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# What You Need To Know About The Iran Nuclear Negotiations

The Huffington Post | By Eline Gordts



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Every week, *The WorldPost* asks an expert to shed light on a topic driving headlines around the world. Today, we speak with Ali Vaez about the nuclear negotiations with Iran.

International negotiators in Geneva have just over two weeks left to bring years of talks between Iran and six world powers to fruition by reaching a framework for an agreement on Iran's nuclear program.

Representatives of Iran and the so-called P5+1 group -- the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council and Germany -- have set a March 31 deadline to reach a basic understanding for a nuclear deal. The parties then have until the end of June to hammer out the remaining details.

The talks stem from international powers' concern that Iran is using its nuclear enrichment program to build a nuclear weapon. Iran insists the program is only for

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peaceful purposes.

The WorldPost spoke with Ali Vaez, the [International Crisis Group's](#) senior analyst on Iran, about the ongoing talks.

### **What do Iran and the world powers aim to accomplish with this agreement?**

Iran's nuclear program has been under international scrutiny for the past twelve years and has resulted in an international standoff between Iran and the West. The primary goal from the Iranian side is to normalize the nuclear program. The second goal is to make sure the sanctions that have been imposed on Iran as a result of the nuclear program are lifted.

The P5+1 group wants to make sure that Iran's nuclear activities are purely peaceful and that there is no nuclear material and activity in Iran that could be diverted towards nuclear proliferation and weaponization.

In November 2013, the two sides took a first step in a very long journey towards their ultimate goals. The first-phase agreement froze some of the most sensitive nuclear activities Iran was conducting at the time, in return for limited and reversible sanctions relief.

In the current negotiations, Iran wants a more permanent form of sanctions relief. In addition to suspending some of its nuclear activities, the P5+1 wants Iran to roll those activities back and also accept and implement monitoring mechanisms that would allow inspectors much better access to verify the peaceful nature of the nuclear program.

### **What is on the table today?**

Since the talks are still ongoing, it's difficult to talk about the details of the agreement with a high degree of certainty. But the contours of a possible agreement are more or less clear. What we know is that Iran will roll back its enrichment activities -- the process that is used to enrich uranium to be used in nuclear power reactors or in a nuclear weapon. Iran will reduce the number of centrifuges that it currently has installed from about 20,000 to a number between 6,000 and 8,000, and it will also reduce its current stockpile of enriched uranium from about 8,000 kg to something below 1,000. Those moves will increase the time that Iran would need to produce the material needed for a nuclear weapon from about three months to 12 months.

In return, sanctions that have been imposed on Iran as a result of its nuclear program are going to be lifted in a phased and incremental manner. Most likely, Iran's actions are going to be pegged to sanctions relief, meaning that Iran would take some specific measures and in return some specific sanctions would be lifted. Iran will also accept the most rigorous monitoring mechanism that has ever been implemented on a nuclear program in the world.

### **Do you consider this a "good" deal?**

Good means different things to different people, but we should realize that diplomacy by nature does not produce perfect outcomes because both sides have to compromise. We should compare the agreement to its alternatives, and the reality is that what is currently being negotiated will virtually block all of Iran's pathways to a nuclear weapon. In that sense I think it is a good deal. It does not totally eliminate the risk, but it diminishes it really significantly.

We should compare it to the alternative: no deal at all. With a deal, Iran will roll back its enrichment capacity. Without a deal, the capacity will be jacked up and the time Iran needs to produce the material for a nuclear weapon will be reduced to maybe just a few weeks. The inspection mechanisms that are currently in place will be much less intrusive than in the case of a deal, and the stockpile of enriched material that

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Iran has access to will grow instead of being reduced.

Without a deal, Iran keeps its heavy water reactor that produces enough plutonium for one nuclear weapon per year, and there's a risk that it could use the plutonium parts for nuclear weapons. With a deal, that reactor is going to be converted and it will produce less than a kilogram of plutonium per year, which means it would take Iran eight years to accumulate enough material for a nuclear weapon.

