



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on April 3, 2015

“Framework” Agreement With Iran Faces Hurdles in Congress and the World

“If Iran cheats, the world will know it,” President Obama said as the United States and five other nations announced in Lausanne, Switzerland, Thursday the outline of a 15-year agreement with Iran over its nuclear program. There remain many details remain to be worked out and more than a few obstacles to overcome, however, before the countries involved in the negotiations — all five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, plus Germany — reach a final agreement with the Tehran government scheduled for the end of June.



Indeed, even with the announcement of the “framework” agreement, Obama appeared to be already in a damage-control mode, cautioning Congress against voting for increased sanctions that could result in a diplomatic failure and attempting to allay the concerns of Arab nations and Israel over Iran’s rising in power and influence in the region. The [New York Times reported](#) that Obama invited Arab leaders to the presidential retreat at Camp David this spring for a conference on Iran and that he phoned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to assure him of “significant progress towards a lasting, comprehensive solution” that will close Iran’s “pathways to a bomb” and ensure Iran’s nuclear program will be peaceful. Netanyahu, who deplored the terms of the negotiations in a speech to the U.S. Congress last month, remained unpersuaded, issuing a statement Thursday saying, “A deal based on this framework would threaten the survival of Israel.”

According to the tentative agreement, Iran will cut its number of operating centrifuges by two-thirds, to 5,060, and reduce its current stockpile of low-enriched uranium from around 10,000 kilograms to 300 for 15 years. It would drastically reduce its total stockpile of nuclear fuel, from about eight tons to a little over 600 pounds. The giant underground enrichment site at Fordo is to be partially converted to advanced nuclear research and the production of medical isotopes. At Arak, where officials feared plutonium might be used to produce a bomb, Iran agreed to redesign a heavy-water reactor in a way that would make it incapable of producing fuel for weapons.

At some point foreign scientists would be present. The agreement, Obama said, calls for the most intrusive inspection regime in history, though a mechanism for resolving disputes over activities at the nuclear facilities has either not yet been decided or remains to be announced.

According to the White House account of the agreement, Iran will be required to cut the number of centrifuges enriching uranium by half, put thousands of others in storage, and convert two of its facilities into research sites without fissile material that could be used in the making of an atom bomb.

Despite warnings over the past several decades by U.S. and Israeli officials of an imminent Iranian nuclear threat, Iran has insisted its nuclear program is for civilian uses only.

Iran’s lead negotiator Mohammad Javad Zarif, said his nation will not have to dismantle any facilities,



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something Washington had initially demanded. He also indicated there remain differences over the lifting of the economic sanctions against Iran, with Zarif suggesting the sanctions will be removed as soon as the final agreement is reached in June. The Obama administration has insisted they will be lifted incrementally, as Iran complies with the terms of the agreement.

There are apparently other points on which there is some dispute over the terms of the tentative agreement between the Iranian team and the negotiators led by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry. As statements describing Iranian concessions were being distributed in Washington, Zarif responded with a number of Twitter postings, including one that read: "There is no need to spin using 'fact sheets' so early on."

The agreement, according to those "fact sheets," would drastically cut Iran's capability for 10 years and then allow it to build up gradually for the next five. After that, Iran would be free to produce as much uranium as it wants and could build the 190,000 centrifuges that Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has said he wants. For the first decade of the agreement, Iran would be prevented from turning to nuclear weapons production in a "breakout" year, as has often been predicted, according U.S. Secretary of Energy Ernest J. Moniz, who is credited with playing a key role in the latter stages of the negotiations.

But critics in Congress, in Israel, and among Arab nations worry that the agreement will leave Iran free to go for the bomb in another 10 to 15 years. In the Arab world, there is also concern that, apart from the nuclear issue, the deal enhances the influence and prestige of Iran as a player on the world stage. The Shia nation has taken a key role in fighting the Sunni Islamic State in Iraq and is a financial supporter of Hezbollah in Lebanon and other terrorist organizations in the Middle East.

"There's a nuclear Iran being dealt with by this deal, but what's much more worrying is the sectarian Iran and expansionist Iran," Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, a retired political science professor in the United Arab Emirates, [told the Wall Street Journal](#). In Washington, Republican leaders are insisting that Congress have a say on any final agreement.

In a statement released by John Boehner (R-Ohio), the speaker of the House said his "immediate concern is the administration signaling it will provide near-term sanctions relief." Congress must "fully review the details of any agreement before any sanctions are lifted," Boehner said. Senator Bob Corker, a Tennessee Republican and chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, issued a statement saying that in any final agreement "the American people, through their elected representatives, must have the opportunity to weigh in to ensure the deal truly can eliminate the threat of Iran's nuclear program and hold the regime accountable."

Senator Mark Kirk (R-Ill) invoked [the Munich analogy](#) in a reference to one of the top State Department negotiators of the "framework" agreement, claiming "Neville Chamberlain got a lot of more out of Hitler than Wendy Sherman got out of Iran."

Administration officials, while continuing to warn that legislation could derail an agreement, said they are "open to discussions" on what "oversight" role Congress could play, [Fox News reported](#). Senator Robert Menendez, a New Jersey Democrat and co-sponsor with Corker of a bill requiring a congressional review of any final agreement with Iran, suggested there would be "a strong vote in favor" of the legislation, which Congress is expected to take up by mid-April.

"If diplomats can negotiate for two-years on this issue, then certainly Congress is entitled to a review period of an agreement that will fundamentally alter our relationship with Iran and the sanctions imposed by Congress," Menendez said in a written statement. "The best outcome remains a good deal



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that ends Iran's illicit nuclear weapons program. That requires a strong, united, and bipartisan approach from the administration and Congress."

It might also require a finding that Iran actually has a nuclear *weapons* program, despite repeated findings by the International Atomic Energy Agency and U.S. intelligence agencies of an absence of evidence that Iran has turned its nuclear program of energy production and medical applications toward weapons production. As Fareed Zakaria wrote in the *Washington Post* after Prime Minister Netanyahu's speech to Congress last month:

[For almost 25 years now](#) Netanyahu has argued that Iran is on the verge of producing a nuclear weapon. [In 1996](#) — 19 years ago — he addressed the Congress and made pretty much the same argument he made this week. Over the last 10 years he has argued repeatedly that Iran is one year away from a bomb.

Zakaria likened Netanyahu to Peter Pan in Never-Never Land. Perhaps he is more the prime minister who cries "Wolf!"

Photo at top shows (from the left) Head of Mission of People's Republic of China to the European Union Hailong Wu, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, German Foreign Minister Frank Walter Steinmeier, European Union High Representative Federica Mogherini, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarifat, Russian Deputy Political Director Alexey Karpov, British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond and US Secretary of State John Kerry arrive, at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, or Ecole Polytechnique Federale De Lausanne, in Lausanne, Switzerland, April 2, 2015, after Iran nuclear program talks finished: AP Images

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