



The Iran nuclear agreement -- officially, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) -- is 104 pages of complex, detailed, sometimes opaque text. While you have undoubtedly read numerous news stories about the agreement, there are still probably many aspects of the text that remain unclear. Therefore, I asked **Institute Managing Director Mike Singh, our Lane-Swig Fellow** and a former senior director on the National Security Council, to sketch out the main elements of the agreement and boil it down to its basics. We hope this summary will be useful to you as you assess the benefits and risks the agreement holds for U.S. interests in the Middle East.

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Understanding the Iran Nuclear Deal

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Introduction

- The bargain at the core of the nuclear agreement between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (UNSCR) and Germany (P5+1) -- now endorsed by the UNSCR -- is as follows:
 - Iran agrees to accept temporary limits on certain nuclear activities and increased inspections which aim to verify it is keeping to those limits.
 - In exchange it receives technical assistance as well as phased sanctions relief and, eventually, outright liberation from any oversight or penalty beyond that to which any other signatory of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty is exposed.
- The agreement requires no dismantlement, though some nuclear infrastructure will be idled (the majority of centrifuges) and other elements will be modified (the core of the Arak reactor).

Limitations on Iran's Nuclear Program

- A nuclear weapons program consists of three prongs: fuel fabrication, "weaponization" to turn that fuel into a nuclear device, and a missile to deliver a nuclear payload to its target.
- While a nuclear weapon could be pursued openly, doing so would expose Iran to considerable risk; it is far more likely that Iran would seek to pursue a weapon covertly.
- The agreement would apparently keep Iran to a one-year "breakout" time at its declared facilities.

- The Arak Heavy Water reactor is redesigned so as not to produce weapons-grade plutonium.
- Iran reduces the centrifuges operating at Natanz, puts the rest into storage, and caps its level of enrichment and low-enriched uranium stockpile.
- No uranium enrichment at Fordow -- which with Russian assistance will become an "international R&D center" -- but some centrifuges remain.
- All of these limits are temporary, lasting ten to fifteen years.
- Iran is permitted to conduct R&D on more efficient centrifuges, but not to deploy those centrifuges for 8.5 years; after ten years, Iran will begin phasing out its first-generation centrifuges.
 - Note that advanced centrifuges ordinarily would take eight to ten years to deploy successfully even in ordinary circumstances, and would be better suited to a covert program than the first-generation centrifuges because they would enable "breakout" with fewer centrifuges.
- Iran agrees not to engage in specified work applicable to a nuclear explosive device.

Inspections

- Iran will implement additional International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards agreements, including the Additional Protocol, which increases the access of IAEA inspectors.
- IAEA inspectors will monitor certain declared nuclear sites for 15-25 years.
- If the IAEA wants access to a suspect site, the deliberative process specified in the JCPOA could take as many as 24 days, and requires the support of a majority of a "Joint Commission" consisting of China, the European Union (EU), France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom (UK), the United States, and Iran itself.
 - Note that -- contrary to the assertions of administration officials -- many nonproliferation experts believe 24 days is ample to "clean" a site significantly of evidence of wrongdoing.
 - The administration counters that the facility would in the interim be closely watched, but there are limits to what such surveillance can reveal.
- If Iran still refuses access, the matter would presumably be addressed as a violation (see below).
- The IAEA and Iran agreed to a separate "Roadmap" for resolving the so-called "Possible Military Dimensions (PMD)" questions regarding Iran's past and possibly ongoing nuclear weaponization research.
 - Per the Roadmap, Iran has until August 15 to answer (in writing) the questions of the IAEA, which then can ask follow-up questions; this process must be complete by October 15, and the IAEA must issue a "final assessment" to the IAEA Board of Governors by December 15.
 - The Roadmap does not indicate that the IAEA will be provided with access to sites or individuals involved in Iran's past weaponization work, or that Iran must make a full declaration of such past or ongoing work.
 - In addition, the timeline seems impossibly short to adequately resolve these issues, and there is no indication that an adverse IAEA report would hold up the deal's implementation -- all that is apparently required is the report's submission.

