



# In Focus

## Agreement on Iran's Nuclear Capabilities 23 July 2015

On 14 July 2015, Iran and the P5+1 group—the US, UK, France, Germany, China and Russia—[reached an agreement](#) on a long-term deal regarding Iran's nuclear capabilities. The deal, known as the [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action](#), commits Iran to reducing its stockpile of enriched uranium and limiting further enrichment activities, in exchange for sanctions relief.

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### Background

Iran's nuclear project was reportedly decades in the making. Even before the [Iranian revolution](#), the former Shah, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, [planned](#) to build nuclear power reactors in Iran with the help of the international community. It was not until the late 1980s, however, when an alleged [deal](#) between Iran and the “father of Pakistan's atomic bomb”, Abdul Qadeer Khan, led the CIA to [warn](#) that Iran was actively seeking nuclear weapons capability. In April 2006, Iran enriched uranium for the first time, though the then President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, said that it was for “[peaceful purposes only](#)”. Still, the United Nations called on Iran to cease all enrichment activities, and [imposed a number of sanctions](#) including freezing assets of individuals and companies related to the enrichment programme, and banning the supply of nuclear-related technology to the country. Further sanctions were [threatened](#) upon the discovery of a nuclear power plant [subsequently revealed as the Fordow facility] near Qom, in 2009, and the potential of military action against Iran was [discussed by US lawmakers](#). In 2013, secret negotiations allegedly began between US officials and Iran on the country's nuclear ambitions; cooperation which was enhanced by the election of the new President, Hassan Rouhani, in the same year, and the establishment of formal talks. Following 20 months of negotiations, the *Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action* was agreed between Iran and the P5+1 group in July 2015.

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### Iran's Nuclear Capability

As part of the *Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action*, Iran has agreed to [reduce](#) its stockpile of low-enriched uranium by 98 percent. Iran has also [agreed](#) for their centrifuges to only enrich uranium to 3.67 percent, which, according to the US Secretary of State, John Kerry, is enough “[for civilian nuclear power and research, but well below anything that could be used possibly for a weapon](#)”. The agreement stipulates that these limits would be in place for a minimum of 15 years. In addition, Iran has agreed to reduce the number of centrifuges in their possession from 19,000 to 6,104, and only 5,060 of the remaining centrifuges will be allowed to enrich uranium in the country over the next ten years.

The agreement will also require significant repurposing of nuclear facilities in Iran, particularly the Arak and Fordow sites. Under the terms of the agreement, Iran will be [unable](#) to build facilities tasked with enriching uranium for at least 15 years, including heavy-water reactors. As a result, Arak—a heavy-water

reactor site—will be redesigned so that it cannot produce spent fuel (which contains plutonium, a component [found](#) in nuclear bombs), and the Fordow facility will be prohibited from enriching uranium for 15 years, with the facility instead [converted](#) into a nuclear, physics and technology centre. The existing centrifuges at Fordow will be used to [produce](#) isotopes for use in agriculture, industry, medicine and science.

Iran has also agreed with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that it will commit to the [Additional Protocol](#); an expanded set of requirements for information and access to assist the IAEA in confirming that states are using nuclear material for solely peaceful purposes. As part of that agreement, monitors from the IAEA will be able to request entry into any sites in Iran that they “[deem suspicious](#)” in regards to nuclear activity, including military sites. Iran can [challenge the request](#). In such cases an arbitration panel would be formed of representatives from Iran, the European Union and the P5+1 countries, to [decide on the outcome](#) by majority decision, should Iran and the IAEA fail to resolve any disagreement within 14 days.

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## Sanctions

According to the BBC, sanctions imposed by the United Nations, United States and the European Union have “[crippled](#)” Iran’s economy, and have cost the country more than \$102 billion in oil revenue since 2012. In return for reducing their uranium stockpiles and centrifuges, Iran will see its sanctions lifted once the IAEA confirms that it has followed through with the steps agreed to under the agreement. However, should Iran violate those terms, sanctions will “[snapback](#)” into place for ten years, with a possible five-year extension. Restrictions will also remain for [five years](#) on conventional weapon sales to the country, with those relating to the sale of ballistic missile technology remaining for [eight years](#).

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## Commentary

US President, Barack Obama [welcomed](#) the announcement of the Iranian nuclear deal, stating that it “offers an opportunity [for Iran and the P5+1 countries] to move in a new direction”. Mr Obama also made clear that he will fight to preserve the agreement in the US Congress, [vowing](#) he would “veto any legislation” that prevents its successful implementation. The Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani, also commended the deal, stating that it proved that “[constructive engagement works](#)”, and that it marked “the end to acts of tyranny against our nation and the start of cooperation with the world”. The UK Foreign Secretary, Phillip Hammond, [described](#) the agreement as “historic”, noted that, having reached a deal, the focus “will now be on its swift and full implementation to make sure that a nuclear weapon remains beyond Iran’s reach”. In contrast, the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, John Boehner, reacted to the agreement by [stating](#) that Congressional Republicans would do “everything we can to stop it”. Mr Boehner [claimed](#) that “instead of stopping the spread of nuclear weapons in the Middle East, this deal is likely to fuel a nuclear arms race around the world.” Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, also [described](#) the deal as a “bad mistake of historic proportions”.

Writing for *Foreign Affairs*, Professor Robert Jervis [concluded](#) that, whilst the agreement with Iran “falls far short” of what the P5+1 group would have liked, ultimately “in the world as it is, [this deal] is quite good”. Richard N Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations, is more critical, [stating](#) that the agreement “doesn’t solve the problem” of Iran’s nuclear ambitions or the country’s reach in the Middle East, and that “at best it buys us [the P5+1 group] fifteen years”.

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