

The Iran Nuclear Deal: Impact Through Inspections



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The Obama Administration led an international process to force Iran to the negotiating table and accept significant limitations on their nuclear weapons program. Now that the parties have announced the outlines of their agreement, and critics have begun to raise questions, how do we assess the deal?

Some in Congress and elsewhere have judged the deal as far from perfect, and that's true. But here in the real world, the deal should be judged by what it does to the existing status quo, not by some hypothetical benchmark.

Compared to where Iran is today, the deal significantly rolls back and then freezes the Iranian nuclear program for a very long time. Most parts of its program are frozen for 15 years, others for 10 years. It takes off-line the majority of the infrastructure Iran would need to make a dash for the bomb. It lengthens the amount of time that Iran would need to make that dash from two to three months currently to more than a year.

Most importantly, the deal puts Iran under a very significant inspection regime that would detect attempts by Iran to develop a covert pathway to the bomb. This inspection structure would be permanent, and any violation of the agreement would trigger a process to ensure that sanctions would “snap back” into place.

Given Iran's history of deception in their nuclear program—especially building a secret, deeply buried facility at Fordow—preventing them from pursuing a *covert* pathway to the bomb is the most important outcome. The best way to detect that is ensuring inspectors get robust access on the ground through every aspect of the supply chain. This deal does that.

The deal does not address other problematic (non-nuclear) issues with Iran, including their support for terrorist groups, attempts to circumvent limits on missile technology and human rights violations. Those are beyond the scope of the agreement, and the U.S. will continue the robust sanctions we have imposed on Iran for those misdeeds. This deal does not purport to make Iran a good actor—it just keeps it from being a bad actor with a nuclear arsenal.

Many technical details have to be worked out by June 30, including: the process for dealing with Iran's uranium stockpile; the process for dispute resolution on snap-back and how long will that take in light of breakout time; the conversion at Fordow; and the phasing of sanctions relief. As they say, the Devil's in the details, and these details will matter. But for now, this preliminary deal looks good to us.

TOPICS

FOREIGN RELATIONS 115