

An Open Letter to the Leaders of the U.S. House and Senate

April 16, 2015

Dear Speaker Boehner, Senator McConnell, Senator Reid, and Representative Pelosi:

We are writing to express our serious concerns about the new “framework agreement” concerning Iran’s nuclear weapons program that was unveiled last week. As you know, it has been presented as an agreed guideline for a comprehensive agreement to address that threat. After carefully reviewing the American, Iranian and European Union treatments of this initiative, however, it is clear that there are myriad and fundamental disagreements about the nature – let alone the practical effects – of those guidelines.

As a result, in our judgment as national security professionals, any agreement likely to result from follow-on negotiations will likely undermine American national security and regional interests by legitimizing Iran’s nuclear weapons program and allowing it to advance, even while an agreement is in effect.

We have four principal objections to the nuclear “framework”:

1. Uranium enrichment. All parties agree that Iran will be allowed to operate thousands of uranium centrifuges and to develop more advanced centrifuges while a nuclear agreement is in effect. Given the significant nuclear proliferation danger of enrichment, we believe the United States must return to its previous position on this issue, which the Obama administration abandoned in 2012: any nuclear agreement with Iran must bar uranium enrichment and require that all Iranian centrifuges be disassembled. We also believe all of Iran’s enriched uranium stockpile must be physically removed from Iran.

2. Plutonium. According to the Obama administration, Iran will remove and replace the core of the Arak heavy-water reactor now under construction so that it will not produce weapons-grade plutonium. Iran disputes this, however, and has said this reactor will be “modernized.”

Not only is it impossible to operate a heavy-water reactor without producing plutonium, even allowing Iran to operate such a reactor so it produces *less* plutonium would pose an unacceptable proliferation risk since it will increase Iran’s expertise in this technology. Iran began construction of this reactor in defiance of UN Security Council resolutions. The United States must return to its previous position that work on this reactor be halted permanently.

3. Verification. We believe the verification provisions in the framework as outlined by U.S. officials will be far too weak to ensure Iran has halted covert nuclear weaponization activities. Notwithstanding public statements by senior Obama administration representatives, it falls far short of an “anytime, anywhere” inspection regime.

In fact, most of the verification provisions described by U.S. officials concern Iran's *declared* civilian program. Provisions to investigate possible weaponization work and covert nuclear sites have major loopholes. For example, Iran reportedly has rejected snap inspections and will be allowed to contest allegations of covert nuclear activities in a dispute-resolution process, possibly for months. This will give Tehran time to do what it has done repeatedly in the past: sanitize suspect nuclear sites.

Although U.S. officials have claimed the IAEA will have greater access to possible covert nuclear sites because Iran has agreed to comply with the IAEA additional protocol (an agreement Iran signed in 2003, but has never actually implemented), we note that an EU/Iran joint statement on the framework says Iran has only agreed to "provisional" cooperation with this agreement.

4. Sanctions. We are very concerned about the significant disagreements that clearly exist between the parties about how and when nuclear-related sanctions on Iran will be lifted. Obama administration officials claim sanctions will be lifted in phases, based on Iranian compliance with a final agreement. They contend that all U.S., EU and UN sanctions will be lifted only after the IAEA certifies Iranian compliance with key elements of a final agreement. Even then, these officials insist that such sanctions will only be suspended, not terminated, and will "snap back" if Iran fails to comply with its obligations under the agreement.

Iranian officials dispute the Obama administration's account of how sanctions will be lifted and have declared that sanctions will be immediately terminated, not suspended, after a final agreement is signed.

Even if Iran accepted the U.S. view on how sanctions will be lifted, we still find the Obama administration's approach to this issue to be unacceptable. We believe the requirements for lifting sanctions are insufficiently rigorous and, therefore, too easy for Iran to meet. For example, it seems unlikely that Tehran will be required to explain past weapons-related activities in order to achieve sanctions relief.

Most importantly, although the Obama administration claims sanctions will be "snapped back" if Iran reneges on its agreement obligations, we believe it is very unlikely that EU or UN sanctions will ever be re-imposed once they are lifted. We also are concerned that the Obama administration's history of ignoring Iranian cheating on prior nuclear commitments makes it unlikely it will block the lifting of sanctions in the event of predictable, further Iranian violations in the future.

In short, given such realities, we believe the purported framework agreement can only be the basis for a bad nuclear deal with Iran – one that will: allow it to continue its nuclear weapons program; be incapable of verifying covert and weapons-related activities; and offer Iran unwarranted and effectively irreversible sanctions relief. Any agreement with Iran based on such a defective foundation will ensure the realization of Iran's longstanding nuclear ambitions, further destabilize the Middle East and seriously undermine Western efforts to prevent further nuclear proliferation.

We respectfully call on Congress to take decisive action to denounce the “framework agreement,” insist on a congressional vote on this accord, and pass new sanctions against Iran requiring it to comply with all existing nuclear-related UN Security Council resolutions. We believe it is imperative for America’s co-equal legislative branch of government to make clear to the world that the status quo – meaning no nuclear deal with Iran – is considerably better than this very bad deal and what will flow from it.

Sincerely,

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