

## **IRAN: THE REACTIONS TO THE INTERIM NUCLEAR AGREEMENT**

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On Sunday, November 24, 2013, the 5+1 negotiator group (the United States, Russia, China, France, the United Kingdom and Germany) reached an interim nuclear agreement with Iran. According to the deal, Iran will stop enriching uranium beyond 5%, and will reconvert its stockpile of uranium enriched at 20%. Teheran will stop developing the Arak plan, where it is believed Iran was producing plutonium, and will grant easier access to inspectors to the Natanz and Fordo nuclear sites. In exchange, the international community will ease sanctions on Iran's car-making sector, petrochemical exports and trading in gold and precious metals, and will unfreeze a \$7bn worth oil sale revenues. This interim agreement will be valid for the next six months. During this time the parties will negotiate a permanent settlement to the decades old Iranian nuclear issue.

Although the agreement has been welcomed by international markets, with Asian trading registering on Monday a fall of Brent crude oil price by 2%, the outcome of the Geneva II conference still remains a compromise between opposing interests. On the one hand, it is true that Geneva II succeeded where Geneva I failed; i.e. paving the way for a permanent agreement. On the other hand, the process is still reversible, both technically and politically speaking. In addition, being a compromise it does not fulfill the interests of all the concerned actors, above all of those who do not sit on the negotiating table: Israel and Saudi Arabia.

From a technical perspective, the request to Teheran to reconvert its stockpile of uranium enriched at 20% is not as automatic as it may seem. First of all, the reconversion will require Iran to build new facilities to perform the downgrade of enriched uranium. Secondly, even this process can be reversed once again, hence giving Iran the chance to come back to the *status quo ante* the interim agreement.

More importantly, the process can be reversed politically, considering that it is based on the Iranian political good-will to comply with it. Speaking on the state television, Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammed Javad Zarif, stated that it is in the interest of Iran to keep the deal on track. However, he has been quite clear in clarifying that: «*All the measures that we will take, the confidence-building measures, are reversible, and they can be reversed fast. Of course, we hope we don't have to do this*». Considering that the nuclear issue is strongly linked to a wide range of regional ones (Syria, Iraq, Israel) the positive outcome cannot be taken for granted.

In fact, as expected other regional players have expressed their concerns over the interim agreement, saying that it does not remove the threat of a nuclearized Iran. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated his disapproval defining the agreement a «*historic mistake*». Israel perceives the interim agreement as extremely dangerous to its interests. PM Netanyahu said that Israel: «*cannot and will not allow a regime that calls for the destruction of Israel to obtain the means to achieve this goal*». Similarly, Justice Minister Tzipi Livni called for speeding up the peace process with Palestine, as: «*Solving the conflict with the Palestinians would enable a united front with Arab countries against Iran*».

An Arab state who would certainly welcome this call is Saudi Arabia. Soon after the interim agreement was signed, Saudi diplomats have start talking about a change in their “defense doctrine” toward the Middles East. Their perception is that Washington is not longer a trustworthy ally in the prevention of a nuclearized Iran. Therefore, as the counselor to Prince Mohammad bin Nawaf, Nawaf Obaid, pointed out a new defense doctrine aimed at containing Iran will be put in place. Saudi Arabia cannot afford to lose the United States as its main security provider in the region. Nonetheless, to back an agreement it sees not preventing Iran from acquiring the nuclear weapon.

In conclusion, the interim agreement is not meant to mark a breakthrough on the Iranian nuclear issue, but it is still useful to buy some extra time for diplomacy. The final agreement that will be reached after this six month might be, therefore, quite different from the present one. Saudi Arabia and Israel will speak out even more in order to make their complaints listened by the negotiating group. At the same time, Iran will use the opportunity to extort other concessions to further mitigate sanctions. In the meantime, the Syrian conflict is still unsolved, as it is the sectarian violence in Iraq. All scenarios remain open.

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