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## **ISIS Analysis of Russian Proposal: Ask Iran to Come Clean on Nuclear Weaponization Before Removing Sanctions**

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov visited Washington last month and [presented a proposal to settle international concerns regarding Iran's nuclear programs](#). Under the proposal, Iran would answer various International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) questions regarding its program, and in return Iran would receive progressive easing of sanctions. ISIS assesses that this proposal has several important characteristics that will need to be incorporated into any action on the Iranian nuclear issue, including addressing IAEA concerns and creating a step-by-step process. It is not clear if the proposal includes a halt to production of 19.75 percent enriched uranium. The proposal, however, does not appear to include any requirement for a halt to Iran's enrichment program in general before these actions are taken. Without such a halt, Iran's enrichment program would continue to grow in capacity and increase Iran's ability to quickly, and perhaps secretly, make highly enriched uranium (HEU) for nuclear weapons in its centrifuge plants.

Legitimizing enrichment is unlikely to be worth the benefits offered by the Russian proposal. However, these benefits could be greatly expanded if the proposal were modified.

The key is to insist that Iran come clean on its alleged nuclear weaponization activities before any sanctions are reduced. If Iran admitted to having a nuclear weapons effort and allowed the IAEA to verify this effort's halt and dismantlement, international confidence could grow to the extent that a small enrichment program could be tolerated. Two decades ago, this formula worked in the cases of Brazil and South Africa, two countries with clandestine nuclear weapons efforts. Their disclosures created transparency and enough confidence that few believed their residual uranium enrichment programs would be used to make HEU for nuclear weapons. However, absent a verified disclosure of Iran's nuclear weaponization activities, legitimizing Iran's enrichment activities makes it easier for Iran to build nuclear weapons at a date of its choosing.

Recent events have shown that Iran continues to increase its enrichment capability in incremental but significant steps. [Iran announced](#) in July that it is in the process of installing 164-machine cascades of advanced centrifuges into its pilot facility at the Natanz enrichment site. [Iran has also stated](#) that it intends on installing the advanced centrifuges at the formerly covert Fordow enrichment near Qom within the next few months. Iran continues to produce and stockpile 19.75 percent enriched uranium and has announced plans to triple these production levels. This steady expansion of Iran's enrichment program represents a steady increase in its capability to more quickly make HEU for nuclear weapons.

The Russian proposal risks offering Iran enrichment under greater supervision, a minimal condition that is unlikely to have any significant impact on Iran's move toward a nuclear weapons capability or, ultimately, nuclear weapons. Moreover, this offer ignores that Iran is steadily developing the capability to rapidly make HEU mostly under IAEA supervision.

It is difficult to argue anymore that if Iran moves to make HEU for a nuclear weapon, it would do so only with a parallel, covert enrichment program. With the development of the Fordow enrichment plant and advanced centrifuges, Iran may or may not use a small covert plant to further enrich low enriched uranium to weapon-grade. It may do so in the Fordow plant, which is largely impervious to aerial military strikes. There is no longer much of a distance between a military and civilian enrichment program in Iran; perhaps that difference has always been less important than often assumed. So, the benefits of additional supervision would likely be marginal if the goal is to reduce the chance of Iran dashing to produce HEU in the future.