

# Phasing Out Sanctions Bedevil Iran Talks

The nuclear negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany) headed into extra time with a major sticking point still the issue of how and when to phase out the economic sanctions against Iran, reports Gareth Porter for Middle East Eye.

By Gareth Porter

As the P5+1 and Iran agree to continue talks on a possible joint statement past a midnight deadline into Wednesday, the most contentious issue in Lausanne, Switzerland, still appears to be how and when sanctions on Iran will be lifted.

Virtually all the details of the negotiating positions of the two sides remain cloaked in secrecy. However, Middle East Eye has learned from an informed source in contact with negotiators in Lausanne that the core issue remaining to be resolved is whether the P5+1 will end some sanctions as soon as Iran has taken what it is calling “irreversible” actions to implement the agreement.

Iran has already made some significant concessions on the sanctions issue, the source revealed. Iran and the six-nation group, led by the U.S., have agreed that unilateral U.S. and European sanctions as UN Security Council sanctions that related to Iran’s nuclear program could be “suspended” rather than being lifted permanently at the beginning of the implementation of the agreement. The Iranian delegation is also not contesting that the UN Security Council resolutions that forbid assistance to Iran’s ballistic missile program and other military programs can stay in place, the source said.

But the remaining bone of contention is that the six-nation group has insisted on maintaining the entire legal system of sanctions in place, even after the sanctions have been suspended, until the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has reached the conclusion that Iran’s nuclear program is entirely for peaceful purposes a process that it admits could take many years.

U.S. and European officials have been telling journalists on background for months that maintaining the sanctions architecture in place is necessary to ensure not only that Iran implements the agreement fully but also that it has no ambitions to obtain nuclear weapons.

But Iran has pointed out to the U.S. and European negotiating teams that it is being asked to carry out curbs on its nuclear program that are effectively “irreversible,” and which should be reciprocated by the P5+1 with termination of some sanctions in each case, according to the source.

The source gave examples of Iranian concessions which Iran argues would be irreversible if implemented, including the redesign of the Arak heavy water reactor the elimination of its stockpile of low-enriched uranium and the ratification of the Additional Protocol by the Iranian parliament. Iran is demanding that the agreement include language calling for the timely ending of sanctions in response to the actual implementation in each case.

Iran has agreed to redesign the Arak heavy water reactor, which the P5+1 had called a proliferation threat because of the roughly 10 kg of plutonium that it would produce annually. The redesign that Iran has agreed to carry out would reduce the output of plutonium to 1 kg per year, according to the source in contact with the negotiators. Therefore, expect the P5+1 to go beyond merely suspending sanctions to reciprocate the implementation of the agreement.

A senior Iranian official told the International Crisis Group last June that the redesign of the Arak reactor would involve the replacement of calandria, the existing vessel that holds the reactor core, with a smaller one. The officials said it would take years for Iran to reverse that change and restore the original reactor.

Frank Von Hippel of Princeton University, a former assistant director for international security in the White House Office of Science and Technology, confirmed in an interview with MEE that the agreed plan for redesigning the Arak Reactor does indeed involve the replacement of the calandria and is therefore, in practical term, "irreversible."

Von Hippel also said the Iranian agreement to reduce its stockpile of low-enriched uranium to a very low level, on top of the reduction in the number of centrifuges to roughly two-thirds of the present operational level, would take about three years to reverse.

Iranian negotiators are not that concerned about the P5+1 refusal to lift sanctions until Iran's provides full information on the "Possible Military Dimensions," according to the source. "The PMD issue is not a problem," the source said, because Iran is prepared to give the agency all the access it needs as part of the agreement.

The much more serious Iranian concern is the six nation group's insistence that the IAEA must also verify the peaceful nature of the program, as though the implementation of the agreement were not sufficient evidence. Iranian negotiators have pointed out to Western diplomats that the IAEA could take up to 15 years to arrive at a final judgment, as it did in the case of South Africa, the source said.

A senior Iranian official told the International Crisis Group last November that IAEA officials, responding to Iran's question about the time required, had refused to rule out the possibility that it would take more than ten years to complete its assessment of Iran's case.

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## Obama's Secrecy Obsession

**Exclusive:** Though President Obama likes to present himself as a regular guy, he acts like an elitist when he unnecessarily withholds information from the American people. At this critical juncture of his presidency, he might finally take a chance on trusting the public with facts, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

If President Barack Obama is ever to take control of his foreign policy and move the United States into a more peaceful and pragmatic direction he will need to shake his obsession with secrecy and bring the American people into his confidence by sharing with them information about key events that have shaped recent crises.

Right now, the American people are deeply confused about what is transpiring in the Middle East and eastern Europe – and Obama appears satisfied that they stay that way. He doesn't seem to understand that one of the president's greatest advantages is his power to release information to the public, thus changing the narrative as written by rival political forces and forcing those forces to adjust to a more complete storyline.

Instead, Obama has behaved as if he's still trying to prove to the national security establishment that he can hoard secrets as compulsively as anyone, that he's not the wild-eyed radical outsider that the Right has made him out to be. At a news conference on March 24, Obama even made a joke about his record of keeping the American people in the dark about information developed by the U.S. intelligence community.

"As a general rule, I don't comment on intelligence matters in a big room full of reporters," Obama said with a smirk on his face. "And I think I'll continue that tradition."

