

Agreement Reached on Framework for Comprehensive Resolution of Iran Nuclear Development Problem

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On April 2, the five United Nations Security Council permanent members and Germany, known as the P5+1, and Iran announced they agreed on a framework for the comprehensive resolution of Iran's nuclear development problem. The Lausanne agreement, named after the Swiss city where their negotiations took place, lists various conditions to limit Iran's nuclear development including (1) restricting and curbing uranium enrichment, (2) dismantling and converting the Fordow uranium enrichment facility, (3) redesigning a heavy water reactor in Arak to bar the production of weapons grade plutonium, and (4) Iran's acceptance of strict inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency. Under the framework agreement, Iran will receive sanctions relief in exchange for its acceptance and implementation of the above conditions.

Iran's uranium enrichment developed into an international problem immediately after its revelation in 2002. It became an even more serious problem as an IAEA report in 2011 noted that the Iranian nuclear energy research was similar to a nuclear weapon development program. Military attack options to prevent Iran's nuclear development became a media topic, and the Iran problem was positioned as one of the most significant geopolitical risks in the Middle East. The problem was combined with the Arab Spring democratic movements to destabilize the Middle East, triggering crude oil price hikes. Western countries then toughened financial sanctions on Iran and embargoes on Iranian oil, dealing a severe blow to the Iranian economy.

Both Iran and Western countries then stuck to their respective basic stances on the nuclear development problem, sustaining confrontational attitudes. As Iran launched a conciliatory approach following the inauguration of the Hassan Rouhani administration in August 2013 and the U.S. Obama administration grew keener about attaining a resolution to the Iran nuclear problem as a foreign and security policy achievement, the way was paved for efforts to resolve the problem by a diplomatic approach. In November 2013, the Geneva agreement for restricting Iran's uranium

enrichment and freezing Western economic sanctions on Iran came as the first step to resolving the problem, leading to negotiations toward a comprehensive resolution. The six-month deadline for the negotiations was extended twice, with Iran and the P5+1 group pursuing a final agreement at the end of June this year. They produced the Lausanne agreement through difficult negotiations to set the framework for the final resolution in June. Negotiators including U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif held energetic talks beyond the March-end deadline for the framework agreement.

The Lausanne agreement includes some specific Iranian actions to be put into the final agreement: (1) reducing the number of centrifuges for enriching uranium from about 19,000 at present to 5,060 for actual operation, (2) limiting the uranium content of low-enriched uranium for production with these centrifuges to 3.67% for 15 years, (3) reducing Iran's current stockpile of about 10 tons of low-enriched uranium to 300 kilograms, (4) building no new facilities for the purpose of enriching uranium for 15 years, (5) enriching uranium only at the Natanz facility and (6) refraining from enriching uranium at the Fordow facility and from producing plutonium in Arak. These actions are designed to reduce Iran's production capacity for weapons grade nuclear materials from one bomb per two to three months at present to one bomb per more than one year at least over the next 10 years. It is important that strict inspections are planned to secure the purpose. If Iranian actions are implemented as agreed, a significant brake may be put on Iran's nuclear development. In this sense, the Lausanne agreement indicates a realistic choice based on the realities of Iran's nuclear development status.

Iran will not lose all nuclear development capabilities nor close any nuclear facility under the agreement. It will be allowed to continue limited research and development of the next-generation centrifuges in line with its insisted demand. If Iran's implementation of these actions is confirmed, it will pave the way for Western countries to ease or lift economic sanctions that have plagued the Iranian economy. The Lausanne agreement thus represents appreciable achievements both for Iran and the P5+1 group.

As a matter of course, the Lausanne agreement is positioned as a framework for the comprehensive resolution of the problem. Iran and the P5+1 group will have to agree on technical and other details regarding the actions in the framework toward the end of June. At the same time, these countries will have to secure their respective domestic understanding of and support for the framework. It may not be so easy for them to do so while nailing down the details toward the end of June. The Lausanne agreement could invite repercussions from U.S. Middle East allies Israel and Saudi Arabia, leading the United States and other P5+1 group members to deal with the agreement

as a diplomatic problem linked to their respective domestic politics. For the next three months to the end of June, we may have to closely watch discussions and negotiations on the final resolution of Iran's nuclear development problem as one of the most important issues that would influence international politics, geopolitics in the Middle East and international energy problems.

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