPECIAL SECTION

## The Solution to the Iranian Nuclear Crisis and Its Consequences for the Middle East



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*After a decade of failed nuclear negotiations between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany (P5+1), they have finally fleshed out a temporary agreement that will hopefully restore trust in the peaceful character of Iran's nuclear program among all parties. To do so, the temporary agreement must become the basis for renewed discussions on a final deal and the contours of a regional nuclear order in the Middle East. In a broader sense, the outcome of the nuclear negotiations with Iran will have a profound impact on nuclear nonproliferation, a nuclear weapons-free zone (NWFZ), and a zone free of nuclear weapons and of other weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems (WMDfZ) in the Middle East. This article examines the consequences of the breakthrough in nuclear talks between Iran and the P5+1. A negotiated settlement will be based on the framework of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, with measures to address key demands from all parties involved. For the P5+1, this includes transparency and verification over the nature of the Iranian nuclear program, ensuring there will be no breakout. Iran's main demand includes respecting its rights under the NPT, including enrichment and lifting sanctions, as negotiated in the November 2013 interim agreement between it and the P5+1. Furthermore, a permanent settlement on the Iranian nuclear issue will inevitably introduce modified and newly formulated measures and technical modalities at the regional level, which will enhance nonproliferation efforts. These milestones, which are described in this article, will pave the way toward strengthening the call for concerted efforts to realize a WMDfZ in the Middle East and will help preserve the global nuclear nonproliferation regime in the future. **KEYWORDS:** Iran, nuclear crisis, uranium enrichment, Middle East, weapons of mass destruction.*

THE WORLD POWERS AND IRAN SIGNED AN INTERIM NUCLEAR DEAL, THE JOINT Plan of Action, on 24 November 2013, with plans to begin new rounds of talks to reach a mutually agreed, long-term comprehensive solution by 20 July 2014.<sup>1</sup> Following the interim deal, subsequent rounds of talks resulted in Iranian and P5+1 negotiators making good progress toward a settlement. However, they could not agree on the contours of a comprehensive nuclear deal. As a result, the talks were extended through 24 November 2014 and pledge to continue compliance with the conditions of the interim deal.<sup>2</sup>

The past three rounds of nuclear talks have progressed relatively smoothly since they focused primarily on setting the agenda and airing individual positions and concerns. The fourth round of high-level nuclear talks in Vienna that concluded on 16 May, however, was a far more difficult process as both sides started to draft the contours of a comprehensive nuclear deal.<sup>3</sup> Following the talks, all sides expressed their frustration at the lack of progress, but remained hopeful to continue their discussions toward a fruitful end. From the Iranian point of view, there was no tangible progress in writing the draft text of the comprehensive agreement due to the unreasonable and excessive demands of the West during the talks.<sup>4</sup> The day after the talks, the lead Iranian negotiator and foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif tweeted, “Back from Vienna after tough discussions. Agreement is possible. But illusions need to go. Opportunity shouldn’t be missed again like in 2005 [referring to the nuclear talks between Iran, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom (EU3) from 2003 to 2005, which failed primarily due to US opposition].”<sup>5</sup> Addressing graduating West Point cadets on 28 May, President Barack Obama said about the nuclear talks with Iran, “The odds of success are still long, but for the first time in a decade, we have a very real chance of achieving a breakthrough agreement—one that is more effective and durable than what we could have achieved through the use of force.”<sup>6</sup>

With the 24 November deadline fast approaching, the latest round of talks were intensified to bridge gaps on the elements of the final deal. All sides took additional steps to increase the likelihood of a final deal. Iranian foreign minister Zarif held a rigorous two-day discussion with European Union (EU) foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton in Istanbul from 26 to 27 May to find common ground on outstanding issues.<sup>7</sup> Expert-level meetings between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany (P5+1) were held on the sidelines of an IAEA board of governors gathering from 5 to 6 June. Iran also held both a bilateral meeting with the United States and a trilateral meeting with the United States and the EU on 17 June. Talks between Iran and the P5+1 resumed on 18 September in New York on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. Iranian president Hassan Rouhani and US president Barack Obama were in sync during their respective General Assembly addresses, voicing optimism and urgency to reach a diplomatic solution to the nuclear dossier. President Obama was unequivocal in his call to “not let this opportunity pass,” and President Rouhani called it a “historic opportunity” to reach a peaceful resolution. While the Iranian delegation held multiple bilateral, technical, and plenary meetings with the P5+1 throughout their presence on US soil from 18 to 26 September, a final deal was out of reach.<sup>8</sup> According to a senior US official at the latest talks, “There are still significant gaps between the P5+1 and Iranian positions; we don’t have illusions about how hard [it will be] to close gaps, but we do see ways to do so.”<sup>9</sup>