Sanctions

- Most UN sanctions on Iran -- contained in six resolutions passed from 2006 to 2010

- will be terminated on the day that the agreement is implemented.
 - Exceptions -- conventional arms sanctions last five years and ballistic missiles sanctions last eight years; both may be terminated sooner if the IAEA certifies Iran's nuclear program is peaceful.
 - UN consideration of the Iran nuclear issue is considered "concluded" entirely ten years after the July 20, 2015, adoption of the JCPOA by the Security Council -- whether or not the IAEA has certified Iran's nuclear program as peaceful.
- Most EU "nuclear-related" sanctions are lifted on the day the agreement is implemented.
 - Proliferation-related sanctions are not lifted until eight years after implementation.
- Most U.S. "nuclear-related" sanctions are suspended on the day the agreement is implemented.
 - The United States also agrees to sell aircraft to Iran and allow Iran to export carpets and pistachios.
 - The United States also agrees to "encourage" state and local officials in the US to change any laws which are inconsistent with the JCPOA.
 - The United States agrees to lift sanctions entirely 8 years after the agreement is implemented.
- As an effect of the lifting of sanctions, Iran would receive all or part of the \$100 to \$150 billion in assets frozen overseas.
 - The administration has asserted these funds will be used domestically by Iran, but there is no evidence to support this assertion, and good reasons to believe Iran will use the funds on domestic, regional, and overseas priorities alike.
- United States, EU, UN, and other sanctions that have no nuclear connection will remain; however, it is left unclear whether the US, EU, and UN are barred from implementing non-nuclear-related sanctions (e.g., focusing on Iranian support for terrorism) that have the same effect (e.g., reducing oil exports) as the sanctions which are lifted; Iran has indicated that it would consider this a violation of the JCPOA.
- Iran is also promised various forms of international technical assistance in the JCPOA, both for the purpose of implementing the accord itself and helping Iran to develop further its nuclear sector.

Enforcement

- The deal contains only one punishment for a violation -- the "snapback" of sanctions, which Iran has indicated will be met by its abandonment of the JCPOA altogether.
- If a party to the JCPOA believed any other party had violated the agreement, the resulting deliberative process could take as many as 35 days.
- If still unresolved, the matter would go to the Security Council, which would have 30 days to adopt a resolution to maintain the lifting of sanctions, subject to the veto of any P5 member (the United States, UK, France, Russia, or China); if the resolution failed to pass, UN sanctions relief would terminate, and all of the provisions of previous resolutions would come back into force.
 - In effect, the severity of this mechanism means "small" violations are unlikely to be punished -- as Rob Satloff has noted, when capital punishment is the only available penalty, only capital crimes will be punished.
- While the military option will remain available, it should be borne in mind that there will be extensive international participation in Iran's nuclear activities, and that Iran's

nuclear facilities will have been granted legitimacy by the UN Security Council.

Implementation

- The deal will be considered "adopted" 90 days from July 20, and will be "implemented" when Iran and the other parties complete certain initial steps -- likely in early 2016.
- Congress has until September 18 to review the deal; if it disapproves with a veto-proof majority:
 - The deal may simply go forward regardless, though it is not clear whether this is technically permitted in the JCPOA text without U.S. participation.
 - Iran may walk away, leaving the United States to reassemble a coalition to reinstate pressure on Iran and continue diplomacy; the EU is likely to cooperate, Russia and China less so.

Conclusion

- The agreement legitimizes some elements of Iran's nuclear program while freezing them only temporarily, while allowing Iran to perfect other, less developed elements with international assistance -- i.e., Iran improves its nuclear weapons capability over the lifetime of the accord.
- The temporary nature of the limits implies that -- barring a stark change in behavior by Iran -- the United States will be confronting an Iran saddled with few nuclear limitations or sanctions in 10-15 years.
- While the accord would likely prevent Iran from quickly producing a nuclear weapon at its known, declared facilities, the agreement's inspection and enforcement mechanisms do not appear sufficiently strong to deter Iran from covertly exercising that option when the time is ripe.
- Meanwhile Iran will receive near-comprehensive sanctions relief and a financial windfall, potentially enabling its destabilizing regional behavior and spurring a reaction from regional rivals.

To view Executive Director Robert Satloff's video statement on Iran, [click here](#). For further Institute analysis on Iran, visit our new [Iran hub](#).

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