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WWS Reacts: Iran and the Path to a Nuclear Agreement

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A preliminary agreement to limit Iran's nuclear program was reached April 2 by Iran and six world powers: the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, China, France, Russia, U.S. and the U.K. – or the P5 – plus Germany, a group commonly referred to as the P5+1.

Since its release, some have criticized the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – to be finalized by June – that details [the key parameters](#) to ratchet down Iran's nuclear program.

We discussed the agreement and its implications with three scholars at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs:

- [Daniel C. Kurtzer](#), Lecturer and S. Daniel Abraham Professor in Middle Eastern Policy Studies
- [Seyed Hossein Mousavian](#), Research Scholar, Program on Science and Global Security
- [Ali Ahmad](#), Lecturer and Researcher, Program on Science and Global Security

Q. What is your reaction to the preliminary nuclear agreement?

Mousavian: If the framework agreement is finalized within a comprehensive deal and fully implemented, it will be a win-win for all parties involved as it meets their key demands. From the beginning, the Iranians insisted on two major outcomes from the negotiations. The first is for the international community to acknowledge and respect the rights of Iran for peaceful nuclear technology, including enrichment, as a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT); and second to lift comprehensive sanctions. Similarly, the Iranians have shown flexibility and commitment to take concrete steps to address the concerns of the P5+1 over nuclear weapons proliferation.

President Obama's statement following the breakthrough talks acknowledged, "This framework would cut off every pathway that Iran could take to develop a nuclear weapon. Iran will face strict limitations on its program, and Iran has also agreed to the most robust and intrusive inspections and transparency regime ever negotiated for any nuclear program in history." Iran has accepted all confidence-building measures assuring no diversion toward weaponization, and the deal will in fact set a new and higher bar for global non-proliferation policy.

Q. From the technical side, how feasible are the terms that have been outlined?

Ahmad: The combined effects of the technical terms of the JCPOA target prolong the time required by Iran to develop a nuclear weapon, if it chooses to do so. These technical parameters can be split into two categories: those related to limiting Iran's potential path to make a nuclear weapon using highly enriched uranium (HEU); and those related to preventing Iran from producing a significant amount of plutonium, which also can be weaponized.

The actions Iran must take to comply with limiting its ability to produce HEU are straightforward and can be achieved within a short period of time, as they only require Iran to scale down its enrichment program for the next 10 to 15 years. This entails dismantling currently installed centrifuges and placing them under International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards and reducing its current stockpile of low enriched uranium from 10,000 kilograms to 300 kilograms.

As we showed in two Princeton studies on converting the Arak reactor, the second set of actions that Iran must take to reduce plutonium production in the heavy water research reactor at Arak is also feasible but may require more time, as this would involve redesigning the reactor and conducting new safety assessments.

Q. What "red lines" have been drawn by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei regarding the agreement? And what does the United States need to do to address them?

Mousavian: In principle, Iran and the P5+1 have agreed that all sanctions would be ultimately lifted. There is a common understanding that sanctions would be suspended right after the comprehensive agreement. During the next three months, the parties need to define a package including all mutual commitments, implemented in a step-by-step manner, with a timetable and proportionate reciprocation. Every irreversible measure met by Iran should be reciprocated by lifting part of the sanctions.

Q. How does the agreement affect Israel?

Kurtzer: In a sense, the announcement of the framework agreement has relegated Israel to the sidelines. The U.S. administration has brushed aside the Israeli complaints and is making its case for the framework aggressively in the media, including in Israel. Indeed, not only have the President and his advisors pushed back against Netanyahu's arguments, but the White House has also taken a sarcastic swipe at the Israeli prime minister by publishing a diagram similar to one used by Netanyahu at the United Nations.

None of this means, however, that Israel will give up. The Israeli media, quoting senior officials, highlight Israel's intention to carry the fight to Washington in a two-pronged strategy: work with its Republican allies in Congress either to scuttle a deal or to encumber the negotiations with requirements that effectively make it impossible to reach a deal; and press the administration to harden its position on the

details required to flesh out the framework.

Q. How will the agreement affect Iran's future energy plans?

Ahmad: In the long term, Iran is unlikely to move away completely from its nuclear energy plans because of historical and political reasons. However, freezing or downsizing some aspects of the nuclear program will offer Iran a valuable opportunity to reconsider its nuclear plans over the next decade. The economic competitiveness of nuclear power is weakening due to cost overruns and the dramatic decline in costs of renewable resources, especially solar. Moreover, uncertainty of future oil and gas revenues, especially when experts signal persistence in low market prices, has implications over Iran's ability to commit toward building many capital-intensive nuclear power plants. Delaying massive expansion of nuclear power until all the constraints are lifted will offer Iran the opportunity to study its future energy plans more carefully.

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