

David Bensoussan
Iran's Nuclear Bazaar

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu was recently invited to speak at the U.S. Senate in Washington about Iran's nuclear program. This article will put into perspective negotiations with Iran over the last decade. These negotiations have dragged on despite sanctions imposed by the United Nations, the U.S. and the European Union.

In 2004, Iran was forced to permanently halt their enrichment of uranium. One year later, they were permitted to enrich up to 20%. At the beginning of negotiations between the P5+1 (U.S., Russia, China, France, U.K. and Germany) and Iran in 2006, Iran was forced to halt their nuclear drive. This demand was abandoned in 2009. It was then proposed to store enriched uranium bars in Europe. In 2013 Iran was permitted to keep enriched uranium for research in one location. A new nuclear site was then discovered in Fordow. Iran was forced to suspend operations and close the site.

When negotiations began in 2003, Iran had 130 centrifuges and was not producing fissile materials for a nuclear weapon. Today, Iran has close to 19000 centrifuges and seven tons of low content enriched fissile material that can be transformed to weapons grade (7-10 bombs as powerful as the nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima) in a few months. In 2013, Iran was then permitted to store this material in a form that could be reversed in a few months.

Why would Iran conclude this matter faced with increasingly extensive concessions from international powers while its nuclear enrichment program was recognized *de facto*? Iranian nuclear negotiators dragged on negotiations before they ended. Furthermore, their actual nuclear ability was concealed despite international sanctions: in 2006, the UN prohibited

deliveries of weapons that could be used for ballistic missiles, and recommended monitoring Iranian banks. The U.S. cut commercial relations with Iran in 1979, and extended the embargo to non-American companies. The European Union decreed an embargo on oil and technical assistance for Iran's oil industry.

While negotiations were taking place, Iran rearmed the Lebanese group Hezbollah, putting an end to Lebanese independence, caused a surge of Shiite militias in Syria to keep the dictator Assad in power, contributed to the persecution of Iraqi Sunnis that joined the extremist groups Al Qaeda and Islamic State after the departure of U.S. troops from Iraq, and helped the Houthi Shiite minority grab power in Yemen. Anxiety over the U.S. retreat from the region and the growing Iranian empire is pushing Iran's neighbors to obtain nuclear technology. Egypt recently concluded a deal with Russia for this reason.

While the negotiations were taking place, Iran prevented an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict by providing missiles for Hamas in Gaza to use against the Israeli population. The Iranian government also organized rallies with thousands of people yelling "Death to America!"

According to former Secretary of State Kissinger, attempts to prevent Iran from building nuclear weapons have been diluted enough to delay production of weapons to one year. Iran could easily drag on inspections during this crucial year. No doubt there is growing skepticism towards any agreement concluded between the P5+1 Powers and the Islamic Republic of Iran that does not include tough preventative measures.

*(David Bensoussan is a CIJR Academic Fellow.
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