This deal contrasts with a series of failed encounters between the United States and Iran. In fact, the history of Iran's nuclear program started when the United States laid the foundation of a nuclear Iran in the 1960s. This nuclear cooperation agreement, signed by the United States and the shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in 1957, was part of President Dwight Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace program. In the 1970s, the United States encouraged Iran to build twenty-three nuclear power plants over twenty years. In 1967 the United States built the first Iranian nuclear facility, the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR).<sup>10</sup> During this period, Europe was fiercely competing with the United States to win lucrative projects to nuclearize Iran. Following the 1979 Iranian revolution, however, Iran decided to forgo the ambitious nuclear and military projects of the United States and the shah. The West responded by violating the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), especially Articles 4(1) and 4(2), and withdrawing from all agreements and contracts—costing Iran billions of dollars. The United States and European countries even opposed Iran having a civilian nuclear plant and pressed Germany to decline its contractual agreement to complete the only Iranian civilian nuclear plant at Bushehr.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the West prevented Iran from having access to the international market for nuclear fuel at a time when Iran had no plans to have uranium enrichment activities on its own soil.

The West, by denying the rights of Iran to a peaceful nuclear program, gave the greatest impetus for Iran to press for self-sufficiency by completing unfinished projects and ensuring domestic supply of reactor fuel in the future. In 2002, Iran mastered enrichment and the West once again began denying the legal and legitimate rights of Iran under the NPT.<sup>12</sup> In October 2003, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) passed the first resolution on Iran's nuclear program. The history of Iran's nuclear program therefore suggests an application of double standards by the West.

Shortly after this first IAEA resolution, the EU3 entered into nuclear talks with Iran. From October 2003 to August 2005 when I was a member of the nuclear negotiation team, Tehran made far-reaching overtures on transparency and confidence-building measures, ensuring the nondiversion of Iran's nuclear program toward nuclear weapons. At the time, we agreed to the maximum transparency arrangements such as the Safeguard Agreement, Subsidiary Arrangement Code 3.1, and Additional Protocol; suspended enrichment for almost two years; limited enrichment at 5 percent; and maintained a meager stockpile of enriched uranium.<sup>13</sup> Our efforts failed, however, due to the US policy of denying the legitimate rights of Iran for enrichment under the NPT.<sup>14</sup> During President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's tenure (2005–2013), the nuclear negotiations continued with the P5+1 countries, but throughout this period nuclear negotiations failed in the absence of a realistic package.

The recent victory of a moderate president in Iran, Hassan Rouhani, has opened a new window for a diplomatic resolution during the second term of President Obama. The latest nuclear agreement requires compromise by all parties on the elements of the final comprehensive deal in order to achieve success. According to former US secretaries of state Henry Kissinger and George Shultz, there are three major tasks for US diplomacy right now: “to define a level of Iranian nuclear capacity limited to plausible civilian uses and to achieve safeguards that ensure that this level is not exceeded; to leave open the possibility of a genuinely constructive relationship with Iran; to design a Middle East policy adjusted to new circumstances.”<sup>15</sup> Further statements made by informed US figures suggest that, in a final deal, the United States will ask Iran to accept strict limitations on its nuclear program that go beyond the NPT.<sup>16</sup> Such measures include dismantling significant portions of existing centrifuges and low-enriched uranium (LEU) stockpiles; closure of Fordow, the second enrichment site near the city of Qum; elimination of the Arak heavy water research reactor; and intrusive inspections and monitoring that are beyond the NPT and its Additional Protocol.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the negotiating parties committing to a deal based on the NPT, the fact is that what the world powers demand from Iran goes beyond the treaty and, most likely, as a member state of the NPT Iran would not accept being singled out and discriminated against. A realistic solution should distinguish between demands within the framework of the NPT and those that go beyond it. Demands based on the NPT can be agreed on permanently. Based on the NPT and other international regulations, a member state would demonstrate the maximum level of transparency by implementing the Safeguard Agreement, Additional Protocol, and Subsidiary Arrangement Code 3.1. These three arrangements are the maximum transparency measures that the world powers can expect. Ultimately, the P5+1 and Iranian negotiators could deal with demands that go beyond the NPT only for a specified period and as a confidence-building measure.

