

IRAN, P5+1 “SUCCEEDED IN MAKING HISTORY”

It has been a very long road since the announcement in November of 2013 that a preliminary agreement between Iran and the P5+1 group of nations had been made on Iran’s nuclear technology. There have been extensions along the way and times when a permanent deal appeared imminent along with times when no such deal seemed possible. Despite tremendous pressure from Israel and the neocon lobby who lust after a war with Iran, the outlines for a permanent deal are now in place. What remains is to nail down the details by the June 30 deadline when the extensions of the interim agreement expire. Laura Rozen and Barbara Slavin capture the historic significance of what has been achieved:

We have “found solutions,” Iran Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif first proclaimed on Twitter on April 2, “Ready to start drafting immediately.”

We have “succeeded in making history,” Zarif said at a press conference here April 2. “If we succeed, it is one of the few cases where an issue of significance is solved through diplomatic means.”

We have “reached a historic understanding with Iran, which, if fully implemented, will prevent it from obtaining a nuclear weapon,” US President Barack Obama said from the White House rose garden after the deal was announced April 2.

What stands out about the agreement is just how much Iran was forced to give up on issues that had been seen by most observers as non-negotiable. Jonathan Landay interviewed a number of nuclear experts on the agreement:

On its face, the framework announced Thursday for an agreement that limits Iran's nuclear program goes further toward preventing Tehran from developing a nuclear weapon than many experts expected it would, including requiring an international inspection system of unprecedented intrusiveness.

The Agreement

The version of the agreement as released by the US can be read here. Let's take a look by sections.

The first section addresses the general concept of uranium enrichment. Although hardliners in the US want all enrichment in Iran stopped, it was clear that Iran would never have agreed to stop. But what has been achieved is staggering. Iran will take two thirds of its existing centrifuges offline. Those centrifuges will be placed in a facility under IAEA inspection, so there is no concern about them winding up in an undisclosed facility. Further, only Iran's original IR-1 centrifuge type will be allowed. That is a huge concession by Iran (everybody knows the IR-1's suck), as they had been developing advanced centrifuges that are much more efficient at enrichment. Many critics of a deal with Iran had suspected that advanced centrifuges would be a route that Iran would use to game any agreement to increase their enrichment capacity if only the number and not the type of centrifuge had been restricted. Further, Iran will not enrich uranium above 3.67% for a period of 15 years. And the stockpile of 3.67% uranium will be reduced by 97%, from 10,000 kg to 300 kg. This reduction also will apply for 15 years. This section also carries an outright statement of targeting a breakout time of 12 months to produce enough enriched uranium for a bomb. [But as always, it must be pointed out that merely having enough enriched uranium for a bomb does not make it a bomb. Many steps, some of which there is no evidence Iran has or could develop under intense

international scrutiny, would remain for making a bomb.]

The next section of the agreement is titled "Fordo Conversion". Iran's Fordo site is the underground bunker built for uranium enrichment. Iran has agreed not to enrich uranium at Fordo or to have uranium or any other fissile material present for 15 years. While many have advocated a complete shutdown of Fordo, the agreement provides a very elegant alternative. Fordo will now become a research site under IAEA monitoring. Had the site shut down, where would all of the scientists who work there now have gone? By keeping them on-site and under IAEA observation, it strikes me that there is much less concern about those with enrichment expertise slinking into the shadows to build a new undeclared enrichment facility.

The section on the Natanz facility follows and it is further documented that only the reduced number of IR-1 centrifuges and no advanced centrifuges will be used. Even research on the advanced centrifuges will be limited and only under IAEA supervision.

The next section addresses inspections and transparency. Iran has agreed to an unprecedented level of IAEA inspections. Some have even suggested on Twitter that Parchin will be inspected, but that is not laid out in the document. What is noted is that Iran will abide by the IAEA's "additional protocol" and investigation of "possible military dimensions" of the nuclear program, which were suggested in part by IAEA after material came from the Laptop of Death. This is another huge concession by Iran that I never expected.

Finally, Iran has agreed to scrap the current reactor core of the Arak heavy water reactor and replace it with a redesigned core that will not produce weapons grade plutonium.

The final sections address sanctions and phasing. Iran, of course, wants immediate cessation of the sanctions. The agreement

“suspends” sanctions once IAEA verifies that Iran has taken all of the key steps. I’ve seen some hawks very concerned about just how these sanctions would “snap back” into place in the event of a breach of the agreement by Iran. I don’t find that to be particularly concerning, since it seems virtually certain to me that in the event of a verified breach of the agreement, Israeli bombs would be falling on Iran long before any effects of restored sanctions came into play.

Reactions

The New York Times praises the agreement in an editorial:

The preliminary agreement between Iran and the major powers is a significant achievement that makes it more likely Iran will never be a nuclear threat. President Obama said it would “cut off every pathway that Iran could take to develop a nuclear weapon.”

Officials said some important issues have not been resolved, like the possible lifting of a United Nations arms embargo, and writing the technical sections could also cause problems before the deal’s finalization, expected by June 30. Even so, the agreement announced on Thursday after eight days of negotiations appears more specific and comprehensive than expected.

Fred Hyatt, on the other hand, is stamping his foot like a good little neocon:

THE “KEY parameters” for an agreement on Iran’s nuclear program released Thursday fall well short of the goals originally set by the Obama administration. None of Iran’s nuclear facilities – including the Fordow center buried under a mountain – will be closed. Not one of the country’s 19,000 centrifuges will be dismantled. Tehran’s existing stockpile

of enriched uranium will be “reduced” but not necessarily shipped out of the country. In effect, Iran’s nuclear infrastructure will remain intact, though some of it will be mothballed for 10 years. When the accord lapses, the Islamic republic will instantly become a threshold nuclear state.

Wow, Hyatt is spinning faster than an Iranian centrifuge on Stuxnet.

But the biggest surprise of all comes at the end of David Sanger and Michael Gordon’s New York Times piece on the deal:

Those conditions impressed two of the most skeptical experts on the negotiations: Gary Samore and Olli Heinonen of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard and members of a group called United Against Nuclear Iran.

Mr. Samore, who was Mr. Obama’s top adviser on weapons of mass destruction in his first term as president, said in an email that the deal was a “very satisfactory resolution of Fordo and Arak issues for the 15-year term” of the accord. He had more questions about operations at Natanz and said there was “much detail to be negotiated, but I think it’s enough to be called a political framework.”

Mr. Heinonen, the former chief inspector of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said, “It appears to be a fairly comprehensive deal with most important parameters.” But he cautioned that “Iran maintains enrichment capacity which will be beyond its near-term needs.”

Hell just froze over, folks. Sanger and Gordon appear to have finally given in to my campaign for full disclosure about Heinonen’s association

with UANI. That Samore and Heinonen have to admit that this is a good deal tells us everything we need to know.

Hearty congratulations are in order for all of the negotiators, especially John Kerry and Javad Zarif. If this deal does get written down and agreed to in anything close to the current understanding of it, their work will stand as the gold standard for patient diplomacy winning out over military action as a means of resolving conflict.