

## **Iran yields to the West's demands**

**By Akbar E Torbat** , Asia Times, December 6, 2013

After investing about US\$40 billion in its nuclear facilities, Iran has agreed to shutting them nearly all down. This has been done quietly since the government of President Hassan Rouhani took over in August 2013. Some opposition groups see Rouhani as a stooge for the West who is trying to abandon Iran's nuclear program in exchange for the West's support for the survival of the clerical regime in Tehran.

To downgrade Iran's nuclear activity, Rouhani has combined the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran with the Power Ministry. The daily Kayhan reported on November 20, 2013, that nearly all the requests from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Geneva meetings last month had been already implemented since Rouhani took over and practically most of Iran's nuclear facilities were almost shutdown.

As has been reported by the Associated Press, for some time a series of secret talks had been going on behind the scenes between the US and Iran in Oman and elsewhere, and Sultan Qaboos of Oman had played a role as go-between. The Deputy Secretary of State, William Burn, and Jake Sullivan, a foreign policy adviser to Vice President Joe Biden, had met at least five times with Iranian officials. [1]

The secret talks paved the way for the official negotiations to finalize an agreement on the nuclear issue. The multilateral negotiations took place in Geneva in three rounds between Iran and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and Germany, the so-called P5+1. After completion of the third round in Geneva on November 23, 2013, a temporary agreement was signed. The official texts of the agreement and its attachment have not been released. The Fars News Agency posted a text that was not consistent with the White House's Fact Sheet released a few hours later.

### **Iran's concessions**

According to the text released by the White House, Iran has agreed to stop enriching uranium beyond 5%, a level that would be sufficient for energy production, and would dismantle links between its networks of centrifuges.

The agreement does not require Iran to stop enriching uranium, or to dismantle any of its existing centrifuges. However, its stockpile of uranium enriched to 20% would be diluted or converted into oxide and its stockpile of 3.5% low-enriched uranium would not increase. Iran has agreed not to install any new centrifuges, start up any that are not already operating or build new enrichment facilities.

Also Iran has agreed not to produce fuel for the heavy water reactor it is building in Arak. Iran has agreed to technically disable its nuclear activity at least for six months. Furthermore, Iran has accepted what previously was called the Additional

Protocol, according to which IAEA inspectors can inspect any locations related to the Iranian nuclear activity at any time they deem necessary.

The red lines for Iran have been to preserve its nuclear capability but not to manufacture nuclear weapons, not halting uranium enrichment, not closing the Fordow facilities, not stopping construction on the Arak heavy water reactor, and not to let its enriched uranium out of Iran. The red line for the Western powers has been any capacity that can enable Iran to manufacture nuclear weapons.

### **Iran gets 'peanuts' in return**

Under the agreement, Iran receives a very small portion of what is its own money in return for practically shutting down its nuclear facilities. The United States facilitates about \$7 billion in sanctions relief. Iran's frozen foreign exchange assets in foreign financial institutions is about \$100 billion. Iran receives only \$4.2 billion of its oil sales; nearly \$15 billion of its revenues during the agreed period will go into restricted overseas accounts, and \$400 million from the restricted Iranian funds is to be transferred to educational institutions in third countries to pay for Iranian students' tuitions. [2]

Except for some minor matters, the sanctions will largely remain intact, and only will not increase. This limited sanctions relief was done by President Barack Obama's executive order, which does not require the approval of the United States Congress. In reality, the sanctions had already reached the point of diminishing returns and even of being negative, which means they were squeezing the economies of Western countries more than Iran.

Iran's right to enrichment was not acknowledged in the agreement, and all the previous sanctions for Iran's enriching uranium, including the UN sanctions, will remain in place.

After the agreement was signed, US Secretary of State John Kerry and British Foreign Secretary William Hague both said Iran's right to enrich uranium was not recognized in the agreement. The United States has disputed Iran's right to uranium enrichment under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Under Article IV of the NPT, each non-nuclear state has the right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Since the text of the treaty does not explicitly indicate enrichment, it has been disputed in the negotiations.

### **Reactions in Iran**

On November 20, three days before the agreement was reached in Geneva, Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei gave a strong speech in front of his top military commanders and about 50,000 heads of the Basij (volunteer) militia. He lashed out at the Western imperialists and summarized some historical facts, including their roles in wars and slave trades, and the US dropping of two atomic bombs on Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Khamenei repeated his previously stated phrase "heroic softness" to pretend he is not yielding and to save his face. Khamenei said "We do insist that we will not step back a bit from our rights". While "I do not intervene in the details of these talks, there are certain red lines and limits that have to be observed. They [Iran's nuclear negotiators] are instructed to abide by those limits."

Despite the strong tone of his speech, there was no response from US officials. That meant the US officials knew that he was just preparing his military men to accept the forthcoming agreement he had secretly agreed on.

According to Kayhan newspaper, Mohammad-Hassan Asfari - a member of the Majles National Security and Foreign Policy committee - and some other members of parliament had met with the Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif at his office. They wanted to send one person from parliament to witness the negotiations in Geneva. Zarif said Rouhani did not permit such participation. Zarif had said he would not give any details of the deal until an agreement was reached.

Some members of the Iranian parliament (Majles) strongly criticized the signing of such a shameful agreement. According to Articles 125 and 77 of the Iranian Constitution, agreements with foreign governments have to be approved by the Majles to be binding. [3]

The clerics have strong influence in the parliament; about 40 of the members are clerics and some of the rest are either relatives of the clerics or their supporters. Some Majles members have friendly relations with London. Historically, the British have used their power of the purse to influence the Iranian parliament. That means that despite wide protests from the opposition groups, parliament may pass the agreement.

Opposition groups were shocked by news of the agreement, which they perceived as an outright yielding to the West. In Iran, most of the university students, labor organizations, and secular groups do not have a positive opinion of the clerics ruling Iran. In the US, the Iranian lobby organizations cheered the signing of the agreement as a "win-win" situation.

However, the opposition groups perceive the agreement as betraying the Iranian nation and think Iran has lost to Western powers who have the lethal weapon of last resort. They compare the agreement to such disgraceful pacts in Iranian history as the Turkamanchai agreement in 1828 with Russia, upon which Iran lost its provinces in south Caucasus to Russia, and also the 1919 agreement with Britain, under which the then prime minister Hassan Vossogh-eldoleh received bribes from Britain to sign what would result in Iran becoming a British protectorate. That agreement was eventually annulled by the Majles.

Will this agreement be annulled similar to the 1919 agreement?

It remains to be seen what reactions the Iranian people, the military, the Revolutionary Guards, and the Majles will have regarding it, but their acceptance is far from being a foregone conclusion.

**Notes:**

1. [Secret US-Iran talks set stage for nuke deal](#), Associated Press, November 24, 2013.
2. [Fact Sheet](#), November 23, 2013.
3. "The President or his legal representative has the authority to sign treaties, protocols, contracts, and agreements concluded by the Iranian government with other governments, as well as agreements pertaining to international organizations, after obtaining the approval of the Islamic Consultative Assembly." [See here](#).

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