In this article, I first analyze the history of recent diplomatic negotiations between Iran and the West, identifying the challenges that lie ahead and the obstacles that must be overcome before a final deal can be reached over Iran’s nuclear enrichment program. Second, I show how a final solution to the Iranian nuclear crisis can be reached, and claim that such a road map can then serve as a model for assuring that no other member state of the NPT would ever divert nuclear activities toward weaponization. As I suggest in this article, progress on the Iranian issue therefore would have a profound impact not only on the possibility to establish a zone free of nuclear weapons and of other weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems (WMDFZ) in the Middle East, but also on the future of the nuclear nonproliferation regime.

### Lessons from the Failed Policies of the Past

To find a permanent solution with Iran that does not trigger proliferation from Arab states requires new thinking in the United States, distanced from the continued failed policy of coercion. As President Obama has said, “My view is that if you have both a credible threat of force, combined with a rigorous diplomatic effort, that, in fact you can strike a deal.”<sup>18</sup> This is the actual US perception on a major foreign policy challenge—how to deal with Iran. Regrettably, every time the Iranians demonstrate cooperation and positive overtures, the United States concludes that this is the result of pressure. Furthermore, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu continues to reiterate, “Pressure on Iran must be increased and not relaxed, and certainly not eased.”<sup>19</sup> His position is that all diplomatic efforts must be accompanied by a “credible military threat.” The Israeli and US language of threat and intimidation is not conducive toward permanently settling the Iranian nuclear file and stabilizing the region as a whole. Regrettably, this language is even used when Iran plays a constructive role in addressing proliferation risks—particularly in the Syrian case. Iran and Russia joined forces to convince Syrian president Bashar al-Assad to join the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and avert another US war in the Middle East.<sup>20</sup> Yet President Obama responded, “Iran should avoid thinking that the United States would not launch a military strike in response to Tehran’s nuclear program just because it has not attacked Syria. They shouldn’t draw a lesson that we haven’t struck, to think we won’t strike Iran.”<sup>21</sup>

Rather than genuine diplomacy, the West has long focused on coercion in its approach—sanctions, sabotage, and assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists. Some observers in the West have made the argument that, during President Ahmadinejad’s tenure, the West was provoked to resort to ever more coercive pressures. Yet I believe that all options have been practically and carefully examined—except a realistic, face-saving, and comprehensive package for a peaceful settlement. For instance, President Obama renewed the option of a military strike against Iran right after a moderate president, Hassan Rouhani, was elected and new foreign minister Zarif took reconciliatory steps, including the recognition that the Holocaust was a historical fact, condemning the killing of Jews by Nazis, and congratulating the Jews for their new year Rosh Hashanah.<sup>22</sup> Iran’s response to the P5+1 threats has been to continue forward with its uranium enrichment program, compelling the West to negotiate on an equal footing with the Iranians.

Now that, against all odds, the United States and the EU have made a deal with Iran, skeptics and opponents have started mobilizing again—in Tehran as well as in many other capitals, including Washington, DC.<sup>23</sup> In Iran, internal opposition to the deal is fueled by concerns related to US policies during President Obama’s first term and by Israel’s continued chal-

