



## Time is Short for Iran to Address IAEA's Nuclear Weapon Concerns

*International security is more important than saving face.*

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The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reportedly expressed concerns that the Islamic Republic of Iran will not address by a late August deadline two key outstanding issues concerning allegations of Iran's past and possibly ongoing work on nuclear weapons, or the so-called "possible military dimensions" (PMD) to its nuclear program.<sup>1</sup> Unless Iran addresses the IAEA's concerns before the deadline, the chance is reduced of successfully negotiating a long term nuclear agreement between the P5+1 and Iran. They are negotiating on a separate track and are expected to resume their negotiations in the coming weeks.

In May 2014, Iran and the IAEA agreed on a third of a series of measures under their November 2013 Joint Statement on a Framework for Cooperation aimed at addressing the IAEA's concerns with regard to Iran's nuclear program; two of these measures are directly related to the PMD file. With less than a month left until the August 25 deadline for fulfilling the third tranche of commitments, Iran has reportedly done little to meet its commitments on these two PMD issues.

Since 2002, the IAEA has voiced concerns about the nature of Iran's nuclear program. These concerns, substantiated by over a thousand pages of technical information corroborated by secondary sources and supplied by more than ten IAEA member states, led the agency to issue a detailed account of Iran's alleged military nuclear work in its November 8, 2011 safeguards report.<sup>2</sup> The IAEA listed twelve areas of Iran's nuclear activity which could potentially be linked to military nuclear programs. Although the IAEA had earlier discussions with Iran about military nuclear activities, these discussions stopped in September 2008 despite the IAEA's repeated

<sup>1</sup> Fredrik Dahl, "IAEA worried about slow progress in Iran nuclear probe: sources," Reuters, July 22, 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/07/22/us-iran-nuclear-iaea-idUSKBN0FR1RE20140722>

<sup>2</sup> IAEA Director General, *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran for November 8, 2011*, GOV/2011/65, <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2011/gov2011-65.pdf>.

calls for cooperation. When the Joint Plan of Action was signed in November 2013, the IAEA, received support for its mandate to work towards resolving “past and present issues of concern.”<sup>3</sup>

In the IAEA/Iran Framework for Cooperation, Iran pledged to address all of the IAEA’s concerns, including the PMD issues.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, in February, it agreed, among other steps, to furnish the IAEA with information regarding Exploding Bridge Wire (EBW) detonators by May 15, 2014.<sup>5</sup> These detonators, in addition to a series of civilian applications, are also an essential part of setting off the high explosives in a nuclear explosive device. The IAEA said it was reviewing the documentation provided by Iran on EBW detonators and indicated it had remaining questions for Iran in regard to this matter.<sup>6</sup> Iran stated that the application for the EBW’s was strictly peaceful in nature but the IAEA did not draw such a conclusion. Thus, the EBW issue remained open, despite the May deadline.

On May 21, 2014, Iran and the IAEA agreed upon another series of measures, two of which are PMD issues. The first concerns the “initiation of high explosives, including the conduct of large scale high explosives experimentation in Iran” and the second is “related to studies made and/or papers published in Iran in relation to neutron transport and associated modeling and calculations and their alleged application to compressed materials.”<sup>7</sup> It is this resolution that is due by the August 25, 2014 deadline and has not been forthcoming.

Media reports in June and July had earlier highlighted the IAEA’s concerns about the slow pace of the probe. While the IAEA’s investigation is separate from the ongoing P5+1 negotiations with Iran, the two efforts run on a parallel tracks that must eventually come together. The IAEA has stated that it will take a considerable amount of time to holistically address the PMD issue, yet any comprehensive deal is contingent upon the initial outcome of this investigation. One senior negotiator from the P5+1 stated that Iran is going to have to admit and detail in some manner about its past work on nuclear weapons. This official added that very important sanctions relief will be tied to the resolution of this issue.

Without addressing these concerns, including understanding the past, the IAEA and the P5+1 cannot construct an adequate verification regime capable of detecting clandestine nuclear facilities and activities. The IAEA (and Western intelligence agencies) lack understanding of how

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<sup>3</sup> Joint Plan of Action, November 28, 2013,  
[http://eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/131124\\_03\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/131124_03_en.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> David Albright and Andrea Stricker, “Iran’s Negotiating Track with the IAEA,” ISIS Report, November 13, 2013, <http://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/irans-negotiating-track-with-the-iaea/8>.

