

# Would Iran deal set new nuclear proliferation standard?

Author: Seyed Hossein Mousavian Posted February 22, 2015

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, arrived in Geneva Feb. 21 to hold bilateral meetings with US Secretary of State John Kerry and US Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz. Hossein Fereydoun, President Hassan Rouhani's senior adviser, is also accompanying the Iranian negotiation team to facilitate consultations and coordination. This is the highest level of talks between Iran and the United States since the 1979 revolution. The nuclear talks between Iran and the world powers are at a most critical moment — and in their final phase — and the chance for a final deal is likely more than 50%.

Recently, Henry Kissinger, the former US secretary of state and national security adviser whose knowledge of national security matters is often viewed as paramount in certain Washington circles, has attempted to cast unwarranted criticism on efforts to negotiate a peaceful resolution to the Iranian nuclear dispute. “The impact of this approach will be to move from preventing proliferation to managing it,” Kissinger said of the ongoing diplomatic efforts. “And if the other countries in the region conclude that America has approved the development of an enrichment capability within one year of a nuclear weapon, and if they then insist on building the same capability, we will live in a proliferated world in which everybody — even if that agreement is maintained — will be very close to the trigger point.”

Kissinger's assessment reflects a beleaguered understanding of the current status of the nuclear negotiations and the history of Iran's nuclear program, as well as the realities of the current international system in regard to nuclear proliferation.

The key to understanding the nuclear proliferation issue is to have a firm grasp of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) that has as its goal reducing the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, as well as nuclear weapons disarmament on behalf of the nuclear weapons powers.

Over the years, many nations signatory to the treaty, on both sides of the nuclear weapons divide, have been in technical violation of their obligations under the NPT. There have been at least five states — Brazil, Argentina, Egypt, South Korea and Taiwan — that have engaged in clandestine nuclear programs without notifying the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The nuclear weapons states, too, have oftentimes been negligent in their obligation to dismantle their nuclear weapons and in many cases have actually upgraded their warheads and increased their number. In the case of Iran, there has also arguably been a significant double standard.

Kissinger most likely knows there are already several non-nuclear weapons states that possess enrichment capability, including Japan, Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, Germany and the Netherlands. It goes without saying that these countries are never described as proliferators.

For decades, the status quo Western position on the Iranian nuclear program has been that there should not be any sort of Iranian nuclear program. The United States in particular had sought to deny Iran's NPT rights by declaring for years that there could be no nuclear power plants in Iran, Iran could have no access to the international fuel market and Iran would be sanctioned from attaining any nuclear technology.

Iran was expected to abide by all its obligations under the NPT without receiving any of its rights under the treaty. Only after it came to light in 2002 that Iran had developed a nuclear enrichment program — strictly within the limits of the NPT — and had thus established “facts on the ground,” did the intractable and international law-defying Western position shift from the no nuclear program in Iran stance.

Iran's nuclear program and any potential nuclear deal with Iran is not a story about some sort of unprecedented proliferation being permitted, but rather it is a tale of a state standing firmly in defense of its NPT rights, and indeed going beyond them to secure these rights.

Contrary to what Kissinger may want others to believe, the would-be nuclear deal under negotiation would reaffirm Iran's commitment to the NPT by providing unprecedented inspection and transparency of Iran's nuclear program. The world powers negotiating with Iran are now convinced that Tehran has even gone above and beyond its obligations under the treaty. Far from harming international security or setting any new standards, this approach in fact ensures Iran will not become a nuclear proliferator. Short of a devastating war for all sides, this is the only way of ensuring this.

Kissinger has proven himself to be less than analytically astute on Iran. For instance, in September 2014, after Iran had played a decisive and positive role in supporting the removal of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and stemming the Islamic State's (IS) onslaught in that country, Kissinger branded Iran as a "bigger problem" for the United States than the brutally expansionist IS.

"Nonsense. As a scholar of history and a Harvard Ph.D., Kissinger should know better. He once said that the United States had more common interests with the Islamic Republic than with many of its friends. That view is much more sensible than beating drums about some imaginary threat of a new Persian empire and a [Shiite] belt," John Limbert, former deputy assistant secretary of state for Iran, responded to Kissinger's remarks.

In his arguments against a nuclear agreement with Iran, Kissinger is seemingly attempting to manufacture a broader dispute over the possession of a nuclear-fuel cycle. In arguing for denying Iran enrichment at the 5% level under the guise of it negatively affecting nuclear proliferation, the impression is given that this is simply a ruse to maintain a small cartel of nuclear-fuel providers and deny the vast majority of the rest of the world this capability. If this is the case, this would be a gross violation of international law and a truly unsustainable policy in an increasingly multipolar world. Perhaps this is the reason that several US allies such as Brazil and Turkey, as well as the 120 states of the Non-Aligned Movement, have explicitly backed Iran in the crisis that has been created over its nuclear program.

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