lenge of Iran's right to enrich its nuclear stockpile for energy use. In the United States, internal opposition to the deal and concern about Iranian behavior have been reinforced by two of its closest allies, Israel and Saudi Arabia.<sup>24</sup> The deep uneasiness in those countries is tangible and immediate, because both see Iran as a mortal enemy bent on Israel's destruction and regional hegemony. WikiLeaks provided a great deal of insight into the secret discussions on a possible military strike against Iran. The king of Saudi Arabia urged the United States to "cut off the head of the snake"<sup>25</sup> (i.e., encouraging the United States to attack Iran and put an end to its nuclear program). The message was clear and well understood by the United States—the Saudis and their allies want to "fight the Iranians until the last American standing."<sup>26</sup> While Israel maintains the same position, former Mossad director Meir Dagan told a US official in 2007 that "Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states all fear Iran, but want someone else to do the job for them."<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, in the United States there is still a risk that powerful domestic forces could succeed in subverting the November 2013 deal between Iran and the P5+1, which would then prove to them that the only option with Iran is a military attack. Lindsey Graham, a leading Republican senator on defense issues, said that the United States should consider sinking the Iranian navy, destroying its air force, and delivering a decisive blow to the Revolutionary Guard to "neuter" the regime, destroying its ability to fight back, and hope that Iranians would use the opportunity to rise up against the government.<sup>28</sup> With no exception, all top-ranking officials in the Obama administration have reiterated that, in dealing with Iran's nuclear program, "all options" remain on the table, including that of a military strike.<sup>29</sup>

Threatening Iran has proved counterproductive to date and will continue to be the case as long as the country refuses to compromise under threat. Thus, there is a need to now convince these Arab states that they should not proliferate or continue to lobby against a peaceful deal with Iran (and now the international community). Now that Iran and the international community are closer to reaching a deal to ensure the peaceful character over Iran's nuclear activities, the main risk of proliferation no longer comes from Iran, but from those countries that do not recognize the legitimacy of that deal and that could be tempted to follow the Israeli approach of security through nuclear weaponization. The most important thing both sides should do now is to convince the world—and the Arab world in particular—that this deal is credible, even though it meets both sides' minimal requirements. For this to be the case, it seems particularly important to hold negotiations with Iran's neighbors on the contours of a WMDFZ in the Middle East shortly after the end of the next round of negotiations between Iran and the P5+1. Innovative solutions to prevent future nuclear proliferation in the region should be addressed within this context, and topics of negotiation may include the possible participation of Arab states and Iran in

future common regional institutions governing nuclear fuel cycle activities, along the lines sketched by the two other articles in this Special Section that take the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) as an example worth studying. Otherwise, the voices of the skeptics and opponents of the deal will rise above those wanting it to work. The marred history and lack of trust between the two sides risk derailing any offer of engagement between Iran and its neighbors. If diplomacy fails, and if the temporary deal reached in November 2013 is not followed by a more permanent solution, this will ultimately lead to heightened tensions, a possible all-out war, and Iran being forced to withdraw from the NPT.<sup>30</sup>

### **In a Final Deal, All Sanctions Should Be Lifted**

The negative impacts of sanctions on the Iranian economy are indisputable. The sanction regime on Iran is expansive, consisting of unilateral, multilateral, and UN Security Council resolutions.<sup>31</sup> In practice, diplomatic energy during the Obama administration has been focused overwhelmingly on implementing punitive sanctions—even more than in previous administrations.<sup>32</sup> These include unilateral sanctions by the United States combined with Security Council Resolution 1929, which is the most comprehensive sanction resolution passed against Iran. The resolution also fortified and expanded unilateral sanctions beyond the realm of Security Council resolutions. These punitive measures sum up the achievements of the United States during nuclear talks.<sup>33</sup>

With the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1929, coupled with US unilateral sanctions and its pressure on other countries to follow suit (including EU members, Japan, South Korea, and Australia), international business with Iran has dramatically diminished.<sup>34</sup> Due to sanctions and mismanagement during Ahmadinejad's presidency, Iran's currency lost roughly half its value,<sup>35</sup> with inflation reaching above 40 percent in 2013.<sup>36</sup> The sanctions comprise just one component of US coercive policy toward Iran. For years, the United States has launched covert operations against Iran, believing it would be more effective and less risky than an overt war.<sup>37</sup>

The results of this comprehensive policy of sanctions on Iran's resolve regarding its nuclear program are not as positive as President Obama claims. In fact, from the point of view of Iran's nuclear ambitions, they have largely proven counterproductive, making Iran more determined than ever to expand its nuclear efforts. IAEA reports prior to covert operations against Iranian nuclear facilities show that Iran had one uranium enrichment site, a pilot plant of 164 centrifuges enriching uranium at a level of 3.5 percent, one generation of centrifuges and approximately 100 kilograms of stockpiled enriched uranium. Six years after draconian unilateral and multilateral sanctions, it had two enrichment sites with roughly 12,000 centrifuges, could enrich uranium up to 20 percent, possessed new generations

of centrifuges, and had amassed a stockpile of more than 8,000 kilograms of enriched uranium.<sup>38</sup>

