



PERSPECTIVES

THE BEGIN-SADAT CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

Israel Cannot Accept the Emerging Accord between the US and Iran

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BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 245, April 24, 2014

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: An accord between the P5+1 and Iran that would allow Iran to maintain a full nuclear fuel cycle is unacceptable to Israel. None of assumptions behind the emerging accord are sound: Neither the assumption that a monitoring regime could guarantee identification in real time of Iranian violations; nor the assumption that the US would act with alacrity if a breach is identified; nor the assumption that in the real world Iran will truly be deterred by US threats. An agreement along these lines would be far worse than no agreement, and could force Israel to respond independently.

Ostensibly, official US policy on Iran's nuclear program is clear: The US will not allow Iran to produce a nuclear bomb. Moreover, President Obama has said that, for this purpose, "all options are on the table" – implying a military option as well. In addition, according to many report in American newspapers, President Obama has ordered the development of diversified US military capabilities with which to attack Iranian nuclear facilities, far beyond what existed in the previous administration – providing further evidence of the President's seriousness.

But many people do not understand the meaning behind the vague statement, "We will not allow Iran to manufacture a nuclear bomb." When will this happen? Who will decide that 'this' is the time for action? How? What does "manufacture" mean?

Robert Einhorn seeks to answer these questions in a 56-page comprehensive paper just published by the Brookings Institution (*Preventing a Nuclear-Armed Iran: Requirements for a Comprehensive Nuclear Agreement*). This paper cannot be ignored, since until a few months ago Einhorn was one of the top officials on Iran in the

Obama administration, and he is very knowledgeable on the topic. (Einhorn was the Secretary of State's special advisor for nonproliferation and arms control. During the Clinton administration, he was assistant secretary for nonproliferation).

In addition to analyzing Iran's intentions toward nuclear weapons and discussing the principal issues in the negotiations, Einhorn outlines the key requirements for an acceptable comprehensive agreement that, in his view, "would prevent Iran from having a rapid nuclear breakout capability and deter a future Iranian decision to build nuclear weapons."

According to Einhorn, the essence of an agreement between Iran and the P5+1 could be as follows: Iran will retain the capability to produce the material necessary for a bomb (full fuel cycle), so theoretically it will be able to produce a bomb should it decide to do so. But the agreement that the US should try to reach will include the most sophisticated and exacting controls and monitoring, which will immediately spot any breakthrough in Iran's nuclear program. The capability that Iran will be permitted under the agreement will be greatly reduced compared with its current capability (for example, far fewer centrifuges), so that from the moment of the breach and its identification, the US will have enough time to respond with very severe sanctions, and with force too, if necessary.

In order to dissuade the Iranians from advancing towards a bomb, it will be made clear to them by various means that Iran will pay a heavy price for violating the agreement, and that the US will respond quickly in the event of a violation to prevent any possibility of the Iranians from reaping the rewards of the violation.

Mr. Einhorn proposes a new world of "deterrence" – not against the use of nuclear weapons, but against producing nuclear weapons. This deterrence is needed because this approach would permit the Iranians to keep the capability to produce a nuclear weapon. The West (and Israel) will have to live with this Iranian production capability, because it is a fact which, Einhorn says, cannot be changed.

In short, violating the agreement will be cause for penalizing Iran, not the fact that Iran will have the capability to produce a nuclear weapon.

In my opinion, Israel should oppose such an agreement for three reasons.

1. The proposal assumes that it will be possible to build a control and monitoring system that the Iranians won't be able to deceive. This system will be partly built on the basis of monitoring arrangements agreed to by the Iranians, stricter than what the International Atomic Energy Agency currently carries out; and partly based on covert intelligence efforts that have been in place for many years.

However, the reality in other places as well as Iran itself indicates that there is no such thing as monitoring system that cannot be sidestepped. There is no way to guarantee that the world will spot Iran's efforts to cheat. American intelligence officials have publicly admitted that they cannot guarantee identification in real time of an Iranian breakout move to produce a nuclear weapon.

The Iraqis, Syrians, Libyans, and North Koreans, just like the Iranians, succeeded in tricking the world and concealing large parts of their system for building nuclear capabilities – for a very long time. Israel also failed to discover these nuclear programs for a long time. In each of these cases, there are specific reasons how and why the West did not see what was happening. But the accumulation of cases forces the assessment that Iran too will be able to deceive the West even after signing a monitoring agreement, and in my opinion is likely to do so, with a high degree of probability.