From an Iranian perspective, with a deal, Iran will not only have sanctions relief but will be able to find its way back to the international market. Without a deal, Iran will be isolated, sanctions will probably increase and we will get into a spiral of escalation on both sides that could lead to military confrontation.

### How are the negotiations perceived in Iran?

With 80 million people, Iran is a big country and it is very pluralistic. There's a broad spectrum of reactions. Some are extremely critical of the approach that the current Iranian negotiating team has adopted. Others are very supportive.

There's a small but very vocal group of hard-liners that would like to see the talks derailed. But overall, there's a sense of fatigue within the Iranian population after years of economic hardship and isolation. As was demonstrated in the presidential elections of 2013 that brought President Hassan Rouhani to power, the majority of the Iranian people want this issue to be resolved. There's broad-based support within the population and within the media. The political elite is also quite supportive.

### Did the letter sent by 47 Republican U.S. senators warning Tehran that the next president could revoke any agreement reached by the current White House affect Iranians' perception of the negotiations?

The letter was obviously designed to sabotage the talks by dissuading the Iranians from making any concessions. Monitoring the Iranian media and reactions from Iranian officials so far, it appears the letter has missed its target.

First of all, it doesn't come as a surprise to the Iranians -- they already knew that Congress is not going to cooperate with the White House on this subject. This was also calculated into their negotiation strategy. Some of the measures that Iran is going to accept are bound to the U.S. government taking sanctions legislation to Congress. So if Congress fails to lift the sanctions, the Iranians will also renege on their end of the bargain.

The Iranians also insisted to focus on U.N. sanctions instead of unilateral U.S. sanctions, because the U.N. sanctions formed the basis of legitimacy of all the unilateral sanctions. Even if the next U.S. president revokes the deal, the U.S. would have a much harder time bringing international support for enforcing the sanctions without a U.N. mandate. The Iranians require the U.N. sanctions to be lifted in the early stages of the agreement.

### The Republicans weren't the only one to criticize the negotiations this month. In a speech to Congress, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made his case for why he considers the agreement "a bad deal." Did Netanyahu's speech come as a surprise to Tehran?

I think this level of politicization of the issue was quite surprising to the Iranians. The circumstances surrounding the speech turned the Iranian nuclear program, for the first time, into a partisan issue. But at the end of the day, Tehran knew that Prime Minister Netanyahu's problems with the Iran deal are not about Iran enriching uranium but about Iran being enriched by any deal.

The speech alienated a lot of Democrats, and that inadvertently backfired on Prime Minister Netanyahu and his Republican allies in Congress, because now it's much



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harder for them to push for legislation to block the agreement -- they simply lack a veto-proof majority in the Senate. So even though the speech was very powerful, it made the Israeli prime minister and the Republicans be seen internationally as pursuing maximalist demands aimed at derailing the negotiations. The Democratic support that was there -- before the speech and before the letter -- to put more pressure on Iran evaporated.

**Do you think the negotiators will be able to come to an agreement?**

I'm cautiously optimistic. I think the chances have significantly improved over the past few weeks because the talks have made significant progress on the most intractable issue in these negotiations: the problem with enrichment capacity. Defining Iran's future enrichment capacity has created a momentum that could help them basically overcome the remaining differences on other issues. We've never been closer.

*This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.*

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**Deborah Baumann Caikoski** · Melcher-Dallas, Iowa

Regardless of what those 47 Republican Senators will receive for that letter to Iran, we need to ensure they 'eat' their 3rd paragraph with Term Limits For Congress, and demolishing Citizens United. The 3rd paragraph of their letter:  
"The offices of our Constitution have different characteristics. For example, the president may serve only two 4-year terms, whereas senators may serve an unlimited number of 6-year terms. As applied today, for instance, President Obama will leave office in January 2017, while most of us will remain in office well beyond then-perhaps decades."

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · [16](#) · March 14 at 8:43am



**Steve Hockey** · ★ Top Commenter

Deborah - Term Limits is a great idea.