<sup>5</sup> “IAEA and Iran conclude talks in connection with the implementation of the Framework for Cooperation,” IAEA Press Office, February 9, 2014, <http://www.iaea.org/press/?p=4393>.

<sup>6</sup> IAEA Director General, *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in Iran for May 23, 2014*, GOV/2014/28, <http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/iaea-iranreport-230514.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Joint Statement by Iran and IAEA, Press Release 2014/11, May 21, 2014.

<http://www.iaea.org/newscenter/pressreleases/2014/prn201411.html>

much Iran knows about making nuclear weapons. When did Iran seek nuclear weapons, how far did it get, what types did it pursue, and how and where did it do this work? How long would it take Iran to weaponize fissile material? Was this weapons capability just put on the shelf, waiting to be quickly restarted? Who worked on these projects? The IAEA needs a good baseline of Iran's military nuclear activities in order to design a verification regime. Moreover, to develop confidence that no weaponization activities take place after the deal is reached, the IAEA will need to periodically inspect past weaponization sites and interview key individuals for years to come. Without more information, it does not know where to go and who to speak to, let alone whether such activity is continuing in a covert manner. Fundamental questions at the core of this decade-long controversy would remain unanswered.

Moreover, if Iran can prevent the IAEA from inspecting military sites where work is alleged to have taken place on developing nuclear weapons, it could also use that precedent to deny the IAEA access to other military sites, some of which it could use later on to hide a covert centrifuge or nuclear weaponization plant. In fact, according to a senior member of a negotiating team, Iranian negotiators stated that allowing IAEA access to military sites was a major obstacle and was opposed by Iran's Revolutionary Guards. But limiting nuclear capabilities at known sites does not make sense if at the same time the deal makes it easier for Iran to make weapon-grade uranium at secret sites. The deal must focus on both potential pathways.

Calls to ignore past military nuclear related efforts by Iran and focus instead only on the present are therefore at best naïve and reflect a poor understanding of adequate verification and the critical lessons learned by the IAEA in key historical cases. In the latter cases, success depended on learning past secret nuclear activities, such as in South Africa and Libya, and failure was ensured when the state refused or was not required to do so, such as in the cases of North Korea in the early 1990s and Iraq prior to 1991. To allow Iran to stonewall the IAEA in the face of the historical record would be unwise.

For there to be an adequate deal, Iran must acknowledge having had a nuclear weapons program, or "come clean," in some manner and must pledge full cooperation with the IAEA in its ongoing verification effort. Without addressing the IAEA's concerns, Iran should not receive major sanctions relief.<sup>8</sup>

For Iran, admitting that it once had a nuclear weapons program and that some of those activities even continued past 2003 may seem politically unpalatable. However, the purpose of such an admission is not to publicly humiliate Iran as some have suggested. There are many ways in which Iran can admit past nuclear weapons work and minimize embarrassment; other historical cases can provide lessons for methods to accomplish these dual goals. But ignoring this issue to spare the Islamic Republic of Iran embarrassment, or allow it to somehow "save

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<sup>8</sup> David Albright, Olli Heinonen and Andrea Stricker, "The Six's' Guiding Principles in Negotiating with Iran," ISIS Report, July 22, 2014, [http://www.isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Principles\\_and\\_Compromises-\\_july\\_22\\_2014-final1.pdf](http://www.isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Principles_and_Compromises-_july_22_2014-final1.pdf).

face,” makes no sense. To do so puts the United States and its allies at unacceptable risk. Equivalently, ignoring this issue or leaving it unresolved reduces the issue to a matter of trust. Given Iran’s history of violations of its non-proliferation commitments and strong evidence of past military nuclear efforts, such a gamble would be imprudent.

The Iranian regime must decide soon whether it is willing to make the type of concessions needed to secure a long term deal. One senior negotiator stated near the end of recent negotiations in Vienna that Iran must “come to terms with reality.” Part of that reevaluation must include the military dimensions of Iran’s nuclear programs. This issue is not the only major stumbling block to a long term deal—there are plenty of others. However, unless there is verified assurance that Iran is no longer developing nuclear weapons, and gaining this assurance requires an understanding of the history of Iran’s military nuclear efforts, any deal will be inadequate, possibly destabilizing, and bad for U.S. and international security. A fundamental question will not have a satisfactory answer: Does the deal provide sufficient assurance that Iran will not build nuclear weapons someday and possibly use them against the United States and its allies?