



Iran's Negotiating Track with the IAEA

By David Albright and Andrea Stricker
November 26, 2013

On November 11, 2013, Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) signed a [Joint Statement on a Framework for Cooperation](#) whereby “Iran and the IAEA will cooperate further with respect to verification activities to be undertaken by the IAEA to resolve all present and past issues.” As a first step, Iran and the IAEA agreed to a set of six measures listed in an [Annex](#) to the statement, and Iran agreed to implement these measures within three months from the date of the Statement. In an [interview](#) with Reuters on November 13, Director General Yukiya Amano said that the initial measures are “an important first step towards clarifying outstanding issues.” But it should be emphasized that the bulk of the work, thus many more measures, remain to be negotiated. Amano also told Reuters that the actual implementation of the statement “would be key.”

This joint statement is intended to set up a new negotiating process whereby the IAEA can resolve its concerns about Iran's past and possibly on-going nuclear weapons work and other military dimensions of its nuclear program. For several years, Iran and the IAEA have been unable to reach an agreement on addressing these concerns along with a range of other transparency issues. In the last 18 months the most visible aspect of this conflict has involved very public IAEA requests to visit the Parchin military complex; Iran rejected all of its requests for access. Instead, after the IAEA's first request in early 2012, it proceeded to sanitize, demolish portions of, and reconstruct the site in an apparent effort to hide past activities and undermine the IAEA's ability to conduct verification activities. This new approach starts with less controversial transparency issues but in subsequent phases, in a step-by-step approach, it will address the main IAEA concerns over the possible military dimensions (PMD) of Iran's nuclear program.

The IAEA/Iran negotiating track is in parallel to the P5+1/Iran negotiations. However, the recently negotiated P5+1/Iran [Joint Plan of Action](#) links the two tracks, or “intertwines” them. The joint plan establishes a Joint Commission, comprised of the P5+1 and Iran, to monitor the implementation of the near-term agreement and work with the IAEA to facilitate the resolution of “past and present issues of concern.” Unless Iran satisfies the IAEA's concerns, a final resolution appears doubtful. Intertwining the IAEA and P5+1 negotiating tracks emphasizes the central importance of addressing the IAEA's concerns and creates a practical deadline for Iran to satisfy those concerns. If it does not, Iran risks not obtaining significant sanctions relief as a result of a failure to satisfy the objectives of the United Nations Security Council resolutions on Iran (which require P5 unanimity to undo), finalize a comprehensive deal under the Joint Plan, or meet conditions established by the U.S. Congress.

The intertwining of the two negotiating tracks highlights the need for Iran and the IAEA to progress expeditiously. Iranian cooperation will be key. To save time, the IAEA and Iran should agree on more

measures before implementing the first set. Otherwise, the IAEA/Iran track could delay the effort to achieve a comprehensive agreement in the P5+1 track.

First Practical Measures

The first step, which the IAEA called small but important, includes six measures designed to allow greater access to nuclear or nuclear-related sites and related information and to clarify Iran's public statements about its plans to build nuclear facilities. The latter, which involves four measures, would bring Iran more into compliance with its safeguards obligations to notify the IAEA about building new nuclear facilities prior to the actual start of construction. The former would institute IAEA access to two sites and provide it with more information about these sites. Once implemented, the former would bring Iran a few steps closer to the implementation of the Additional Protocol, which Iran is yet unwilling to ratify.

Measures to Clarify Public Statements

The four measures aiming to clarify Iranian public announcements are:

1. Providing information on all new research reactors;
2. Providing information with regard to the identification of 16 sites designated for the construction of nuclear power plants;
3. Clarifying Iran's announcement regarding additional enrichment facilities;
4. Further clarification of the announcement made by Iran with respect to laser enrichment technology.