The latest nuclear negotiations have created the conditions to press forward with a comprehensive deal, the final goal of which would be to lift this system of sanctions. Without a doubt, Iran's main objective is to resolve the nuclear dilemma through a peaceful solution—no other option is optimal for the country or the international community. At the same time, Iran cannot tolerate the current punitive measures, which include six Security Council resolutions;<sup>39</sup> EU and US unilateral sanctions on oil and the central bank, which is beyond the realm of the Security Council;<sup>40</sup> and an intensifying cyberwar. As part of this agreement, Iran probably will have to accept temporary limitations on its nuclear program and submit to intrusive inspections. In return, the world powers must respect the country's right to the peaceful use of nuclear technology (including enrichment) and lift the sanctions. While verifying that Iran's compliance with its obligations—a process that could realistically be completed within three to five years—they must gradually lift all sanctions related to Iran's nuclear program, withdraw Iran's nuclear file from the Security Council, and normalize Iran's relationship with the IAEA.

### **The Way Forward: A Phased Grand Agenda**

The Iranian nuclear issue is political in nature as illustrated by the heated debate over the nature of Iran's nuclear program. On 5 March 2013 Hans Blix, who was in charge of the UN's Iraq nuclear monitoring and verification group from 2000 to 2003 and led the IAEA for sixteen years, said that "so far Iran has not violated the NPT and there is no evidence right now that suggests that Iran is producing nuclear weapons. The fact that Tehran has enriched uranium up to 20 per cent leads to suspicion of a secret weapons program, however, no action can be justified on mere suspicions or intentions that may not exist."<sup>41</sup> Mohammad ElBaradei, head of the IAEA from 1997 to 2009, stated that "during my time at the agency, we haven't seen a shred of evidence that Iran has been weaponizing, in terms of building nuclear-weapons facilities and using enriched materials."<sup>42</sup> Even while the United States implemented its hostile policies of sanctions against Iran, it was completely convinced that Iran had neither decided to build a nuclear bomb nor had there been any evidence of diversion in the Iranian nuclear program during this time. Speaking at a Senate committee, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper confirmed that the US intelligence community had concluded with a high level of confidence that Iran had not restarted nuclear weapons work that was halted in 2003.<sup>43</sup> I hold to the assessment that Iran has not made a decision to acquire a nuclear weapon—as distinguished from a nuclear-weapon option.

It is important for the international community to understand the fact that Iran is not after any type of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). In a letter addressed to President Rouhani in August 2013, President Obama indicated that the United States is ready to resolve the nuclear issue in a way that allows Iran to demonstrate that its nuclear program is for exclusively peaceful purposes.<sup>44</sup> Rouhani said in an interview with NBC, “Under no circumstances would we seek any weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, nor will we ever.”<sup>45</sup> At a meeting with commanders of the Revolutionary Guard in September 2013, Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei stated, “We are against nuclear weapons not because of the U.S. or other countries, but because of our beliefs. And when we say no one should have nuclear weapons, we definitely do not pursue it ourselves either.”<sup>46</sup>

Rather than wasting their time targeting Iran’s legal and legitimate right for enrichment under the NPT, the world powers should focus on transparency and confidence-building measures that assure the Iranian nuclear program will remain peaceful forever. While no Iranian politician can risk surrendering uranium enrichment, under the leadership of President Rouhani the road to a resolution will be more constructive. Iran’s insistence on enriching uranium on its soil reflects its centuries-old determination to protect its independence. “To us, mastering the atomic fuel cycle and generating nuclear power is as much about diversifying our energy resources as it is about who Iranians are as a nation, our demand for dignity and respect and our consequent place in the world,” Rouhani wrote in the *Washington Post* on 19 September 2013.<sup>47</sup>

