

TIP Call with Greg Jones

Omri Ceren: Thank you for that and thank you for joining us this morning I know that many of you are joining us from the East Coast where logistics are in the best case, challenging. The reason that we wanted to, nonetheless, hold this conference call today rather than waiting either for tomorrow or for next week is, of course, negotiations between the West and, between Iran and the P5+1, are launching again on Tuesday. Monday is a holiday, we wanted to make sure that we put somebody in front of you who can help contextualize both what's going on, which is to say, where are we after two weeks of the sides publicly trying to position themselves and what we should be looking out for, which is to say there are of course multiple issues that are at stake, ballistic missile technology, nuclear enrichment facilities, the atomic facilities, which of those are things that may not look like they matter but matter a great deal. Which are things about which there are, there's been a great deal of noise but may not be as important. To contextualize all that today, we have on the phone with you, Greg Jones. He's, of course, well-known to, I'm sure, to just about everybody on this call. He is just off of testifying on the Hill. He's been involved in defense policy analysis for the better part of four decades and has published, or edited, or co-authored, I think now we're approaching triple digits in terms of reports and articles. He is currently stationed at the Non-Proliferation Policy Education Center as a senior researcher over there and is a recent co-author on an article that dealt with the Iranian nuclear negotiations: "Deflating the Hype on Obama's Iran Nuclear Deal" that was published in mid-December. On that note, I will turn it over to Mr. Jones. We will after his remarks have concluded, go to questions/answers; as we always do, the instructions to queue up will be given at that time and on that note, I'll turn the call over.

Greg Jones: Ok, thank you. Of course there's a lot of interest in the negotiations next week and, you know, what the final, the comprehensive solution might look like. I have to say I'm not as concerned as probably most other people and the reason for that is, most, many people mistakenly call the comprehensive solution a final solution, but one of the things that's come out of the Joint Plan of Action is clear, is the comprehensive solution is only going to be a long-term interim agreement. The Joint Plan of Action has already spelled out what the final agreement's going to be. The final agreement has Iran under no special restrictions whatever, it's supposed to be treated like any other non-nuclear weapons state NPT-member, but Iran will have enrichment. Now there's been many statements saying, 'well, we haven't granted them the right to enrich, we're only allowing them to enrich.' A difference I find somewhat puzzling. The key on this, is once we've said that Iran can enrich, there's two aspects to this. One, for Iran, means that whenever the comprehensive solution's term is run out, then Iran's going to be under no restrictions, going to have centrifuge enrichment, gonna have as large and robust a centrifuge enrichment program as it wants, could even – since this is now legitimized – get aid from other countries, materials, whatever. So that's a serious problem. Another serious problem is that once you've said that Iran, a country that's violated its IAEA safeguards, defied multiple UN Security Council resolutions to stop centrifuge enrichment, can have centrifuge enrichment, there's no basis to denying centrifuge enrichment to any other NPT member country. So you're, and once any country has centrifuge enrichment it's already quite close to being able to produce the HEU for nuclear weapons. And now, those who envision allowing Iran to have a, some enrichment, their view is that, 'well, Iran will only have token centrifuge enrichment. We're going to pare it way down so it'll just be this token little thing and it won't be a threat.' Now, first of all, as I already said, you know, when the comprehensive

solution runs out, they won't be under any restrictions. But even under the shorter term, we've seen that President Rouhani has said he's not going to dismantle any of the 19,000 current centrifuges that they want, and further he went on to say that he wants Iran to have 20,000 megawatts of nuclear power and wants Iran to provide the fuel for those reactors. Well, that would require the equivalent of one to two million centrifuges. So you can see where Iran's position is.

Now, many have couched this in terms of 'we either get an agreement or we have war.' Now, first of all, just on the war side, I just want to make clear, I'm not in favor of war. I think a major war with Iran would be a bad idea. But I'm afraid that if you come in with that mindset, that we're going to have either an agreement or war, then once Iran starts being recalcitrant about cutting down the thing that you decide you want to have essentially a very bad agreement because, after all, the alternative is war. Now, I think in fact there's a third alternative, the one that I think we're really having and that is, we failed. Iran's a nuclear weapon state. I think that's really what's going to happen and where we are right now. And with that I think I'll stop and take some questions. Thank you.

Omri Ceren: Operator, can you give instructions? [operator instructions] While we wait for folks to queue up, there are a couple of questions that have come in by email. The first has to do with questions that are broader than the enrichment capabilities and even broader than the [inaudible] requirements that you've talked about, and that is kind of, of the overall tone of Iran's, of statements that have been coming out from top Iranian leaders. So for instance, we've seen red lines drawn not just on enrichment technology and not just on nuclear infrastructure, but also, for instance, on ballistic missile testing. There's an open debate about whether or not these are negotiating positions or rhetoric that's being designed for domestic consumption, and I was wondering if you could speak to that for a bit.

Greg Jones: Well, ultimately, we don't know. I'm not sure that I can say any more than anybody else. But I am afraid, as I've said, that they are going to take these, this hard position. And that given this concern, this dichotomy between an agreement or war, that the West is going to cave on these points and we're going to wind up with an agreement that grants Iran not just token centrifuge enrichment but even during the comprehensive solution a rather substantial centrifuge program, continuing in some form the Arak nuclear reactor, and of course the ballistic missiles. I mean there's nothing in any of this framework. The Joint Plan of Action does not include military systems at all, and I think it's going to be very hard, even though Wendy Sherman last week said that we were going to try to negotiate that. I don't see how the other P5+1 members like Russia or China will allow that to be brought into the negotiations.

Omri Ceren: The next question came in, this is a little wonky, I apologize if there are folks that are not interested in this level of detail, but you have written that the concessions that were made in front of the JPA are, one thing that you've wrote is that they're aspirational at best, in the context of cutting off Iran's most likely path to a bomb, specifically the oxidation requirement or the dilution requirement, where Iran is forced to dilute its 20% enriched uranium down to no more than 5%, he said is relatively easy to, reverse. I was wondering if you could explain how that happened.

Greg Jones: Well, I, at that point I was not referring to the 20% because reversing the oxidation of the 20% does pose difficulties because of the high-level enrichment and the possibility that in the process you'd have an uncontrolled, potentially lethal chain reaction go off, and so you'd have to design some special facilities. But as I've said for years, there's way too much focus on the 20% enriched uranium. I

mean people were worried about Iran's centrifuge enrichment only when they had 3.5% because even 3.5% material is already two-thirds of the way to 90% enriched in terms of separative work. So what I was saying is that the 3.5% stockpile is allowed to remain -- not only allowed to remain; it was going to grow. And the administration, in particular Secretary Kerry, had claimed that it wasn't, and the reason for this was because they were going to oxidize the 3.5%, and the 3.5% because of its much lower enrichment can be quite easily converted back into hexafluoride and enriched up to full weapons-grade uranium, and so that's why this remains a problem.

Omri Ceren: On that note, I think we've got some questions in the queue.

Eli Lake (The Daily Beast): Hi Greg, thanks for doing this. I wanted to just ask you, can you talk about what a deal that appears to allow at least some enrichment at the end, or the fact that this is even being talked about, what does that do to the 123 agreements the United States has signed in the region, particularly with the UAE? And you can just, even a successful deal would potentially set off a proliferation scenario that, you know, Obama himself has said he is trying to prevent?

Greg Jones: Well I think that's a very great concern. I mean, as you point out, in some 123 agreements, we've, we've recognized that enrichment's a problem and with the UAE, for example, they haven't permitted it. Now, we weren't that vigilant with Vietnam and South Korea is fighting very hard against this. I think that there are various proliferation concerns. I mean, Saudi Arabia's suddenly said that it wants a very large nuclear program, though exactly in its situation why it needs one isn't clear. And now Turkey has suddenly inserted language into its cooperation agreement with Japan that it would be allowed if the parties agreed to undertake enrichment. So, and one has to worry not only about the Middle East, but, you know, with North Korea going on, countries like South Korea or even Japan could also be proliferation threats. So I'm afraid, I've been concerned for some time that our whole non-proliferation regime maybe heading towards collapse.

Alan Goldsmith: Thank you. So my question is, given what you've said, that essentially we've failed to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear weapon state. What are your recommendations, both about what to do about Iran and what to do to reverse the tide of collapse of the international nuclear non-proliferation system? Thank you.

Greg Jones: Well, I, well what to do about Iran once it has nuclear weapons is going to be a difficult subject. I'm afraid we're going to have to live with it, and live, in some sense, with diminished power. I mean, we aren't going to do anything more to Iran, I don't think, then we did to Pakistan. And Pakistan worries me more than any other country these days, given the security, or lack thereof, of their current nuclear forces. I'm trying to remember, what was the second, I'm sorry, what was the second part of your question?

Omri Ceren: I think he asked how we should position ourselves...

Greg Jones: ...how we should deal with the broader problem. Well, I think we need to start taking non-proliferation a lot more seriously and it just isn't nuclear proliferation. We saw with Syria, this major use of chemical weapons, not only the U.S., but world-wide reaction, in general, was quite underwhelming. And unfortunately, I'm afraid non-proliferation policy's been a victim of its own success. Since there's been concerns about it so long and nothing truly bad has happened, people have gotten blasé about it and take a short-term view, and I'm afraid it's not going to be until something truly bad happens that

suddenly there'll be the usual finger-pointing about who did what and then we'll finally have to take some action.

Omri Ceren: On that note, I think that the queue has been cleared out and we don't have any more questions by email so we'll wrap up today's call. Thank you again, Mr. Jones, for taking the time and as always, if anyone on the call needs to follow up, you can ping us at press@theisraelproject.org, press@theisraelproject.org. Thank you everybody, stay warm.

Greg Jones: Thank you.