These four measures are meant to clarify Iran's public statements about its intentions to build nuclear facilities. Over the last several years, Iranian officials have announced in the media plans to build research and power reactors. Iran also announced that it would build ten gas centrifuge plants. Construction of one of the centrifuge plants could have started last summer, based on a literal reading of past public statements by senior Iranian officials. On August 16, 2010, then nuclear head Ali Akbar Salehi claimed that "studies for the location of 10 other uranium enrichment facilities" had ended, and that "the construction of one of these facilities will begin by the end of the (current Iranian) year (March 2011) or start of the next year."¹ Succeeding nuclear head Fereydoun Abbassi-Davani said in mid-2011 that construction on additional enrichment plants was delayed by two years.² It is reasonable to ask whether in mid-2013 Iran started construction of this centrifuge plant. Given the concern that Iran may build a secret another centrifuge plant, it is not surprising the IAEA has sought clarification about these public statements. Iran has committed in the Joint Plan of Action that it will not construct a centrifuge plant during the initial period of six months. This commitment remains to be verified, as would any Iranian statement that it is not building a third centrifuge plant.

In addition, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced in 2010 at a major laser exhibition in Tehran that Iran possessed laser enrichment technology.³ He stated: "Today, we are capable of

¹ "Iran Specifies Location for 10 New Enrichment Sites," Fars News Agency, August 16, 2010.

² Siavosh Ghazi, "Iran atomic chief says fuel swap talks over: IRNA," AFP, August 29, 2011.

³ For details of this 2010 announcement and other information about Iran's laser enrichment activities and capabilities, see David Albright and Serena Kelleher-Vergantini, *Lashkar Ab'ad: Iran's Unexplained Laser Enrichment Capabilities*, ISIS Report, July 29, 2013. http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Lashkar_Abad_29July2013.pdf

enriching uranium with lasers. It is now possible to do this using the same devices which are on display here in this exhibition.”⁴ He added that “using the laser technology for enriching uranium would lead to carrying out the enrichment process with a higher quality, accuracy and speed.” However, he also stated that “the Iranian scientists have acquired the laser-operating uranium enrichment know-how but would put the technology on shelf for the moment.” He highlighted that given that Iran was using centrifuges for enriching uranium it would not use its laser technology for enrichment. But with Iran’s long experience at subterfuge about its nuclear activities, the IAEA has rightly asked Iran to clarify the February 2010 statement.

Measures to Gain Access

The IAEA also has sought access to a range of nuclear or nuclear-related sites. Two measures cover two sites in particular:

1. Providing mutually agreed relevant information and managed access to the Gchine mine in Bandar Abbas.

Comment: This will allow the IAEA to know the amount of natural uranium mined at Gchine, making it harder for Iran to generate a secret stock of natural uranium that could be used in a clandestine, parallel centrifuge program. It would also bring Iran one step closer to implementing the Additional Protocol, which requires a state to provide information about mining and milling and complementary access;

2. Providing mutually agreed relevant information and managed access to the Heavy Water Production Plant.

Comment: This type of nuclear-related facility is not inspected under a comprehensive safeguards agreement, but under the Additional Protocol, the IAEA would receive information about the scale of operations of the site and have complementary access to it. So, this measure would also bring Iran closer to implementing the Additional Protocol as well.

Next Measures

While important, the implementation of the initial measures are still only a first step. They remain far from being enough to satisfy the IAEA’s concerns. As of late November, moreover, the next measures have not been agreed to or announced. The IAEA writes in its most recent [Iran safeguards report](#) (bolding for emphasis):

*In the Framework for Cooperation, the Agency and Iran agreed to cooperate further with respect to verification activities to be undertaken by the Agency **to resolve all present and past issues** and that Iran will implement the initial practical measures within three months. **The outstanding issues that are not addressed by the practical measures....including those issues identified in previous reports of the Director General to the Board of Governors, will be addressed in subsequent steps.***

Subsequent measures that the IAEA will need to implement in cooperation with Iran include addressing the key outstanding issues that involve its concerns about past and possibly on-going

⁴ The following text in this paragraph containing the quotes (and their references) is from *Lashkar Ab’ad: Iran’s Unexplained Laser Enrichment Capabilities*, op cit., pp 15-16.

nuclear weapons work and other alleged military dimensions. For instance, Iran will need to provide the IAEA with far more information and allow IAEA access to sites in question including the Parchin site and likely workshops associated with the manufacture of mock re-entry vehicles used in Iran's alleged work on nuclear weapons prior to 2004. Iran will need to provide procurement information related to these alleged military activities, including those by the Physics Research Center, a military entity which evidence supports conducted in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s parallel military nuclear activities involving extensive foreign procurement activities. Overall, Iran will need to provide far more cooperation on all these issues than it has done so far.