

Iran's Nuclear Chess Game Strategy

If delaying Iran's "nuclear breakout" were the only issue, then I, like some other scientists, would admit that President Obama is right: an agreement now is better than no agreement. But even if it were tightly sewn (which this one is not), any agreement on breakout time alone would leave gaping holes on other crucial issues: the danger of conventional war, the flow of hundreds of billions of dollars into global terrorism, and aggression by the Revolutionary Guard against Iran's own freedom-seeking citizens.

Adopting for now the counter claim that the nuclear agreement on its own, is important enough to ignore other issues, let us focus on what is purported to be its primary achievement: preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons. In the long run, it will produce quite the opposite conclusion.

Defining "breakout" will help clarify matters. Iran can already be seen as a breakout nation capable of further enriching its uranium to the 90% level required for a bomb of the WWII type. It is, however, far from the "nuclear breakout" of psychological-political immunity that was achieved by its ally North Korea after twice violating agreements with the U.S. This includes production of plutonium, acquiring nuclear ignition technology, conducting nuclear testing, preparing for installation of compact plutonium weapons on long-range missiles, and amassing a nuclear arsenal that will include approximately 80 bombs by the end of the decade.

Iran is not yet ripe for a North Korean-style breakout. Therefore its chess strategy (after ensuring freedom to strengthen its conventional capabilities) is to retain its existing nuclear infrastructure and continue clandestine development of its military nuclear program. While sacrificing a pawn of retracting some of its exposed actions in violation of NPT, Iran retains the option of a complete Korean-style

nuclear breakout in five to ten years, or when the regime feels threatened, or when the current agreement expires. Contrary to North Korea's motivation for its nuclear breakout – preservation of its thin layer of dictatorial rule, Iran's goal and long range strategy is to arrive to similar capability when ready, in order to bolster its terrorist and military aggression potency.

Iran's dangerous intentions are clearly evident in the agreement's loopholes, which were included at Iran's insistence:

1. Lack of a tight timetable for converting of the Arak plutonium reactor to a lower-efficacy facility. The conversion itself is one of the main achievements of the agreement, since only at Arak can Iran produce plutonium from raw uranium. The reason it is so important is that only plutonium bombs can be used in missile warheads. Iran was granted responsibility for downgrading the facility as "owner and project manager." This control, together with the agreement's cumbersome mechanism for resolving disputes, enables Iran to drag out the project on for years while the reactor (again, protected by the agreement) is immune from attack or sabotage. To eliminate this danger, the agreement should have required Iran to take the critical step of removing the existing reactor core (Calandria) immediately, regardless of the reactor redesign process.

2. Continued operation of declared nuclear facilities, including partial operation of the centrifuges and further development of advanced models. Despite assurances that Iran will export a huge amount (ten tons) of accumulated enriched uranium, the agreement allows it to dilute the substance to a raw material level and keep it within its borders, ready, when desired, for uranium bombs (which require renewed enrichment) or plutonium reactor fueling (which does not).

3. A green light to continue concealed development of military nuclear weapons technology at military facilities. This is an outrageous concession by the agreement's co-signers. When suspicions arise,

inspections by IAEA representatives are permitted only after 24-day advance notice, allowing the Iranians to cover up evidence of their activity. Although it is difficult to hide traces of radioactive material, as President Obama has noted, detection is unlikely since a separate, secret IAEA agreement permits the Iranians themselves to collect the samples.

Furthermore, Iran's staunch refusal to disclose its past nuclear weapons testing in Parchin makes it impossible to distinguish between (forbidden) previous tests and (forbidden) new tests. Therefore, traces of radioactive material, if discovered, can easily be attributed by the Iranians to tests conducted prior to the agreement.

There are other crucial activities that Iran can secretly conduct at its military facilities to complete production of a nuclear weapon without radioactive materials: development of the ignition mechanism, preparation of sites and equipment for underground nuclear tests, and advancement of EMP (Electromagnetic Pulse) technology that can disable a country's entire electronics and electrical grid via a single nuclear explosion above the earth's atmosphere. In the coming years, Iranian scientists will also have an opportunity to develop critical components at home and test them underground in North Korea.

Therefore, even if we ignore the agreement's total exclusion of conventional forms of aggression and the development of intercontinental missiles (useful only for nuclear warfare), we see that the main achievement heralded by the negotiators—preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapon in the foreseeable future—is empty of meaning. It will be nearly impossible to derail the agreement in the remaining months of the current U.S. administration. But with sound opposition expressed by Congress and the American public, the next president may have the support needed to act when the dangers posed by existing policies become an unfortunate reality.