The fact is that the nuclear issue is a subsidiary of the hostilities between Iran and the United States and, as long as this animosity continues, the disputes over the nuclear dilemma will remain unresolved. However, a peaceful resolution to the nuclear crisis can pave the way for rapprochement between the two countries. The present engagement policy of President Obama will fail if neither country has a grand strategy—or even a road map for dealing with the Iranian nuclear issue and US-Iran relations more generally. A negotiable framework, which contains a comprehensive solution package for these two different dimensions of the US-Iran problem and the nuclear issue, is essential. To reach a solution on the nuclear case, there is a need to contextualize the nuclear and other issues within a bilateral, regional, and international framework, recognizing the need to address the rapprochement between Iran and the United States simultaneously.<sup>48</sup>

Iran and the United States have common interests in the war on terror against al-Qaeda. Whether they like it or not, they are natural allies in Afghanistan because both capitals are seeking peace and stability in Afghanistan coupled with the safe exit of US troops in 2014. During 2001, under President Mohammad Khatami, Iran and the United States cooper-

ated to overthrow the Taliban and were successful in managing the transition to a national unity government in December 2001 through Iran's involvement in the UN-sponsored talks in Bonn on the future of Afghanistan.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, Iran and the United States are natural allies in Iraq and both are backing the current government in Baghdad. Indirectly, Iran cooperated with the United States and made the collapse of Saddam Hussein's dictatorial regime possible in 2003. Finally, stability or instability from the Gulf to the Mediterranean region and to the borders of India is directly or indirectly linked to cooperation between Iran and the United States. Therefore, in parallel to Iran and the P5+1 talks, a direct line of communication between Tehran and Washington, DC, is inevitable.

For Iranians, the nuclear issue is about the legitimate rights of Iran to enrichment under the NPT, a sign of independence and defending the country's integrity, and not building a nuclear bomb. Iran is a member of all of the WMD conventions, including the NPT, the CWC, and the Biological (and Chemical/Toxin) Weapons Convention(s) (BWC), and it has signed the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).<sup>50</sup> Since 2005, there have been several lost opportunities to achieve a breakthrough in talks. These include the 2009 swap deal on simultaneous exchange of 3.5 percent stockpile for TRR fuel rods; Iran's 2010 offer to cap enrichment at 5 percent in return for fuel rods; the 2010 Turkey-Brazil-Iran swap agreement; Iran's 2011 offer of halting 20 percent enrichment for TRR fuel; and the 2011 Russian step-by-step proposal, which was the most important initiative because it addressed all the concerns of the P5+1—however, the West declined the initiative. This latter proposal entailed implementing the Additional Protocol and Subsidiary Arrangement Code 3.1, limiting enrichment to 5 percent, halting installation of a new generation of centrifuges, limiting the number of enrichment sites to one, addressing the IAEA's concerns on all technical ambiguities, and suspending enrichment for three months.<sup>51</sup> All of these efforts failed, however, because the United States and the West were not prepared to reciprocate with sanctions relief and recognition of Iranian rights under the NPT.

The Iranian position has been well known to the world powers since 2006. Iran has had two major demands: lifting of sanctions and recognizing its rights under the NPT. In December 2010, for the first time the United States signaled its willingness to accept Iran eventually being permitted to enrich uranium under certain conditions. Then US secretary of state Hillary Clinton told the BBC, "We've told them [Iran] that they are entitled to the peaceful use of civil nuclear energy. . . . They can enrich uranium at some future date once they have demonstrated that they can do so in a responsible manner in accordance with international obligations."<sup>52</sup> When the P5+1 held the first round of talks with the new Iranian president's nuclear nego-

tiation team in Geneva on 15 and 16 October 2013, Iran shocked the world powers by presenting a new “comprehensive proposal” with the capacity to make a breakthrough. After the four days of talks ended in the evening of 16 October, Obama spokesman Jay Carney concluded: “We found the Iranian presentation very useful. The Iranian proposal was a new proposal with a level of seriousness and substance that we had not seen before.”<sup>53</sup>

Therefore, to achieve a peaceful resolution there needs to be a package, consisting of the major demands of the world powers and the two Iranian demands, that can be implemented in a step-by-step manner with proportionate reciprocation. In order to do so, the West should welcome the initiatives undertaken by Iran to ban nuclear weapons in the Middle East. In particular, the West should also place greater faith in the fatwa by Iran’s supreme leader that prohibits the production, storage, and use of nuclear weapons. Iran believes that nuclear weapons are forbidden by Islam and that it is incumbent on everyone to safeguard humanity from such weapons.<sup>54</sup> Initiatives to garner the support of religious leaders from the Islamic world and the UN engagement to globalize this fatwa would be a great contribution to a WMDFZ in the Middle East and beyond.

