

SFRC Testimony

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member.

I appreciate this opportunity to brief the Committee on a new report just published by the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs on the Iran nuclear deal. (Hold up copy.) With contributions from the Belfer Center's nuclear experts, the report is intended to provide a comprehensive description and balanced evaluation of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, including issues on which the Belfer team disagree - most importantly, whether or not Congress should approve the agreement.

With respect to the agreement itself, we have three main conclusions:

First, if the agreement is implemented, it will effectively prevent Iran from producing fissile material for nuclear weapons at its declared nuclear facilities for at least 10-15 years. This assessment is based on both the physical limits on fissile material production at declared facilities (such as Arak, Natanz, and Fordow) and the IAEA inspection and monitoring measures at declared facilities, which would quickly detect any significant cheating, diversion of nuclear material, or breakout.

Reason for 10-15 year range is because Belfer experts disagreed on how to characterize Iran's enrichment capacity during years 11-15 of the agreement, when Iran is allowed to gradually replace its IR-1 centrifuges at Natanz with limited numbers of IR-2m, IR-4, IR 6 and IR-8

centrifuges. Some contributors believe that breakout time at Year 15 will be about the same as it is today – a few months – while others think it could be shorted to a few weeks, but as you know, the details of the enrichment plan are not public. Nonetheless, the Belfer team agrees that Iran unlikely to risk breakout at Natanz through at least year 15 because detection would be very swift and certain.

In other words, the agreement blocks Iran's pathway to produce nuclear weapons for at least 10-15 years unless Iran can build secret facilities to produce fissile material – so-called sneak out option.

This leads to our **second** major conclusion. The verification and compliance measures in the agreement – along with continuing U.S. and allied intelligence efforts – are likely to detect any Iranian attempt to build secret facilities to process nuclear materials and to reimpose UN sanctions if Iran is caught in a major violation. At the same time, the report concludes that intelligence and inspections under the JCPOA are less likely to deter or detect incremental cheating or secret activities not involving nuclear material, such as certain areas of nuclear weapons research. You can never say with complete confidence that the secret pathway is cut off, but the agreement makes it more difficult for Iran to conceal and makes international response more certain.

The one area of verification that the Belfer contributors most disputed was the significant of the IAEA's investigation of Iran's past nuclear weapons program, so called Possible Military Dimensions or PMD. Some contributors felt that full resolution of PMD was essential to establish a baseline to monitor future activities, while others felt that the U.S. and allies already have sufficient information from intelligence.

Third point – and I think the most difficult to assess - is what happens after 15 years, when the physical constraints on Iran’s nuclear program and most of the special monitoring provisions expire? Supporters of the agreement it could create conditions to reduce Iran’s incentives to develop nuclear weapons while opponents think it could legitimize Iran’s nuclear weapons option. At that point, Iran would be able within a matter of years to build an enrichment facility large enough to provide low enriched uranium for its nuclear power program. Such a large scale enrichment program would create more credible options for both nuclear breakout and sneakout. Iran could even claim it needed to produce highly enriched uranium for civil purposes. As Secretary Moniz testified before this committee, the U.S. could object, but whether we could rally international support is unclear.

So – that takes me to the final issues - overall judgment about the agreement compared to the available alternatives. Obviously, the agreement is better than no deal, in terms of constraining Iran’s nuclear development and increasing monitoring. But just as obviously, the deal could be better – tighter physical restrictions, tougher inspections, and longer duration. On this, the Belfer team was deeply split between those who thought we should accept the current deal (with its known risks) or take the risk of rejecting this deal in hopes of negotiating a better deal. Frankly, we don’t have a final answer, but we’ve tried to lay out the best arguments on both sides.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member. I’d be happy to answer your questions.