

Secretary Kerry's Remarks
SFRC Hearing on the Iran Nuclear Deal
Thursday, July 23, 2015

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, Members of the Committee, friends and former Colleagues – I appreciate the chance to discuss with you the comprehensive plan that we and our P5+1 partners have developed with Iran regarding the future of its nuclear program.

I am joined by the two Cabinet Secretaries whose help was invaluable in reaching this deal– Treasury Secretary Jack Lew and Energy Secretary Ernie Moniz.

I want to thank all of you for the role that Congress has played in getting us to this point and particularly for this committee's hard work in enacting sanctions that achieved their purpose -- by bringing about serious, productive negotiations with Iran.

From the day those talks began, we were crystal clear that we would not accept anything less than a good deal – a deal that shuts off all of Iran's pathways towards fissile material for a nuclear weapon and resolves the international community's concerns about Iran's nuclear program.

After 18 months of intense talks, the facts are also crystal clear: the plan announced last week in Vienna is the good deal we have sought.

Under its terms, Iran must get rid of 98 percent of its stockpile of enriched uranium, two-thirds of its installed centrifuges, and the existing core of its heavy-water reactor.

Iran will be barred from producing or acquiring both highly enriched uranium and weapons-grade plutonium for at least the next 15 years.

Iran will be subject to the most comprehensive and intrusive verification and transparency measures ever negotiated – so that if Iran cheats, we will know it quickly and be able to respond accordingly. And many of these measures will be in place not just for 10 or 15 or 20 years, but for the lifetime of Iran's nuclear program, which will enable us to verifiably ensure it remains exclusively peaceful.

Remember that, two years ago, when our negotiations began, we faced an Iran that was enriching uranium up to 20 percent at a facility built in secret and buried in a mountain, was rapidly stockpiling enriched uranium, had installed nearly 20,000 nuclear centrifuges, and was building a heavy water reactor that could produce weapons-grade plutonium at a rate of one to two bombs per year. Experts tabbed Iran's so-called breakout time – the interval required for it to have enough fissile material for a bomb – at two to three months.

This is the reality we would return to if this deal is rejected – except that the diplomatic support we have been steadily accumulating in recent years would disappear overnight.

Let me underscore – the alternative to the deal we've reached isn't a better deal – some sort of unicorn arrangement involving Iran's complete capitulation. That's a fantasy – plain and simple.

The choice we face is between a deal that will ensure Iran's nuclear program is limited, rigorously scrutinized, and wholly peaceful – or no deal at all.

If we walk away from what was agreed in Vienna, we will be walking away from every one of the restrictions we have negotiated, and giving Iran the green light to double the pace of its uranium enrichment, proceed full speed ahead with a heavy water reactor, install new and more efficient centrifuges, and do it all without the unprecedented inspection and transparency measures we've secured.

If we walk away, our partners will not walk away with us. Instead, they'll walk away from the tough multilateral sanctions regime they helped us to put in place. We will be left to go it alone and whatever limited economic pressure from sanctions would remain would certainly not compel Tehran to negotiate or to make any deeper concessions. They would instead push the program ahead potentially forcing military conflict. And we will have squandered the best chance we have to solve this problem through peaceful means.

Make no mistake: we will never accept a nuclear-armed Iran. But the fact is that Iran has extensive experience with nuclear fuel cycle technology. We can't bomb that knowledge away. Nor can we sanction that knowledge away. Remember that sanctions did not stop Iran's nuclear program from growing steadily, to the point it had accumulated enough low enriched uranium that, if further enriched, could be used to produce about 10 nuclear bombs.

The truth is that the Vienna plan will provide a stronger, more comprehensive, and more lasting means of limiting Iran's nuclear program than any realistic alternative.

And to those who are thinking about opposing the deal because of what might happen in year 15 or 16 – remember that, if we walk away, year 15 starts tomorrow – and without any of the long-term verification or transparency safeguards that we have put in place to ensure that we prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon.

Over the past week, I've spoken at length about what, exactly, this deal is. But I also want to make clear what this deal was never expected or intended to be.

This plan was designed to address the nuclear issue alone, not to reform Iran's regime, or end its support for terrorism, or its contributions to sectarian violence in the Middle East. Those are all issues about which we remain deeply concerned and will continue take real steps, which is why we are upholding our unprecedented levels of security cooperation with Israel; why we are working so closely with the Gulf States and continue to maintain a robust military presence in the region and countering Iran's destabilizing activities; why we will keep striving to prevent terrorist groups – including Hamas and Hezbollah – from acquiring weapons; and why U.S. sanctions related to human rights, terrorism, and ballistic missiles will remain in place. It is also why we will continue to press Iran for information about the missing and for the immediate release of Americans who have been unjustly detained.

The fact is, there is not a challenge in the entire region that wouldn't become much worse if Iran had a nuclear weapon – and that's exactly why this deal is so important. Its provisions will help us to address the full range of regional challenges without the looming threat of a nuclear-armed Iran.

That outcome cannot be guaranteed either by sanctions alone or – on an enduring basis – by military action. The only viable option is a comprehensive diplomatic resolution of the type reached in Vienna. That deal will make our country and our allies safer. It will ensure that Iran's nuclear program remains under intense scrutiny. And it will ensure that the world community is united in ensuring that Iran's nuclear activities are and remain wholly peaceful. It is a good deal for the world – a good deal for America – and it richly deserves your support. Thank you.

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