

# Iran Nuclear Arms Deal: What Framework Agreement?

The first thing to note about the framework agreement is that there is no framework agreement. Though an announcement was made at the end of recent talks in Lausanne that a so-called framework agreement had been reached with Iran over its renegade nuclear program, nothing was signed by the negotiating parties.

This amounts to a verbal agreement—one might call it a gentleman's agreement were there any trust to be shared between the parties. The fact is that stark differences have emerged between Iran and the U.S. over their respective interpretations of what was supposedly agreed.

Furthermore, Iran has since gone so far as to openly contradict key elements of the U.S. fact sheet as being nothing more than "lies" and "deceptions." While claiming that there will be no restrictions on either enrichment activities or on research and development, Iran is also stating that all sanctions relief will be immediate, and there will be no inspections of any military sites.

## **Obama's Wish List**

The framework agreement now appears to be not much more than a wish list of what U.S. President Barack Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry hope to convince the Iranians to sign on to before June 30. What was celebrated by team Obama as a major diplomatic achievement has quickly descended into a face-saving game of political spin, with the Americans and Iranians attempting to convince their national constituencies that their respective version of the framework is the real one.

Worth noting is that while Obama and Kerry have defended the Iranian backlash as nothing more than political posturing due

to Iran's national "pride," Ayatollah Khomeini has gone so far as to accuse the Americans of being "deceptive" and having "devilish" intentions.

### **Why Was It Issued?**

One might rightly question why the Obama administration issued such a patently flawed framework agreement where apparently no agreement existed? None of the other P5+1 parties to the negotiations, or Iran for that matter, saw the March 31 deadline for a framework agreement as one that could not simply be rolled into the June 30 deadline for a final deal. The Russian Foreign Minister even left Lausanne before negotiations were completed.

What is clear though is that Obama was facing significant pressure from the US Congress in the form of new sanctions bills on Iran should no progress be shown at the negotiating table by the 31st of March. Obama managed to persuade top congressional leaders to hold off on any voting until after the Lausanne talks concluded.

Amazingly, instead of Iran facing the pressure of new sanctions, Obama's negotiating team then lost all leverage and it was Iran which gained the upper hand as the U.S. team desperately pressed for an agreement to show Congress some progress had been made.

### **Is This Really a Choice Between War and Peace?**

Obama and Kerry have even admitted that the framework agreement is not the basis for a "good" deal, since it clearly doesn't achieve the objective of dismantling Iran's nuclear program. All it does is attempt to put the entire program on hold for 10 years, leaving inspections to do the job of ensuring Iran does not break out to a nuclear bomb long before that.

The mantra repeated by the Obama administration in defense of

their approach is that this all comes down to a simple choice between war and peace. We are told that critics of the framework deal like Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu and key Members of Congress only see war as the sole alternative to resolving the Iranian nuclear crisis, while people of goodwill like the Obama administration are presenting the only viable alternative, which is the framework agreement.

Meantime, Netanyahu has made clear that his preferred alternative is more pressure on the ayatollahs in order to reach a “better deal” with Iran.

While it is true that Israel itself does not have much leverage to change Iran’s nuclear ambitions other than the threat of military action, the international community as a whole does have the ability to bring Iran to heel. In this regard, Iran only came to the negotiating table once the world, through the United Nations Security Council, adopted a series of six unanimous resolutions placing sanctions on Iran and demanding that it totally dismantle its nuclear program. Unfortunately, the Obama administration is squandering the advantage these resolutions gave to the P5+1 powers in the talks with Iran.

Sanctions are the one peaceful option that Obama has opposed, then accepted and now opposed again. And in his latest opposition to tighter limits on Iran, Obama turned the threat of new sanctions from Congress in Tehran’s favor.

The final irony is that without the real threat of renewed sanctions, all the West is left with is the threat of force against Iran if they do not acquiesce. As if to hit home this point, U.S Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter announced on April 11 that the U.S. had successfully developed a whole new generation of bunker busters for use on Iran’s nuclear facilities.

## **Worst-Case Scenarios**

Should Iran actually agree to a comprehensive deal by the June 30 deadline, which reflects the U.S. version of the framework agreement, the Obama administration would assuredly hail this as an historic achievement. The problem is that such a deal would leave the West with little option other than military strikes should Iran go rogue again. With Obama admitting that over the course of the deal Iran's breakout time will be reduced to months, it would not leave enough time for the international community to take concerted, effective multilateral steps to block Iran from going nuclear.

### **Where to Now?**

Netanyahu has consistently rejected the notion that there is no alternative to a bad deal with Iran. A solid majority in Congress, many Democrats included, seems for the most part to agree with him.

Iran's intransigence and rejection of the U.S. version of the framework agreement might actually be presenting an opportunity for the West to do a reset. Rather than working in opposition to Congress and Israel, the Obama administration should come to an agreed strategy with them and with its allies abroad on what the goals are with Iran and how to get there now. This revised strategy will likely require the threat of more sanctions and isolation of Iran with a firm timetable for them to agree to dismantle their nuclear program.

A good deal is achievable. Iran's nuclear program can be dismantled, and yes, it can be done so peacefully. But, it all depends on the next move of Western leaders.

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