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## Ahmadinejad Reiterates Willingness to Halt 20 Percent Enrichment

In a September 21 [interview](#) with *The New York Times*'s Nicholas Kristof, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad again reiterated Iran's willingness to halt domestic 20 percent low enriched uranium (LEU) production in return for foreign supply of the material. He said, "If they give us the 20% enriched uranium this very week, we will cease the domestic enrichment of uranium of up to 20 percent this very week." Ahmadinejad [previously stated](#) Iran's interest in such an arrangement to *The Washington Post*'s Lally Weymouth on September 13. He indicated that Iran would still seek to produce 3.5 percent LEU.

ISIS [assesses](#) that the United States and other P5+1 negotiating partners would be wise to pursue this offer and that an agreement that would cap 20 percent LEU production and institute a sales agreement for foreign supply of the fuel for the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR) would be a positive measure. Iran has no immediate or logical need for such large stockpiles of this material and its continued production only fuels concern that its enrichment program is [oriented toward](#) achieving a nuclear weapons breakout capability. To test out Ahmadinejad's offer, the United States could suggest that it would arrange the sale of two-year's worth of TRR fuel in exchange for a two-year halt to any production of uranium enriched over five percent. TRR targets for medical isotope production could also be offered for sale to increase interest in the deal. Such an agreement would be modest. It would not substitute for an agreement solving the fundamental nuclear issues and should not include any reductions in sanctions on Iran, or for that matter slow down current efforts to increase both the level of sanctions and their effectiveness.

It remains, as of yet, unclear whether Ahmadinejad has coordinated his announcements with other parts of the Iranian nuclear establishment, namely Atomic Energy Organization of Iran head Fereydoun Abbasi-Davani or Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei. In his interview to Kristof, Ahmadinejad appeared surprised that Abbasi-Davani had [earlier ruled out](#) any halt to 20 percent enrichment in favor of importing the fuel, [in contradiction to his offers](#). Kristof asked: "Mr. Abbasi-Davani, the head of the Iranian nuclear program, was quoted as saying that [such an arrangement] was no longer a possibility." Ahmadinejad replied: "Who did you hear that from sir?" and indicated that Abbasi-Davani was perhaps just disappointed with the West's failure to follow through on a sales agreement. Ahmadinejad also failed to win internal consensus on a 2009 proposal for Iran to swap out its 20 percent LEU for foreign fabrication of the material into reactor fuel. Thus, questions remain whether Ahmadinejad could deliver any agreement.

Nonetheless, the United States would do well to follow up on his offer with a "sales and cap" proposal. Despite the limited nature of such an agreement, capping even temporarily Iran's stock of 20 percent LEU would reduce concern that Iran is producing weapon-grade uranium piecemeal. This agreement would also provide humanitarian assistance by increasing Iran's supply of medical isotopes.