I am curious though - are you also opposed to public service unions being allowed to contribute to the candidates - or just Corporations representing their shareholders?

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · [1](#) · March 15 at 9:42am



**Jimmy Teal** · ★ Top Commenter · Winyah High School

Deborah: You do know that a letter was never sent to Iran, it was posted on Sen. Tom Cotton's website. I'm sure from there it was copied and posted all over social media. It is another bald faced lie by Democrats and liberals to get people mad at Republicans.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · [1](#) · March 20 at 4:35pm



**Tim Brown** · ★ Top Commenter · Mississippi State University

Jimmy Teal a letter, often critical, addressed to a particular person or group of people but intended for publication - Jimmy, this is the definition of an 'open letter'. In the digital world we live in today, you post an open letter to your site and invite people to read it. You don't physically send the letter. So, no this is not a bald face lie by Democrats and liberals to get people mad at Republicans. People are mad at Republicans for writing an open letter to Iranian leaders and publishing it on line for every one to read.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · [2](#) · March 21 at 9:35pm

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**Mach Crit** · ★ Top Commenter

Too damn sad that John Kerry hadn't become president instead of George Bush. The State Department's job would be infinitely easier now.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · [13](#) · March 14 at 9:00am



**Larry LaBate** · ★ Top Commenter · Aubrey, Texas

Is that meant to be serious? I laughed and then decided you might actually mean it which is mind boggling.

Reply · Like · 1 · March 14 at 9:44am



**John Hill** · ★ Top Commenter · Cape Coral, Florida

Larry, people from Texas s/b apologizing for George.. then we might stop crying.... when the damage is undone in another 20 years.

A REMINDER WHERE WE WERE IN 2001 (or Repubs who don't remember pre2009)

AP) President Bush said Saturday that the most important number in the budget he sends to Congress next week is the \$5.6 trillion surplus it projects over the next 10 years.

That huge projected surplus provides the underpinning of all the administration's tax-cut and spending plans, Mr. Bush said in his recorded weekly radio address.

"A surplus in tax revenue, after all, means that taxpayers have been overcharged," the president said. "And usually when you've been overcharged, you expect to get something back." The surplus figure "counts more than any other" in the budget, he said.

Democrats cautioned that surpluses projec... [See More](#)

Reply · Like · 3 · March 15 at 4:53am



**Ed Tolliver** · ★ Top Commenter

Viper: Nailed it once again. Unfortunately, the GOP acolites can't be bothered with facts.

Reply · Like · March 15 at 8:53am

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**Nadeem Ahmed** · ★ Top Commenter · Harvard University

Much has been written about how the #47Traitors misunderstood the US Constitution (foreign affairs is the sole responsibility of the executive branch), empowered the enemy (hard liners in Iran), undermined our allies (Britain, France, Germany, China and Russia) and weakened the US abroad (by making the US appear divided in the face of our enemies). However the long term question is can Mitch McConnell govern? Tom Cotton is a three month tenured Senator for a backwater state. Mitch McConnell is a long tenured Leader of the Senate. He know the role of the Senate, has a responsibility to uphold its traditions and duties. How could he sign such a document. Some are saying it was a snow storm and were trying to leave town. Again, a junior Senator I get. The Leader of the Senate - really? The GOP need to take a hard long look in the mirror, and their behaviour must change if they are ever to be taken seriously again on foreign affairs. I thought the days of Bush/Chaney shoot first and ask questions later were over, I thought Republicans had matured. It is the shoot first thinking that led to the latter and Rumsfeld justifying why he did not have body armour for the troops - "It would take several months to get it, I did no think the war would last that long".

Reply · Like · 9 · March 14 at 8:58am



**Blaine Smitty** · ★ Top Commenter

China ,Russia, negotiating with US interest at heart, get real, the history of Germany,England and France when it comes to being able to negotiate, and recognize threats ,lol.