Furthermore, the recent use of chemical weapons in Syria suggests that the Security Council should proactively pursue a WMDFZ in the Middle East, as requested by Iranian leaders for four decades. The security concerns of this conflict-ridden region necessitate a WMDFZ to be realized. The seeds planted for creating such a zone date back to 9 December 1974, when the General Assembly passed an Iranian and Egyptian resolution calling for a Middle East nuclear weapons-free zone (NWFZ).<sup>55</sup> The zone would remain in force indefinitely and commit regional countries not to manufacture, acquire, test, or possess nuclear weapons.<sup>56</sup> A key impetus for their resolution was to roll back the nuclear weapons capabilities that Israel had developed in the late 1960s and to prevent further proliferation in the Middle East. Yet there has been zero progress toward this goal for four decades because Israel has obstructed it repeatedly to maintain its nuclear weapons monopoly. The world powers should also take actions to push Israel to give up its nuclear weapons and join the NPT; if not, it could fuel nuclear weapons proliferation in the region for decades to come.

In this scenario, Iran would tacitly take the responsibility to lead the Middle East toward complete nonproliferation and elimination of all types of WMD. Iran is well positioned to take this leadership role. As the victim of the largest use of chemical weapons, which killed and injured 100,000 Iranians by then Western-backed Saddam Hussein, Iran has always sought a world free of the threat, production, and use of WMD, including chemical arms.<sup>57</sup> Tehran has also provided more than 5,000 man-days of inspections to the IAEA since 2003, the most in the agency’s history, including access

to facilities that go beyond the realm of the NPT.<sup>58</sup> And last but not least, as mentioned above, Iran has signed every WMD convention.<sup>59</sup>

With broader vision, the world powers and Iran can agree on a model for the Middle East based on six principles applicable to all regional states: (1) no nuclear weapons; (2) a ban on the production of plutonium and reprocessing; (3) a ban on the production of highly enriched uranium, with no enrichment beyond 5 percent; (4) no stockpile of uranium beyond domestic needs for nuclear civilian use; (5) the establishment of a regional or international consortium for producing nuclear fuel; and (6) the implementation of regional confidence-building and verification measures on WMD nonproliferation through the creation of a regional authority in charge of regulating nuclear development and verifying its peaceful nature in the region. The EURATOM Treaty, which covers peaceful nuclear activities in Europe, and shares safeguards responsibilities with the IAEA, could be a model for a similar agreement in the Middle East (see Grégoire Mallard and Paolo Foradori's article in this issue).

## **Conclusion**

When compared with the West's pressure on Iran (which has not acquired nuclear weapons), the strategic relations of the P5+1 to Israel, India, and Pakistan (which have nuclear weapons and are not parties to the NPT) clearly show that the West applies a double standard in its nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament strategy. Rather than continue these failed policies, the permanent members of the Security Council should move more quickly to fulfill their own NPT commitments to nuclear disarmament. Resolving the Iranian nuclear dossier could become a success for both Iran and the West, and could then serve as the basis for a broader agenda for nuclear renaissance in the Middle East and a road map for a WMDFZ. The agreement with Iran could alleviate present concerns over the nature of Iran's nuclear program and concurrently be recognized as a model to address future proliferation challenges in the region.

Iran fully understands that possessing WMD might provide a short-term regional advantage, but one that would turn into longer-term vulnerability as it would lead to a regional arms race. Instead, Iran seeks to have the sanctions lifted and be treated as an equal member of the NPT—without discrimination. After having been involved in relations between Iran and the West for three decades, I have no doubts that the commitment of President Obama, Secretary of State John Kerry, and Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel in Washington, DC, and that of President Rouhani, Foreign Minister Zarif, and Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani in Tehran mean there is no better time to resolve the nuclear

dilemma peacefully and bring an end to decades of animosity between the two countries.<sup>60</sup> 🌐

## Notes

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