Agreement Reached in Iran Nuclear Talks

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On July 14, 2015, the United States, its P5+1 and European Union partners and Iran reached a historic agreement to curb Iran’s nuclear program in exchange for relief from crippling international sanctions. The details of the agreement are provided in a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). This landmark deal occurred two weeks after missing the June 30th deadline for reaching an agreement.

President Barack Obama delivered remarks from the White House to announce the historic nuclear agreement that will verifiably prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. He stated, “Today, after two years of negotiations, the United States, together with our international partners, has achieved something that decades of animosity has not—a comprehensive, long-term deal with Iran that will prevent it from obtaining a nuclear weapon.”

In a press conference in Vienna, Austria, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said, “The fact is that the agreement we’ve reached, fully implemented, will bring insight and accountability to Iran’s nuclear program—not for a small number of years but for the lifetime of that program. This is the good deal that we have sought.”

In a press release, U.S. Secretary of Defense Ash Carter stated “We remain prepared and postured to bolster the security of our friends and allies in the region, including Israel; to defense against aggression; ensure freedom of navigation in the Gulf; and check Iranian malign influence. We will utilize the military option if necessary.”

Congressional Republicans are vowing to fight the deal. U.S. Republican Senator Bob Corker, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said, “Throughout these negotiations, I have expressed significant concerns to the administration about the crossing of red line after red line as we have moved from a goal of dismantling Iran’s nuclear capabilities to managing its proliferation. I want to read the agreement in detail and fully understand it, but I begin from a place of deep skepticism that the deal actually meets the goal of preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.”

The most important provisions of the Iran nuclear agreement center on the following eight topics:

Centrifuges – Iran will be allowed 6,104 centrifuges in all: 5,060 that can enrich uranium at its Natanz facility and another 1,044 at Fordow, where they can be used for non-fissile research. It can only use first-generation IR-1 centrifuges, and has to give up other models. However, in 10 years, Iran can begin phasing out its IR-1 centrifuges.

Uranium Enrichment – Iran will be allowed to enrich uranium to only 3.67 percent. This means that Iran will be allowed to turn raw uranium into the kind of fuel that can be used for a nuclear power plant but nothing more.

Uranium Stockpile – Iran will be required to reduce its stockpile of enriched uranium from almost 12,000 kilograms to 300 kilograms for at least the next 15 years.

Nuclear Facilities – Iran will be allowed to use its nuclear facility at Natanz for enrichment. The Fordow facility will be converted into a nuclear, physics and technology center. However, the Fordow facility will not be allowed to use or store fissile material for the next 15 years.

Plutonium Plant at Arak – Iran will be required to redesign and rebuild its plutonium plant at Arak such that it will only make energy-grade plutonium and will ship out its spent plutonium. It is barred from heavy-water reactor use.

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Inspections – International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors will have access to Iran's nuclear sites, the uranium mines and mills, centrifuge factories and supply chains. It will monitor dual-use technologies. It can access suspicious locations. One caveat is that certain military sites will be covered under "managed access" which means Iran gets some say in how those inspections occur.

Sanctions Relief – Iran must fulfill its initial commitments by mid-October, after which the IAEA will verify Iran's compliance by mid-December. Once it has verifiably fulfilled its commitments, the US, EU and United Nations Security Council will begin to remove their nuclear-related sanctions on Iran.

Sanctions Snap-Back – If one of the parties to the deal believes Iran is violating the deal, they can submit a complaint to an eight-member joint commission (consisting of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia, China, Iran, as well as, the EU) for review. The joint commission will resolve the complaint, but its decisions aren’t binding. If the party doesn’t like the joint commission’s decision, it can force the UN Security Council to actively approve the process of lifting sanctions. If the vote fails, or if the United States vetoes, then the sanctions will automatically "snap back" into place.

Implementation of the Iran nuclear deal will not occur until specific milestones have been met. One of those milestones is endorsement of the JCPOA by the UN Security Council.

In the event that implementation of the Iran nuclear agreement occurs, it could present U.S. national security issues both in the short-term and the long-term. In addition, the security of our allies in the Middle East may also be impacted at a time of heightened insecurity due to the collapse of state institutions and the rise of jihadist forces on all their borders. At stake is Iran’s ability to break out to a nuclear weapons capability. The goal will be to delay the threat of a nuclear Iran as long as possible.

References:
John Kerry, Secretary of State. Secretary Kerry’s Press Availability on Nuclear Deal with Iran. (2015, July 14).

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