But Obama's lack of transparency after promising in 2008 to run a transparent administration has left him at the mercy of Washington's closed club of insiders, while alienating him from the broad American public. With neoconservatives and other opinion leaders dictating the dominant narrative on topic after topic, Obama has ended up reacting to events, not controlling them.

Thus, even if a framework agreement on limiting Iran's nuclear program is reached, it is likely to get battered in Congress, where Israeli clout is overwhelming. The President will have to fend off repeated attempts to sabotage the deal.

A more effective strategy might be for Obama to build public support by surrounding any agreement with the release of U.S. intelligence information on a range of related topics and with a blunt speech to the people explaining the need to work with major countries even when there are differences and disagreements.

For one, Obama could provide an historical accounting of U.S. relations with Iran, including the CIA's role in ousting the democratically elected government of Mohammad Mossaddegh in 1953, the U.S. support for the autocratic Shah over the ensuing quarter century (including helping to start Iran's nuclear program), American dealings with the regime of hard-line Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in the 1980s (including secret contacts between Ronald Reagan's 1980 campaign and Iranian emissaries, and the evolution of the Iran-Contra scandal), and whatever evidence exists of Iran's support for terrorism.

The President also could give the American people a deeper look into the complexities of Middle East politics by exposing the role of Saudi Arabia and other Sunni-Arab states in support of Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups. Obama has long reneged on his promise to release the 28 redacted pages of the congressional 9/11 report dealing with alleged Saudi financing of Al-Qaeda.

And, if Obama really believed in the value of an informed electorate, he might toss into the pile of declassified material the U.S. intelligence data on the Syrian-Sarin incident of Aug. 21, 2013, which brought the United States to the brink of going to war against the Syrian government after a rush to judgment blaming Bashar al-Assad's regime for use of the poison gas (although later information pointed more toward a likely rebel provocation). [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Collapsing Syria-Sarin Case](#)."] ]

## **Rallying the People**

Nothing would rally the American people to the President more than a display of

candor by him and a show of faith in them. A democratic Republic cannot survive when leaders routinely hide key facts and keep the people in the dark, all the better to manipulate them with exaggerations, lies and propaganda. Obama could show that he understands that core democratic principle by making as much information available as possible.

He may have forgotten but he opened his presidency with a memorandum instructing Executive Branch department heads on the importance of transparency. He wrote: "My Administration is committed to creating an unprecedented level of openness in Government. We will work together to ensure the public trust and establish a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration. Openness will strengthen our democracy and promote efficiency and effectiveness in Government."

While some sensitive data is appropriately protected for national security reasons, excessive secrecy is a form of elitism showing disdain for the many millions of us who aren't special enough to be inside the club. Secrecy also empowers an unscrupulous leader to mislead and to scare the people with selective leaks and half-truths as we saw during George W. Bush's presidency, a pattern that Obama vowed to break.

But like much else Obama mostly chose continuity, not change. After a few promising document releases in the first days of his presidency, including President Bush's "torture memo" arguing the tortured legality of "enhanced interrogation techniques," Obama reversed course and turned his administration into one of the most opaque and secretive of modern times, pursuing leakers more aggressively than any previous U.S. president.

In his second term, Obama has further slid into a pattern of deception embracing the Orwellian concept of "information warfare" in which propaganda themes are created and maintained even when the evidence goes in a different direction. The Syrian-Sarin gas incident is one such case when the early Assad-did-it claims were left in place despite the U.S. intelligence community's shifting analysis.

Similarly, key incidents in the Ukraine crisis such as responsibility for the lethal sniper fire on Feb. 20, 2014, and for the shoot-down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 on July 17, 2014 were pinned on U.S. propaganda targets (Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich and Russian President Vladimir Putin, respectively) and U.S. officialdom made no effort to clarify the record even as evidence emerged that suggested a contrary conclusion. [A worthwhile documentary on the sniper mystery is "Maidan Massacre."]

Instead of refining or correcting the record, President Obama has let the hasty early judgments stand all the better to smear the adversaries and manipulate the

public.

For instance, regarding the MH-17 crash, the office of the Director of National Intelligence told me recently that the U.S. intelligence assessment of that shoot-down, killing 298 people, had not been refined since July 22, 2014, five days after the incident. The statement was not credible. Indeed, I have been told that U.S. analysts have vastly expanded their knowledge of the case and at least some analysts have broken with the initial conclusions.

But the early rush to judgment had proved useful in demonizing Putin so any contradictions of the storyline were seen as negating a potent propaganda weapon and also would be embarrassing to Secretary of State John Kerry and other senior officials who went off half-cocked. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[US Intel Stands Pat on MH-17 Shoot-down.](#)"]

Yet, in a healthy democracy, leaders would immediately update the public with relevant information and dispel any misunderstandings in recognition and respect for the people's fundamental right to know, especially on issues of war or peace.

Instead, Obama has joined in keeping the new assessments of all these key moments hidden from the American people. That secrecy suggests that Obama holds the public in contempt and thus he shouldn't be surprised when that contempt is returned to him.

What America needs now more than ever is an old-fashioned presidential speech from the Oval Office with Obama looking directly into the camera and leveling with the nation, much like President Dwight Eisenhower did in his farewell address in 1961 with his famous warning about the influence of the Military-Industrial Complex.

If Obama were to explain the opportunities and the challenges facing the country in stark and truthful terms there might still be a chance to avert the looming catastrophes ahead.

[For more on the topic of propaganda and manipulation, see Consortiumnews.com's "[The Victory of 'Perception Management.'](#)"]

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). You also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).**