2. Assuming that a violation of a nuclear agreement is identified, will the US respond immediately? Or might the US administration be likely and naturally begin a plodding process to clarify, verify, and confirm the alleged violation? Afterwards, won't the US, with or without its P5+1 partners enter into negotiations with Iran about the situation? Would not the US, in line with international practice, compromise under the new circumstances? Such compromise can be expected to further facilitate slow but steady progress of the Iranian nuclear effort, to the point where it will be completely impossible to stop Iran's program.

Anyone who thinks that a US administration would respond immediately to an Iranian agreement violation, without negotiations, is deluding himself. This will be especially true of a US administration years down the road in the indeterminate future, which will undoubtedly be less committed to the dictates of the agreement than its predecessor. Israel cannot accept the existential threat caused by this delusion. Our experience in this matter is clear and unequivocal.

How do I know that such an erosion in P5+1 determination to halt the Iranians will develop in the future? Doesn't everyone want to prevent Iran from going nuclear? Yet I know and fear an erosion of P5+1 resolve with near absolute certainty from a thorough study of the ongoing chain of P5+1 concessions ever since the negotiations with Iran began 15 years ago. Over time, first the Europeans, and then the P5+1, together and separately, including the US, repeatedly lowered their demands of Iran.

The current excuse for a lower threshold of demands from Iran is not that the threshold is sufficient, but rather the very sad admission that "The Iranians will not agree to a higher and more strict threshold." This statement reveals the defeatist mindset of today's P5+1 negotiators. In other words, for the world, the agreement is more important than the content; and in order to secure this desired agreement, it is

worth waiving or forgoing the demands of Iran that two or three years earlier were considered essential. And thus, instead of asking how to bring the Iranians to a good agreement, the threshold of world demands is constantly lowered.

The Iranians understand this, which is why they are dragging out the negotiations as long as possible while intensifying their efforts to get closer to the bomb. Over the years they have won significant concessions even before starting serious discussions about an agreement. According to US Secretary of State John Kerry, the Iranians are just two months away from a bomb; a reality which is the end result of years of negotiations.

3. The third leg on which the conciliatory approach rests is this: The deterrence of Iran from going for a nuclear "breakout." The deterrent is based on the assumption that Iran will understand that, if a breach is identified, the US will get into the thick of things and respond extremely harshly, up to and including the use of force against Iran.

Is this assumption valid in the contemporary world? Does anyone believe that the use of force is a possible option for the US? What are the chances that the US would obtain the support of the Security Council for the use of force against Iran? What are the chances that Washington would act without UN support? Is there any reason to think that at the moment of truth Iran would truly fear American military action for violating the agreement in a way that does not include an act of war or violation of the sovereignty of a neighboring state?

What if the circumstances that will be chosen for violating the agreement by the Iranians will be when the US is engaged in another international crisis? In that case, would the administration really have the necessary energy to apply military force?

Today, we more or less know that the Iranians assess the likelihood of an American military action against Iran's nuclear program as very, very low; close to negligible – unless Iran precipitates hostilities in the Persian Gulf. Why should Iran think that the chances of this will increase in the future? If the past proves anything, it proves that the chances of American force in the future will only diminish.

Finally, we cannot ignore the fact that the world is dealing with Iran, a murderous Shiite revolutionary regime that seeks regional and even global hegemony; that sponsors international terrorism and stands behind the slaughter in Syria on Bashar Assad's side; and that has purposefully deceived the West time and time again regarding its nuclear program. Thus Iran can hardly be trusted to abide by any accord with the West.

Thus, the solution to the Iranian crisis proposed in the Brookings Institution paper – which I fear represents mainstream Administration thinking – is unsound. None of its assumptions can be used as a good basis for an agreement: Neither the assumption that a monitoring regime can guarantee identification in real time of Iranian violations; nor the assumption that the US will act with alacrity if a breach is identified; nor the assumption that in the real world Iran will truly be deterred by US threats.

Mr. Einhorn's proposals for an agreement with Iran are important because of his expertise, and they are worrying because they probably represent mainstream thinking in today's Washington. In any case, the proposals fall far from meeting the needs of Israel on this existential matter. An agreement along the lines proposed in the Brookings paper would be far worse than the absence of an agreement, because it would improperly calm the nations of the world and permit full commercial relations with Iran.

With such a flimsy agreement, I wonder what will be left of Western commitment to preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. And Israel will have to draw its own conclusions.

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BESA Center Perspectives Papers are published through the generosity
of the Greg Rosshandler Family