



A New Approach to Resolve Military Aspects of Iran's Nuclear Program

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Despite a great effort over the last year, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has learned little from Iran that has added to the inspectors' ability to resolve their concern about Iran's past and possibly on-going work on nuclear weapons. Recently, the IAEA has also been unable to reach agreement with Iran on how to tackle the remaining military nuclear issues. In a recent appearance in Washington, DC, the IAEA's Director General Yukiya Amano repeatedly emphasized that the military nuclear issues need to be addressed and solved. It is time for the IAEA to chart a new course before its lack of progress in resolving this issue collides with the effort by the world's powers and Iran to achieve a nuclear deal by November 24. The IAEA, with the support of the United States, must act quickly.

For years, the inspectors have unsuccessfully asked the Islamic Republic to address the substantial body of evidence that Iran was developing nuclear weapons prior to 2004 and that it may have continued some of that, or related, work afterwards, even up to the present. The November 24 deadline is fast approaching for the major powers and Iran to negotiate a long-term comprehensive agreement capable of ensuring that Iran's nuclear program will be fully peaceful. Before a deal is concluded, concrete progress is needed on the central issue of whether Iran has worked on nuclear weapons and is maintaining a capability to revive such efforts in the future.

Addressing all of the IAEA's outstanding concerns about Iran's past and possibly on-going military nuclear efforts prior to the November deadline appears unlikely. In the interests of moving the process forward towards a deal, the IAEA should divide the resolution of the problem into two phases:

- (i) The first one would take place in the coming weeks and demonstrate that Iran is seriously addressing the IAEA's concerns;
- (ii) The second one would occur after signing a comprehensive agreement and would link key sanctions relief to Iran addressing, fully and in a verifiable manner, the IAEA's outstanding concerns about Iran's military nuclear program.

In the first phase, the IAEA should do what it did in the case of the secret Syrian nuclear reactor, which was bombed by Israel in 2007. After several years of Syrian denials and stonewalling, the IAEA released a conclusion in 2011 that the destroyed building was very likely a nuclear reactor. In the case of Iran, the IAEA should state that it has concluded that Iran very likely conducted a well-structured research and development program for nuclear weapons up to 2004; some activities relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device may have continued after 2003 and some may still be ongoing. This conclusion would hardly be surprising to anyone who has monitored the Iran case for the past decade, and it is virtually identical to the conclusions of the intelligence communities in the United States and most other powers. To reinforce this point to Iran, the United States in late August sanctioned Iran's Organization of Defensive Innovation and Research (SPND), which it said is a Tehran-based entity established in early 2011 that is primarily responsible for research in the field of nuclear weapons development.

For its part, Iran would take several steps in phase one. First, it would take a seemingly small one—it would say nothing. While small, it would be significant, since Iran has always denied and protested against addressing any of the possible military dimension concerns as baseless fabrications. Still, while that may be the mantra and expected reaction, Iran would want to consider a different path in order to resolve this issue. Then, Iran would allow the IAEA full access to the Parchin military site associated with nuclear weapons development and at least one other site linked to the IAEA's concerns, some of which the IAEA has already asked to visit. Tehran would also permit the IAEA to interview at least some of the key scientists linked to its concerns.

In phase two, or during the implementation phase of a long-term agreement, key economic and financial sanctions relief would be tied to Iran resolving in a verifiable manner all of the IAEA's outstanding issues about the military dimensions of its nuclear program. Iran would have an incentive to resolve these issues, and the IAEA would achieve the time it needs to do so.

Iran's agreement to Phase One would be an effective test of whether it actually intends to continue stonewalling the IAEA after a comprehensive agreement is signed. Right now, Tehran is trying to obtain a deal without resolving the fundamental concerns of the international community about nuclear weapons, which have led to numerous Security Council resolutions with sanctions. If Iran succeeds, it would be motivated to continue this game of pretending to cooperate without really ever having to do so. Tehran may in fact reckon it can continue this process indefinitely while harvesting rewards and weakening both the remaining sanctions and any new verification arrangements. It may calculate that it does not need the lifting of any sanctions linked to resolving the IAEA's concerns. After all, if all the key sanctions are linked to the IAEA's concerns, there will be no deal. But armed with the IAEA's initial conclusion from phase one that Iran has had a nuclear weapons program, if Iran continues to stonewall the IAEA, the P5+1 and the rest of the international community would have the justification to hold up sanctions relief and move to increase them.

By accessing Parchin and other military sites before a deal is signed, the IAEA would have gone a long way in defeating Iran's effort to deny inspector access to all military sites throughout the life of a deal. Iranian officials told U.S. negotiators last winter that one of Iran's fundamental redlines was no IAEA access to Revolutionary Guard's or other military sites, which include places like Parchin. But what better place and sanctuary in the future to conduct clandestine, prohibited activities, such as uranium enrichment and nuclear weaponization?

Iran's promised ratification of the IAEA's Additional Protocol, while making the IAEA's verification task easier, would not guarantee access. The IAEA already has the legal right to access military sites under existing comprehensive safeguards agreement; so, regardless of what is added by a long term agreement, future access and compliance is by no means assured particularly as sanctions are lifted and the international community loses its leverage. Iran has also offered "nuclear transparency," measures which go beyond the safeguards agreement and Additional Protocol. However, in the early 1990's, and again from 2003, the implementation of those voluntary measures by Iran has not worked in real life.

There is still time to achieve a durable comprehensive deal done on schedule. But signing a deal without Iran demonstrating that it is turning its back on nuclear weapons is folly. Iran would have shown that stonewalling can pay off in the long run; surviving a punishing sanctions regime is only a temporary plight.

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