

The Comprehensive P5+1 Nuclear Agreement With Iran: A Net-Plus for Nonproliferation

Statement from Nuclear Nonproliferation Specialists
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The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is a strong, long-term, and verifiable agreement that will be a net-plus for international nuclear nonproliferation efforts.

It advances the security interests of the P5+1 nations (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States), the European Union, their allies and partners in the Middle East, and the international community.

When implemented, the JCPOA will establish long-term, verifiable restrictions on Iran's enrichment facilities and research and development, including advanced centrifuge research and deployment. Taken in combination with stringent limitations on Iran's low-enriched uranium stockpile, these restrictions ensure that Iran's capability to produce enough bomb-grade uranium sufficient for one weapon would be extended to approximately 12 months for a decade or more.

Moreover, the JCPOA will effectively eliminate Iran's ability to produce and separate plutonium for a nuclear weapon for at least 15 years, including by permanently modifying the Arak reactor, Iran's major potential source for weapons grade plutonium, committing Iran not to reprocess spent fuel, and shipping spent fuel out of the country.

The JCPOA is effectively verifiable. The agreement will put in place a multi-layered monitoring regime across Iran's entire nuclear supply chain, including centrifuge manufacturing sites (for 20 years), uranium mining and milling (for 25 years), and continuous monitoring of a larger number of nuclear and nuclear-related sites.

The JCPOA requires Iran to implement and ratify the additional protocol to Iran's comprehensive safeguards agreement, which significantly enhances the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) inspection regime. Among other measures, this will give international inspectors timely access to any Iranian facility of proliferation concern, including military sites, which the JCPOA will ensure cannot be stalled more than 24 days without serious consequences.

In addition, the JCPOA puts in place safeguards that require early notification of design changes or new nuclear projects by Iran (the modified code 3.1 provision). The additional protocol and code 3.1 monitoring and verification measures will remain in place indefinitely.

The JCPOA also requires that Iran cooperate with the IAEA to conclude its long-running investigation of Iran's past activities with possible military dimensions (PMDs) and permanently prohibits certain dual-use activities, which could contribute to the design and development of a nuclear explosive device.

Taken together, these rigorous limits and transparency measures will make it very likely that any future effort by Iran to pursue nuclear weapons, even a clandestine program, would be detected promptly, providing the opportunity to intervene decisively to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon.

The agreement requires that Iran undertake major steps—including to reduce its uranium enrichment capacity, modify the Arak reactor, allow for more intrusive international monitoring, and cooperate with the IAEA’s PMD investigation—before UN Security Council, U.S., and EU economic and financial sanctions are suspended or terminated, and it provides for swift consequences in the event of noncompliance.

If all sides comply with and faithfully implement their multi-year obligations, the agreement will reduce the risk of a destabilizing nuclear competition in a troubled region – giving time and space to address other regional problems without fear of an Iran armed with nuclear weapons—and head off a catastrophic military conflict over Iran's nuclear program.

Though all of us could find ways to improve the text, we believe the JCPOA meets key nonproliferation and security objectives and see no realistic prospect for a better nuclear agreement.

We urge the leaders of the P5+1 states, the European Union, and Iran to take the steps necessary to ensure timely implementation and rigorous compliance with the JCPOA.

Endorsed by:

Amb. Nobuyasu Abe, Commissioner of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission* and former United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, former Director-General for Arms Control and Science Affairs of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs

James Acton, Co-Director, Nuclear Policy Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*

John Ahearne, former Chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission

Steve Andreasen, former Director for Defense Policy and Arms Control on the National Security Council staff (1993-2001), consultant to the Nuclear Threat Initiative*

Dr. Bruce Blair, Research Scholar, Program on Science and Global Security, Princeton University

Dr. Barry Blechman, Co-Founder, Stimson Center*

Hans Blix, former Director General of the IAEA

Avis Bohlen, former Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control, U.S. Department of State

Amb. (ret.) Kenneth C. Brill, Ambassador to the IAEA (2001-2004) and Founding Director of the U.S. National Counterproliferation Center (2005-2009)

Matthew Bunn, Professor of Practice, Harvard Kennedy School, and former adviser to the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy

Susan F. Burk, former Special Representative of the President for Nuclear Nonproliferation, and former Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Nonproliferation, U.S. Department of State

Sandra Ionno Butcher, Executive Director, Pugwash Conferences on Science & World Affairs (International)*

John Carlson, Counselor, Nuclear Threat Initiative, former Director General, Australian Safeguards and Nonproliferation Office

Joseph Cirincione, President, Ploughshares Fund

Tom Z. Collina, Director of Policy, Ploughshares Fund, and former Executive Director and Co-Founder of the Institute for Science and International Security and the Director of the Global Security Program at the Union of Concerned Scientists

Avner Cohen, Professor of Nonproliferation Studies at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey*

Philip E. Coyle, former Associate Director for National Security and International Affairs, White House Office of Science and Technology Policy

Toby Dalton, Co-Director, Nuclear Policy Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*

Kelsey Davenport, Director for Nonproliferation Policy, Arms Control Association

Amb. Jayantha Dhanapala, former United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs

Amb. Sergio Duarte, former United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs

Robert J. Einhorn, former U.S. Department of State Special Advisor for Nonproliferation and Arms Control and former negotiator on the Iran nuclear talks

Dina Esfandiary, MacArthur Fellow, Centre for Science and Security Studies, Department of War Studies, Kings College London

