JCPOA: EARLY RESULTS.
A VIEW FROM RUSSIA

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Russia played an important role in negotiating the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). It was Russian diplomats who came up with such elements of the Vienna agreement's conceptual basis as the step-by-step and reciprocal approach. They also proposed several key initiatives that were instrumental in untangling the knot of differences and concerns over Tehran's nuclear activities. A good example of the breakthrough proposals introduced by the Russian delegation at the talks between Iran and the six international mediators (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) was the initiative to turn the uranium enrichment facility at Fordow (the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant, or FFEP), a heavily fortified facility hidden 80 meters underground, into a stable medical isotopes production center.

This commentary is not a comprehensive review of JCPOA implementation to date. Its goal is to focus on some of the key results achieved in the 12 months since the adoption of the Vienna agreement's, and on Russia's role in making that progress possible.

First, few analysts had expected that the voluminous JCPOA (which takes 159 pages) could be put into action so quickly. On July 20, 2015, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2231 in support of the JCPOA. The internal national vetting procedures in the participating states were completed in October. The agreement entered into force on October 18 (the Adoption Day), and on January 16, 2016, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director-General Yukiya Amano presented a report confirming Iranian compliance with all the requirements for proceeding to the next phase, the Implementation Day, which signaled the beginning of practical efforts to implement the terms of the JCPOA. The Iranian party must be given its due: it wasted no time bringing its nuclear infrastructure into compliance with the restrictions of the Vienna agreements, including the dismantling of agreed critical equipment of nuclear facilities in Arak, Fordow, and Natanz. Tehran also fulfilled its obligations under the roadmap for the clarification of past and present outstanding issues regarding Iran's nuclear program.

Such a speedy transition to practical steps under the JCPOA has reduced the risks related to the onset of the active phase of the presidential election cycle in the United States. It has also helped to increase the number of supporters of the Vienna agreements in the Iranian legislature following the February 26, 2016, parliamentary election in Iran. This creates a more favorable climate for any Iranian legislative steps in the nuclear area, including related to the country's ratification of the

Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the Convention on Nuclear Safety (CNS), as well as for the application of the IAEA Additional Protocol in Iran on a permanent basis. Nevertheless, the ratification of these documents by the current Iranian parliament (if indeed, they are submitted for ratification by the government) should not be regarded as a foregone conclusion. It will depend on many factors; in the case of the CTBT, one of the main factors will be Washington's ability to secure U.S. ratification within the first 24 months of the next administration if Hillary Clinton wins the presidential race.

One of the central preconditions for declaring the onset of the Implementation Day, and one of the most difficult tasks in view of the broad range of the existing Iranian nuclear materials, was the removal of the Iranian stockpiles of low-enriched uranium in excess of 300 kg. So far, more than 11 tons of low-enriched uranium (LEU) in various forms have been removed from Iran, which is another major achievement of the JCPOA to date. Russia played a key role in making that achievement possible; it actively participated in speedy preparations for the removal project (the actual removal took place on December 28, 2015). The material removed from Iran is now being stored at Russian facilities operated by the Rosatom nuclear energy corporation. The size of Iran's low-enriched uranium stockpiles stored on its territory has thereby been reduced by over 95 percent.

Third, major progress has already been made on converting the FFEP, which now as result of Russian-Iranian cooperation will host a facility for the production of stable medical isotopes. Following a series of meetings and mutual visits by Rosatom and the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) officials, an understanding has been reached on the future shape of the facility. The alternative use of the centrifuge cascades at Fordow will be modeled on the ongoing operations at Electrochemical Plant (JSC "PA "ECP"), one of Russia's four uranium enrichment facilities. The company is situated in the town of Zelenogorsk, Krasnoyarsk Territory, Eastern Siberia, 3,500 miles from Fordow. It has been producing isotopes using centrifuge technology since 1971; it currently offers about 100 stable isotopes of 19 different chemical elements. In accordance with the terms of the JCPOA, some of the centrifuge cascades at Fordow that were previously used for uranium enrichment have already been dismantled under IAEA supervision. All the nuclear materials previously held at Fordow have now been removed, and two IR-1 centrifuge cascades have been prepared for further modification for use in stable isotopes production.

On November 23, 2015, the Russian president signed Decree No 567 "On measures to implement UN Security Council Resolution 2231 of July 20, 2015." The decree lifts the restrictions on supplying to Iran technology and equipment required for the modification of the FFEP. First supplies of stable isotopes from the converted Fordow facility to Iranian hospitals are expected in 2018. It is worth emphasizing that the project is being pursued on a commercial footing; in essence, commercial mechanisms are being used to achieve

nonproliferation goals. It makes a project more sustainable.

Significant progress has been achieved in JCPOA implementation in the first 12 months since its adoption. Nevertheless, such a large document, which is the product of many compromises and directly pertains to national security interests of many states, can hardly be implemented on autopilot. Suffice to recall the scale, technological complexity, and cost of the project to modernize the research reactor in Arak. This is why the implementation of the JCPOA requires regular management and maintenance by the international mediators and Iran, as well as ongoing discussions to resolve mutual issues and concerns that will inevitably arise during the process. Fortunately, the instrument that enables such work is already up and running; the Joint Commission is expected to hold its third meeting by the end of this month. With sufficient political will—which all the participants of the Vienna agreements are now demonstrating—and based on the experience of the first 12 months, the potential technical obstacles facing the implementation of the JCPOA look entirely surmountable.

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