

## **Peter Jenkins “What has become of the July 2015 Nuclear Agreement with Iran?”**

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Peter Jenkins began by reviewing the history of Iran’s nuclear programme. Between the mid-1980s and 2003 the programme had a covert military and an overt civilian component. Its clandestine element was conceived in reaction to Iraq’s nuclear weapon programme. Why it survived the dismantling of Iraq’s programme in the early 90s is still unclear. Continuing research into nuclear weapons may have been seen as reinsurance against an uncertain future. The civilian component was partly about prestige: Iran wanted and wants to be seen as a major Asian civilisation and as a significant international player.

US intelligence determined in 2007 that Iran had ended its nuclear weapons programme in 2003. That was when Iran opened negotiations with the UK, France and Germany. A leading influence on this decision was Hasan Rouhani – President of Iran from 2013.

Why did the US take so long to act on their assessment that Iran no longer sought nuclear weapons? (Iran and the US only engaged with a view to serious negotiations in 2012.) It’s not clear, but the fact that many in the US continued to want to deprive Iran of an enrichment capability, despite the assessment, was probably an important factor.

#### The JCPOA 2015 agreement

- Iran offered to reduce the number of operational centrifuges from 19,000 (13,000 operable) to 5,300, and to reduce its stock of low enriched uranium to 300 kgs (the rest has been shipped to Russia). These reductions have increased the time it would take Iran to enrich uranium to weapons grade to about one year.
- On the Arak heavy water reactor, the Iranians have agreed to convert it to a light water reactor with the spent fuel being shipped to Russia and have pledged not to build further heavy water reactors.
- The 3,000-centrifuge plant at Fordow is being converted to a research facility for the production of medical isotopes.
- Iran undertook to implement the additional protocol in perpetuity, allowing for greater IAEA scrutiny, including on-site inspections. [The additional protocol was developed because of the IAEA’s lack of awareness of the development of Iraq’s nuclear programme in the 1980s.]
- The IAEA can also monitor the production of centrifuge machines, and uranium mining.
- Iran has pledged to remain a party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in perpetuity.

Iran has implemented all its obligations under the agreement and so far has complied fully with it. There no chance of Iran cheating on this agreement with impunity, were they tempted to do so, given the level of on-site and off-site surveillance. In fact, Iran's leaders insist that they have no intention of cheating because they consider nuclear weapons to be forbidden by their Islamic beliefs – and the West ought not to look cynically on that affirmation; the Iranian reaction to the 1980s Iraqi programme does not necessarily disprove it.

On the other side, the 2015 agreement requires the lifting of nuclear-related economic sanctions on Iran, including the un-freezing of Iranian assets (c. US\$50bn frozen since 2012, mostly oil revenues) and the re-opening of access to the interbank Swift system. The Western record of compliance with this requirement has been patchy. UN and European trade and financial sanctions have been lifted. But the United States, where attitudes to Iran remain largely hostile, has refused to allow unblocked Iranian funds to pass through the US banking system, even momentarily, and has done too little to assure European banks that the US will not fine them for doing business with Iran.

For the near future, Peter Jenkins thinks Rohani is likely to be re-elected in June 2017, though conservatives will try to profit from the failure so far to materialise of many of the benefits that the government promised to Iranians as a result of the agreement. The economy has improved in 2016, despite low oil prices. An unknown factor is whether the Supreme Leader will want Rohani to serve another term. If Rohani is re-elected, the JCPOA will be safe until 2021 at least.

In the US, in the unlikely event of Trump being elected, he would come under pressure from the Pentagon and the national security establishment to comply with the agreement. If Hilary Clinton becomes president the prognosis will not be certain because of her closeness to the Israeli government of Binyamin Netanyahu, who has been opposed to the JCPOA, but she too will come under pressure from the national security bureaucracy to maintain it (and Bill Clinton is likely to encourage her to do so).

After 2030 Iran will be free to manufacture as many centrifuges as it pleases (while remaining under advanced IAEA safeguards and subject to NPT non-proliferation obligations). This would enable it to produce enough weapons grade uranium for one device in a matter of weeks, if it were to choose to do so. That possibility is likely to alarm some of its neighbours. This suggests that the West ought to make every effort to create incentives for Iran to exercise its post-2030 freedom with restraint – for “nuclear prudence”. That means re-integrating Iran into the world economy and community of nations so that they have much to lose if they start to exercise their nuclear rights recklessly. Will US politicians come to understand this? At present only a minority show signs of readiness to move towards a more “balanced” attitude to Iran and a more normal US relationship with Iran.

For non-proliferation the JCPOA is good news. It means that, apart from North Korea (a horse that has already bolted), there are currently no states of proliferation concern. Some have suggested Saudi Arabia could become of concern, because of the JCPOA, but it is a party to the NPT and would be inhibited from embarking on a nuclear weapons programme

by its close relationship with the US and increasingly (and surprisingly) with Israel. The other country sometimes mentioned is Turkey. But it is also a party to the NPT and such a move would jeopardise its relations with the US, Russia and Israel, and its membership of NATO.