Trevor Findlay, Senior Research Fellow, Project on Managing the Atom, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University

Richard L. Garwin, former Chair of the Arms Control and Nonproliferation Advisory Board of the U.S. Department of State

Ellie Geranmayeh, Policy Fellow, European Council on Foreign Relations*

Ilan Goldenberg, former Iran Team Chief, Office of the Secretary of Defense, U.S. Department of Defense

Dr. Lisbeth Gronlund, Co-Director and Senior Scientist, Global Security Program, Union of Concerned Scientists

Morton H. Halperin, former Director of Policy Planning, U.S. Department of State

Laicie Heeley, Fellow, Stimson Center*

Paul Ingram, Executive Director, British American Security Information Council

Raymond Jeanloz, Chair, National Academy of Sciences Committee on International Security and Arms Control*

Togzhan Kassenova, Associate, Nuclear Policy Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*

R. Scott Kemp, assistant professor of nuclear science and engineering at MIT, former science advisor to the U.S. Department of State's Special Advisor for Nonproliferation and Arms Control

Daryl G. Kimball, Executive Director, Arms Control Association

Michael Krepon, Co-Founder, Stimson Center*

Ellen Laipson, President and CEO, Stimson Center*

Dr. Edward Levine, former Senior Professional Staff Member, Senate Foreign Relations Committee (1997-2011) and Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (1976-1997)

Dr. Jeffrey Lewis, Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey* and Director of East Asia Non-Proliferation Program at the Center for Nonproliferation Studies*

Jan Lodal, former Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, U.S. Department of Defense

Jessica T. Mathews, Distinguished Fellow, former President, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*

Fred McGoldrick, former Director of the Office of Nonproliferation and Export Policy, U.S. Department of State

Oliver Meier, Deputy Head, International Security Division, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP)*

Dr. Zia Mian, Director of the Project on Peace and Security in South Asia at the Program on Science and Global Security, Princeton University

Adam Mount, Stanton Nuclear Security Fellow, Council on Foreign Relations*

Richard Nephew, former Principal Deputy Coordinator for Sanctions Policy at the Department of State, and Director for Iran on the National Security Staff

George Perkovich, Vice President for Studies, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*

Amb. Thomas R. Pickering, former Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, and former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Russian Federation, India, Israel, and Jordan

Steve Pifer, Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution, and retired career Foreign Service officer

Paul R. Pillar, former U.S. National Intelligence Officer for the Near East and South Asia

Valerie Plame, former covert CIA operations officer

William Potter, Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar Professor of Nonproliferation Studies at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey*

Tariq Rauf, former Head of Verification and Security Policy Coordination, Office reporting to the Director General, International Atomic Energy Agency, and Director of the Disarmament, Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Programme at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)*

Laura Rockwood, Executive Director, Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation,* and former section head for nonproliferation and policymaking in the Office of Legal Affairs of the IAEA (1985-2013)

Joan Rohlfing, President and Chief Operating Officer, Nuclear Threat Initiative*

Dr. Randy Rydell, former Senior Political Affairs Officer in the Office of the High Representative for Disarmament, United Nations

Scott D. Sagan, The Caroline S.G. Munro Professor of Political Science, Stanford University

Thomas Shea, former IAEA Safeguards Official, and former Head of the IAEA Trilateral Initiative Office, and former Sector Head of Defense Nuclear Nonproliferation Programs, Pacific Northwest National Laboratory

Shen Dingli, Professor and Director, Program on Arms Control and Regional Security, and Associate Dean, Institute of International Studies, Fudan University, Shanghai, China

Jacqueline Shire, former member of United Nations Panel of Experts (Iran) established under Security Council Resolution 1929 (2010)

Leonard S. Spector, Deputy Director, Center for Nonproliferation Studies at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies,* and former Assistant Deputy Administrator for Arms Control and Nonproliferation at the U.S. National Nuclear Security Administration

Sharon Squassoni, Senior Fellow and Director, Proliferation Prevention Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies*

Ariane M. Tabatabai, Visiting Assistant Professor in the Security Studies Program at the Georgetown University Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service*

Honorable Ellen O. Tauscher, former Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, U.S. Department of State, seven-term Member of House of Representatives, and Chairman of the Strategic Forces Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee (2006-2009)

Greg Thielmann, former Director of the Strategic, Proliferation and Military Affairs Office in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research

Dr. Ali Vaez, Senior Iran Analyst, International Crisis Group

Frank von Hippel, former Assistant Director for National Security, White House Office of Science and Technology Policy

Dr. James Walsh, Research Associate at the Security Studies Program, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Honorable Andy Weber, former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear, Chemical and Biological Defense Programs, U.S. Department of Defense

Larry Weiler, former Special Assistant to the Director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and a negotiator of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty

Amb. Joseph Wilson (ret.), former Special Assistant to President Bill Clinton and Senior Director at the National Security Council

Joel S. Wit, Visiting Scholar at U.S.-Korea Institute at SAIS, Senior Research Fellow at Columbia University Weatherhead Institute for East Asian Studies, and former Coordinator for the U.S.-North Korea Agreed Framework (1995-1999)

Dr. David Wright, Co-Director and Senior Scientist, Global Security Program, Union of Concerned Scientists

Amb. Norman A. Wulf, U.S. Department of State (ret.), and Special Representative of the President for Nuclear Nonproliferation (1999-2002)

**Institution listed for identification purposes only.*