Why wasn't countries from that region invited? seems fair, instead of countries that have a vested interest in Iran's economy?

God Bless the 47 Patriots.....

Reply · Like · 6 · March 14 at 9:21am



**Larry LaBate** · ★ Top Commenter · Aubrey, Texas

Blaine Smitty I'm with you Blaine. I don't know about the tactic but I understand the intent.

Reply · Like · 1 · March 14 at 9:38am



**Gary Stern** · ★ Top Commenter · University of Baltimore Alumni Association

Blaine Smitty The countries doing the negotiating are the voting members of the UN Security Council. It was the agreeing to sanctions by those countries that brought Iran to the negotiating table. The US does not get to dictate

international diplomacy they must consult with other powers through the UN.

Reply · Like ·  5 · March 14 at 9:41am

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**Fred White** ·  Top Commenter · UNC Chapel Hill

Anyone insane enough to think an American war with Iran would be better for America, Israel, and the world than the deal Iran will soon be signing with the major powers of the world is simply nuts, like Shel Adelson, who would simply nuke all of Iran if he had his way. Like firing everyone in one of his casinos if he has a tantrum. How short the memories of our fellow American idiots truly is! The dunces didn't like it when they saw our soldiers getting their faces, arms, and legs blown off because virtually everyone in the country wanted us dead and gone, just a few years ago. Now lots of mass fools in America want us to go to war for Israel with a country with THREE times the population of potential haters of American soldiers as Iran had. Just because Fox and Rush are the Goebbels Memorial Ministry of Propaganda and Big Lies for Shel Adelson and Bibi doesn't mean it's good for America to follow their advice! That way, madness lies. Those who cannot learn from their bitter experiences are suicidally stupid. End of discussion. We've been warned by our own neocon idiocy in control of our war-making. Now you want three times as big a war led by the same fools? REALLY?!!!!!

Reply · Like ·  7 · March 14 at 9:58am



**Jessica Dubois**

Yeah, war is bad. That's not a new idea. Yes, negotiations are better than war. But without real action, Iran WILL continue their covert enrichment programs. You can reach a deal, but it's not going to stop them. And when they produce a nuclear weapon or ten and we bring them back to the negotiating table, how do you think THAT deal will pan out? When Iran has the bomb(s), do you think they'd be so willing to pretend to agree to a deal?

Listen to Netanyahu. It's very clear. Stop willfully suspending your common sense for your lefty ideologies and USE YOUR HEAD!

Reply · Like ·  2 · March 14 at 2:02pm



**Jack Garbuz** ·  Top Commenter

Jessica Dubois

Maybe if an Iranian bomb goes off in Washington DC will some minds be changed? Short of that, I doubt it. It took 9/11 but that didn't last.

Reply · Like · March 14 at 9:04pm



**John Hill** ·  Top Commenter · Cape Coral, Florida

Well per Defense Dept. you CAN'T stop them by bombing. So you will have to invade a country with 4 times the population of Iraq... that one will ultimately cost us 6 trillion, this will close Persian Gulf, send oil prices up 300%, and cost 25 trillion, not to mention that Iraq and Iran have a mutual defense pack.

Regards,

Viper

Reply · Like ·  2 · March 15 at 5:07am

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**Maurice Gaxiola** ·  Top Commenter · Merced, California

You don't even know what is in the agreement and yet you're jumping on this ban wagon that this will somehow going to be a great deal, a good deal, marginal deal, or just maybe a bad deal, let us see what the deal is before we commit to anything

Reply · Like ·  6 · March 14 at 9:30am





**James Wrightsman** · ★ Top Commenter · American School of Mallorca

A very sensible analysis. Everyone should read it. Especially Republican Senators.

Reply · Like · 5 · March 14 at 8:59am



**Larry LaBate** · ★ Top Commenter · Aubrey, Texas

A sensible and potentially very naive one. Two things from me (not that anyone cares.) The Obama teams negotiating history is not great. I'm not presupposing anything here only pointing out that if history is any indicator whatever you think of the 47 Senators tactics you can understand their fear of a potentially bad deal. Secondly Do you trust Iran? Meaning if they say they will quit enriching does anyone here believe that they will do that? Or that they will be transparent about what they are doing or not doing?

