

Inside the Iran Deal: a French Perspective

The Iranian nuclear crisis, a major challenge for regional security as well as global efforts to limit nuclear proliferation, began in August 2002 with the revelation of the ongoing construction of two covert Iranian facilities: the Natanz uranium enrichment plant and the plutonium-production reactor in Arak. Three European countries—France, Great Britain, and Germany—initially attempted to manage this problem. In 2006, the United States, Russia, and China joined them in a two-pronged strategy of dialogue and pressure through sanctions. This grouping of countries came to be known as the E3+3, or known as the P6 or P5+1 in the United States (for the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, plus Germany). Their strategy led to repeated efforts to undertake negotiations with Iran, which were unproductive due to Iran's reservations concerning the first agreements reached (in May 2005) and its failure to demonstrate any genuine will to negotiate in the following years.

At the same time, Iran continued to increase its capacity, both declared (at Natanz, after it had been discovered in 2002) and undisclosed (at Fordow, a uranium enrichment facility discovered in 2009), while limiting cooperation with the International Agency for Atomic Energy (IAEA). The United Nations applied ever-more stringent sanctions, as did the European Union and the United States unilaterally. In May 2012, just after the French presidential elections and as I became Foreign Minister, the Iranian nuclear question was at a diplomatic impasse—the array of sanctions in place and the disquieting state of advancement of the Iranian nuclear program justified the fear of military intervention to shut it down.

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Given the high stakes that this issue represented for national and regional security as well as for nuclear nonproliferation, we decided, in full agreement with the President of the French Republic, to engage in a policy of “constructive firmness.” Our objective? To negotiate and conclude an agreement that would be solid and verifiable, and that would show real progress and create confidence in the international community toward Iran’s genuine renunciation of nuclear weapons.

Many things have been written and said about how this major agreement came into being, some true, others less so. This is why I believe that, without waiting for the archival materials to be made public, a precise, straightforward description of the complex discussions as expressed by one of the participants—in this case, myself—would be of use. It is in this spirit that I wrote the following, which serves as a kind of first-hand account of events, and ends with some lessons learned.

April 2012—June 2013: a Dialogue of the Deaf

Discussions on the Iranian nuclear program began again in the spring of 2012, after an interruption since January 2011 without face-to-face meetings but marked by “epistolary diplomacy” between the EU’s High Representative, Cathy Ashton, and the Iranian negotiator and secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council, Saeed Jalili. Negotiators were able to return to the table because Iran had abandoned a certain number of preconditions: the right to enrichment and the immediate lifting of sanctions. It soon brought these conditions back to the table, however, and the discussions became pointless.

Nevertheless, this temporary opening on the Iranian side did enable a series of consultations to take place among policy chiefs of the E3+3 and Iran at several different times: Istanbul in April 2012, Baghdad in May (which led to the expression “the Baghdad offer”), and Moscow in June. Experts also held their own meetings, such as at Istanbul in July. Iran did not really engage with the debate on the basic E3+3 proposals, which addressed the main concern of Iran enriching uranium to 20 percent, making it highly-enriched uranium that is used for weapons. Indeed since the end of 2011, Iran had accelerated the construction of cascades at the Fordow site, and had begun enriching uranium to 20 percent.

The E3+3 group did advance concrete proposals for cooperation and agreed not to adopt new resolutions on the nuclear program at the UN Security Council. The Iranians refused to respond to the expectations of the three key demands on enrichment: an end to the production of uranium enriched to 20 percent, closure of the Fordow enrichment site, and removal from Iran of the stockpile of uranium that had already been enriched to 20 percent. However, the question

of supplying fuel for the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR), which had been the subject of former proposals in the years 2009–2010, was no longer mentioned.

The Iranians in fact only proposed to gradually suspend the enrichment of uranium to 20 percent in the context of a nine-stage plan leading to lifting all sanctions, multilateral and unilateral. This plan, even the existence of which was later challenged by the Iranian negotiator, had in fact been brought forward during a follow-up meeting between Ashton's deputy, Helga Schmid, and Jalili's lead associate, Ali Bagheri, on July 24, 2012, in Istanbul.

It rapidly appeared in the summer of 2012 that the Iranians had a much reduced margin of maneuver for negotiation, given that the regime seemed to be awaiting the results of the November 2012 U.S. presidential elections before making a decision. Concerns further mounted that negotiations would be frozen even longer while the United States would in turn await the results of the June 2013 Iranian presidential elections.

“More for More”

Tensions grew in the summer and fall 2012. The European Union began preparations for a new series of financial and energy sanctions (confirmed on October 15). