

## TIP Conference Call with David Albright

**David Harris:** Hi there and welcome to the next conference call from the Israel Project. My name's David Harris, Director of Content and Research of the Jerusalem office of The Israel Project. You're very welcome to join us.

Over the last few days, there has been renewed focus on the Iranian nuclear program. A week ago the International Atomic Energy Agency, the IAEA, met with Iranian negotiators, and today it's the turn of the P5+1 to meet the team from Tehran. The P5+1 is Germany plus the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council: China, Russia, France, the United Kingdom, and, of course, the United States. These talks are the latest assets to stop Iran's nuclear program, at least partially – but, at what cost?

In a few minutes, we'll take your questions, but first, let me introduce today's guest. We are privileged to be hosting David Albright, the founder and president of the Washington D.C. based Institute for Science and International Security, or (ISIS). I won't go through his very detailed bio, but suffice it to say David is one of the foremost experts in this field. David, please make your introductory comments.

**David Albright:** Thank you very much. I apologize, I'm slightly horse; and I'm going to keep my comments short. It's pretty clear that negotiations in Geneva are aiming for some kind of interim deal or what they've now decided to market as a first step. And I think, kind of what the United States is seeking is somewhat clear, although there are some questions; for example, is the U.S. seeking to cap the inventories of 3.5% low enriched uranium, or is it seeking to cap the centrifuge capability of Iran?

I think it's pretty clear we want to end 20% enriched uranium production and reduce the stocks of 20% of low enriched uranium in hexofluoride form, and one of the ways I think they would agree to do that, or agree that that can happen, is to turn it into oxide. More or less what's been happening. And so, there's also I would say a lot of, or some uncertainty about the verification that would be established, and we can talk about that more later.

Now, I'd like to say one word about the negotiations that happened between Iran and the IAEA last week. I don't think it went as well as originally portrayed, and I think you see part of that in Director General Amano's hesitation to connect to go to Iran. I think

he understands that continued meetings, which is what's been happening or many, many months, is not worth it if there's not some deal that's going to take place.

There's also some worry that the Iranian proposal for Iran, at least reported in one news outlet, Global Security Newswire, that what Iran is asking for is limitations on what the IAEA can inspect. And so again we don't know if that's true. It could be a mistake in the leak. But if Iran is asking to have some site off limits to inspections, then the IAEA would have to say no. So I would say that agreement is uncertain, and where that feeds back into [inaudible] are the U.S. and the P5+1 going to link what they're doing – minimally, offering sanctions relief – to the Iranians starting to deal cooperatively with the IAEA, and so that's, I don't know if that'll happen, but I would hope that it does, because I think Iran has to understand that significant sanctions relief cannot happen if it's not willing to cooperate with the IAEA and solve these basic concerns of whether Iran had a nuclear weapons record in the past and whether that effort has continued.

I'd like to end, one of the things we do, and I think for many, many years, is to try to figure out how quickly if Iran decided to breakout and produce enough weapons grade uranium for a nuclear weapon, and these calculations are done in collaboration with a team at University of Virginia, their all time centrifuge expert, Houston Wood, and then he runs a graduate program and he has a couple of graduate students with post-docs that get deeper into these calculations. And I got to say, in a recent study we did, I think the reaction that we saw was the breakout times are just becoming too short. We see a minimal estimate was a month, month and a half, which you can still argue there's enough time to detect that and respond. But others, it's just getting too short, and so therefore there is a need to limit Iran's centrifuge capability, and I think that view is probably shared widely in the P5+1, but it is a question whether that is going to be part of a deal that an interim deal would actually address. So let me just stop there, and I'm happy to answer questions.

**David Harris:** David, thanks so far, and on behalf of the many listeners on this line, I wish you a speedy recovery with your sore throat. Now it's your chance to ask David Albright a question regarding the Iranian nuclear program. Ok, and while that process is ongoing, we are going to look at some of the questions already submitted by listeners.

Here we go, number 1: Earlier today, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, "The P5+1 can compel Iran to fully dismantle its nuclear weapons program. This means ending all enrichment, stopping all work on the heavy water plutonium reactor.

Anything else would make a peaceful resolution less likely.” David, what are your thoughts?

**David Albright:** Well, I think certainly, then, P5+1 has the mechanisms to compel Iran to do a lot. That they can actually compel Iran to do all those things, I’m not so convinced, I mean short of war; obviously, war could settle this. But I think there’s a desire on most to avoid that, and so I think the first strategy, and I understand it’s not so easy for the prime minister to accept, is to test the waters, and see if Iran is willing to make significant concessions in the context of negotiations. And so, there’s just a difference between the U.S., and the other P5+1, and the prime minister on this issue.

**David Harris:** Thank you. We’re starting to hear a flow of rumors out of Geneva about what an interim stat is going to look like. Some details of course vary, but every version seems to allow Iran to continue enrichment of 3.5% and does not require the dismantling of any centrifuges at Natanz, just commitments not to use all of those installed. If that’s really what the interim stats turn out to be, would that constitute a setback to the program?

**David Albright:** Well, again, I’m trying to represent what I’ve learned and then mix it with what we’re trying to do at our [inaudible] I think the administration was undecided about whether it would seek a halt to 3.5% low enriched uranium. Certainly once they halt to 20% and reduced the stocks that we discussed, then on the 3.5% I think they wanted to do that, but I would say like groups like myself say and push back on that and say, well look, a six months deal they’re not going to make that much more 3.5% if you cap the centrifuge capability. And if you have to choose between ending 3.5% LEU production or capping their centrifuge capability, both would put a cap on the centrifuge capability. Meaning, stop installing any more centrifuges and get them to limit the number of centrifuges that they’re enriching preferably to a level lower in which you have now, and go for an agreement that says right off the bat – Iran is not going to be able to reach an agreement with the P5+1 that calls for continued growth in centrifuge capability.

Now, that’s always been Iran’s position, is to seek that, and it’s been why earlier deals just never went anywhere, such as in 2005. So I think right up front, the P5+1 has to get established that Iran’s centrifuge capability – mainly, the number of centrifuges, the types of centrifuges – is going to be capped and will not exceed that level for many years into the future.

**David Harris:** So these headlines of suspension of 20% enriched uranium and conversion to oxide – is that a red herring if an interim step doesn't stop low level enrichment and dismantle centrifuges?

**David Albright:** I don't think it's a red herring. I mean, it's also something Prime Minister Netanyahu wanted, very clearly, he wanted that stock of near 20% LEU hexafluoride a form that's used in the centrifuge to be kept under 250 kilograms. What I've heard is that the P5+1 wants an end to the production of further 20% and the existing stock of near 20% hexafluoride would be reduced. What that would get you is a lengthening of breakout times – not a huge lengthening, but, for example, it could add a month or two to the breakout times if you added if you got rid of all the LEU and hexafluoride form and assuming Iran can't rapidly convert the oxide back into hexafluoride on the time scales they would need to actually increase, I'm sorry, I mean decrease, the breakout time. So in that sense, the oxide would be good on the second bomb but it wouldn't help them on the first, or at least give you enough of the weapon grade uranium for the first bomb. So I don't think it's a red herring; I think it does lengthen the breakout time and it's worth getting. But by itself it's by no means enough. And if that's what you mean by red herring...again, if there aren't more constraints put on the Iranian centrifuge program, then you haven't accomplished very much at all.

**David Harris:** Ladies and gentlemen, almost time to hand over to you for your live questions, but one more before we do. It's reported today that Saudi Arabia could be entering the nuclear race, taking the shortcut financing Pakistan's nuclear program and then potentially purchasing bombs in return. What should we extrapolate from that with regard to Iran's nuclear program?

**David Albright:** Well, again, I can't comment on the facts of the case, assuming now there was for decades a secret deal between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia that would involve transferring nuclear weapons in some manner to Saudi Arabia in a crisis. So I think it's a legitimate concern. In the present context, I think it's to send a signal – a strong signal – to Iran, that if they continue to go down this path, there will be a nuclear weapons capability and possibly nuclear weapons that they're going to confront nuclear weapons on two sides – Saudi Arabia but also Pakistan. If Pakistan gives nuclear weapons to Saudi Arabia, it's clearly taking sides. And so Iran may face containment by nuclear weapons states that it did not anticipate. And so I think it's in a sense to fire a warning shot to Iran that they're going down a very dangerous path, that if they make the decision to build nuclear weapons, could lead them into a security environment that's much worse than what they face today.

**Margaret Warner** (PBS News Hour): Hi, David. Thank you for doing this. What is your understanding from what Rouhani has said publicly, from what Jahad Zarif has said publicly, about what the Iranian position is in terms of what an interim stage would look like as well as the final package?

**David Albright:** Well, I think we know. I should point out that, I understand what Ambassador Zarif has said and what Rouhani said, a lot of it is promises to do things, a willingness to do things, that hasn't been tested. And it's very unclear what the Iranians will settle for, and I think that's part of what's going on – is just that the idea of a first step or interim deal is to put out things that matter to the P5+1 and particularly to the United States, and then see if Iran is willing even to engage on that or if its demanding outrageous sanctions relief. I mean just beyond the pale and finally all these steps that being discussed as part of an interim deal are not going to warrant dismantling the sanctions regime. I think the U.S. has made that clear. So I think that in a sense it's a time to test Iranians. And I think I would also point out that what I said earlier about what happened between the IAEA and Iran last week in Vienna, where the proposal by Iran was not enough to warrant [Yukiya] Amano coming to Tehran. He did that once before and was sorely disappointed. **So I think unfortunately, the leadership of Rouhani, Zarif, has been good at making promises, enticements but has not been so great on delivering.** And then it happened in '05 the same way, lots of promises, but in the end Iran launched a centrifuge program that was essentially uncapped. They'll trade that for some transparency but it's never viewed as enough by the P5+1 and therefore we don't get a settlement and so we have to see now if that's what's going to be played out today, tomorrow and then hopefully we'll know more. Or, actually, hopefully we'll see an interim deal that will start to solve this problem.

**Benny Avni** (New York Post/Newsweek): ... What is made of the fact that not all the new generation centrifuges have been used ... We talked a little bit about the meaning of that, whether that really means something, or whether they can be used once the sanctions are removed or whatever?

**David Albright:** Yes, the operational ability to use advanced centrifuges, mainly the IR-2M, is not known. I mean, the IAEA has little data on how well they've performed. The Iranians have talked about enriching uranium that would be measured by the IAEA in the pilot plan and the test cascade that is there, but never allowed it to happen. They actually, after they enriched, the Iranians measured the enrichment level and then they remixed the enriched uranium with a depleted uranium and you end up back with natural uranium and that's what the IAEA sees. So, we don't know how well these

centrifuges work. We know Iran seems to be making a lot of them and we will see how many more were deployed at Natanz, in the underground site, in the fuel-enrichment plant, in the IAEA report that should come out next week. But there is a lot of uncertainty, and so I know we don't include them in a lot of our breakout calculations. While we can estimate the outcome, we don't know for sure what they are doing. Now, with that being said, one has to conclude that if they are building hundreds of them and supporting hundreds of them it probably will work. And they very well will work a lot better than the first generation machine; so therefore, one of the goals of the negotiations has to be to try to limit their deployment. I think, my sense in the initial stage, is that it's not going to be an issue that is really addressed and it would be in the more longer-term deal, where this would be addressed. And I would also argue that early on establishing a cap on the centrifuge program is the first thing to do, because you want to be able to lengthen the break out times. Whether it's an IR-1 or IR-2M that is ultimately in your centrifuge program, is of secondary importance, but still important. I would say establishing a cap is the first priority.

**Peter Foster** (London Daily Telegraph): Thanks for doing this, David. I understand in the briefings taking place up on the Hill, was that the Iranian agreement was going to be if you say suspend enrichment to 20% and convert the rest to oxide. The limit to percent enrichment to a certain number of centrifuges. I know you put 9,000 in your report, but I don't have a number for that. Not to start the Arak reactor during the six month period and not use the IR-Q's during the sixth month period. I wonder whether you felt that was still in the ballpark of where a deal is looking and whether you could give us some idea if that is roughly what the step one deal is, how that compares with what you put out yesterday or the day before on your minimum requirement as it were for freezing the Iranian program.

**David Albright:** I think we are not sure, with the group of us that worked on this, and just as some background we had a workshop a couple weeks ago with experts both in government and outside government to look at this, that have meetings with the administration to try to discuss this and I think, my view is that the administration is going to try to probe and ask for a considerable number of things not expecting to get all of them. Some of those would be in our list of minimal constraints. I mean the Arak reactor I think is important to settle sooner rather than later, and that may not be included. We are very worried about the potential that Iran could continue to make centrifuges, including the IR-2M's, during the interim deal and then emerge, if a deal fell apart, with several thousand IR-1 and IR-2M's to be deployed rapidly in Natanz and possibly even at a third centrifuge plant. So, my understanding is that they are not

focusing that much on the centrifuge manufacturing, although I think, I've heard they would like to. So, we will just have to see. I mean our recommendation is to focus on it, because it will save you a lot of criticism and also potentially a lot of trouble down the road. My point of view, which is if they are going to cap the program they are not going to install, so would they need to make any more centrifuges, during the interim or even after that, if the cap holds. So, I think it is quite reasonable to expect Iran to stop centrifuge manufacturing and to have some verification of that. But again I am not sure the US is going to go there.

**Trudy Rubin** (Philadelphia Inquirer): Thank you very much for doing this David. My question is I have seen references often to the fact that other countries that gave up their nuclear programs were able to engender trust by coming clean about the past. How key is it that Iran comes clean in both about the past and the reason for manufacturing so much more low and medium enriched uranium than they could ever possibly use for a peaceful program?

**David Albright:** I think the history would say it is important to come clean. I mean South Africa learned when it decided not to come clean and actually not given up its nuclear weapons. It signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty and it decided to hide its nuclear weapons program and it paid a heavy price. It finally reversed that decision 18 months later. After the President F W de Klerk made a public announcement and then allowed the IAEA to come in and verify that the program had been dismantled, it quickly reversed their international situation. When Brazil decided to come clean, at least partial, and did not use the IAEA verification method, but did use another one. It did not have any Peace in Nuclear explosives, so this was an earlier stage. I think if Iran doesn't do it, it's going to go closer. But, more importantly, the IAEA said it wants to know and it has laid down a marker and I don't see how Iran can escape that. The US can't tell the IAEA to be quiet and so even if they wanted to, they would have a tough time. Even if Iran signed the additional protocol that will remove these questions, it would actually intensify them because the additional protocol would require much more on the requirement of Iran to talk about the history of its nuclear program. And so it's giving the IAEA a few more tools to pursue those questions. So I think Iran can't get out of it, but I would argue the sooner they do it the better. When you do these emissions there usually isn't really much that's going to happen in terms of punishments, but there can be a tremendous amount of trust that is built up if you allow the verification necessary to support the emission. So I would say the sooner the better and I think from our point of view, the interim deal should enforce that by affirming that and I think Congress believes this too, that don't expect to see the

sanctions architecture dismantled if you haven't satisfied the IAEA concerns on these key questions.

**Aram Nir** (Channel 2 News): I know this conversation, I have been through it last week. My question is, can you think of a formula that will satisfy Prime Minister Netanyahu and still save the Iranian face?

**David Albright:** No, not really. I mean, I think both sides, in order to move forward in a positive way, both sides would have to give, and it's too early to know if this process can succeed. So in that sense I will side-step the question. The other thing is that in the end we are more of a technical organization and how people save face is less of a concern for us. I won't give an example only a premise. On Iran we all think, Iran can't bear to admit it has a nuclear weapons program. It's just inconceivable - you could ask Iran to get up and some even posited that the regime could collapse, if they were exposed as having made such a lie. All I can refer to is back in '02, in fact I had debates with Ambassador Swenson. Back in the nineties, Iran has no gas centrifuge program he would argue, and I would argue the opposite. They couldn't deftly were able to admit and it was done by the President at that time, Khatami, in February of '03 or so, or January of '03 that they had a big centrifuge program and the regime didn't collapse. So, I think countries are really good at being able to lie and then be able to reverse that tell the truth. So, I think the face saving part of this is really not the issue. It's getting to a substantive agreement that in the end reduces or eliminates the concerns that Iran will build nuclear weapons.

**Robert Einhorn** (Brookings): Thank you, David. First of all, a couple of things. On the paper you did a few days ago, my hunch is that it is fairly close to what an interim deal would look like and it's also fairly close to a presentation I gave in Tel Aviv on October 24<sup>th</sup> when I tried to imagine what an interim deal would look like. I would suggest that ISIS do some analysis, it would be very helpful I'm sure for everyone else on the line, and the public in general of three different cases. One case is the breakout, you know, capability, the break out timeline that exists today. Another would be the timeline that would exist under the interim agreement, and the third would be the timeline that could exist if Iran filled out some of the impending elements in its program. For example, if they started enriching at the 12 idle cascades at Fordow, if they started running hexafluoride through the thousand or so IR-2M at Natanz, and so on. But to look at those three cases because that would enable observers to evaluate, you know, the impact of the interim deal. What is it doing? Is it putting more time on the clock? Is it holding the hands of the clock still? What is the impact of it? I think that would be a

real service. Maybe you have some, you know, top of the head estimates even now. I want to comment on some of the earlier questions. On Saudi-Pakistan, I really think this is unfounded. Yes, we believed the Saudis bankrolled Pakistan's nuclear program or at least part of it. The Saudis will say openly there is an I.O.U here that we can call in. I don't believe it, the world is different. I think Pakistan would be much more cautious today than in the A.Q. Khan days. Finally, the question about why not press Prime Minister Netanyahu's tough maximalist approach. I think the reason is first of all, it's not achievable. I don't think any Iranian government could sell that deal at home, it's just inconceivable. They think it would be unwise even to try to push that deal because it will paint the US and the P5+1 partners as the intransigent partner in the negotiations and I think we would pay a price in the terms of the unraveling of sanctions if it looked like we, and not the Iranians, were the cause of the impasse. Thank you.

**David Albright:** Bob, thank you. We have those timelines. One that is probably most relevant to the interim deal which we haven't published is that they have some number of enriching centrifuges close to what they have now. I think part of it is 9,000 and there is a technical reason for 9,000 and not 10,000 and I won't go into it. On difficulty of breakout, it's better to have 9,000 than 10,000 because of the way they organize all the cascades. But if you get rid of this inventory of near 20% and you are looking at the enrichment centrifuges, you go from a minimal breakout time of a calculated 1.3 to 2.3 months, that's with the existing 20% inventory. If you can get rid of that, then you can get it up to 2-3 months and you roughly double the breakout timeline and I think most people will say a three month breakout timeline is the minimal estimate, you are in a more comfortable region than if you are down in a one and a half to two month region. I think it's not a huge increase in the break out timeline but I think it's an important one to try to get and important to get rid of this 20%, and make it all available for a rapid break out.

**David Harris:** Thank you very much indeed, Drew [operator]. This is a real testament to you, David. I also had the privilege to listen to Bob Einhorn here, several weeks ago, so I'm delighted you decided to join this call. It is a tremendous tribute to David Albright, to your expertise and knowledge and that wraps today's conference call from The Israel Project. Thanks to you listener, and of course thanks so much to our special guest today, the founder and President of the Washington D.C. institute ISIS, David Albright. On behalf of all of us, get well soon. Thank you so much.

**David Albright:** Thank you.