I think we're all on the same page here, or most of us anyway. No one wants war nor do we want a nuclear Iran. The issue is how do we achieve that? With this deal? Or by strangling them economically? I personally don't know the answer, but I can see both sides.

Reply · Like · 1 · March 14 at 9:36am



**John Bear** · ★ Top Commenter

I'm in the same thought process as you are Larry... But I tend to feel that the sanctions should be ratcheted up as much as they can until Iran ends it's proxy wars, destroys it's ballistic missiles and then agrees to a deal.

Reply · Like · 1 · March 14 at 11:15am



**Jon Rathsack** · ★ Top Commenter

@Larry LaBate -- More appropriate to say that the US has poor negotiating skills (how long did it take to agree on shape of table during Vietnam War? ) -- Negotiating & haggling are not part of our social structure @John Bear agree on sentiment towards Iran but need to apply same pressure on Israel to cleanup their act (proxy wars, human rights violations) as well

Reply · Like · March 14 at 2:03pm

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**James Wagner Sr.** · ★ Top Commenter

It dosen't take a brain surgen to figure out that deplomacy is far out better than war.

Reply · Like · 5 · March 14 at 8:48am



**James Phillips** · ★ Top Commenter

Winston Churchill" "Jaw jaw" is better than "war war"."

Reply · Like · 2 · March 14 at 9:25am



**Gary Stern** · ★ Top Commenter · University of Baltimore Alumni Association

Finally a fact based story. What the Reich Wing in the US and Israel do not understanding is in negotiation one party, The US, does not get to impose its will on Iran. Each side has to give and take until they both get enough to come to an agreement.

And the far right say that unless Iran accepts everything the US wants there should be no deal. Then the question is what happens next? Are they calling for another 4 trillion dollar war that is not paid for and it will cripple the economy and coat US soldier lives.

Reply · Like · 3 · March 14 at 8:52am



**Larry LaBate** · ★ Top Commenter · Aubrey, Texas

Reich Wing.....bais much. I read nothing else you said why bother? Do you think the right has evil intentions here? I don't think the left does either but I don't know the right answer here. One thing I do know.....I'm scared of whatever Obama is afraid of in not showing this deal to Congress. Bipartisanship is rare these days but isn't this something we should be able to come together on?

Reply · Like · 2 · March 14 at 9:40am

**Ronnie Ledlow** · Lakeland Community College



Larry LaBate do you really think the gop would even look at any thing coming fromthe POTUS I agree about the bipartisanship but what makes you think the gop will start now

Reply · Like · 1 · March 14 at 10:33am



**Harold DePalma** · Top Commenter · Florida State University

Translation:

Mr. Obama and the Euros have abandoned all pretense that they are working toward stopping Iranian uranium enrichment for nuclear weapons and instead are poised to agree to roll back sanctions if Iran promises to reduce the speed of its uranium enrichment, slow walking their nuclear weapons program a few years.

Peace in our time.

Reply · Like · 3 · March 14 at 9:01am



**James Wrightsman** · Top Commenter · American School of Mallorca

Harold by the end of the month you will be eating your words.

Reply · Like · 6 · March 14 at 9:07am



**James Phillips** · Top Commenter

Mr. DePalma your book title should be "Always manufacture a crisis to win an election."

Reply · Like · 7 · March 14 at 9:28am



**Larry LaBate** · Top Commenter · Aubrey, Texas

I hope you are right James but I fear that Harold is dead on. This is no manufactured crisis this is real. A nuclear Iran would be dangerous for the entire world. I'm not saying I know which way is right I don't.....but I'm afraid of a bad deal here more than I'm hopeful of a good one. I hope I'm wrong.

Reply · Like · 1 · March 14 at 9:43am



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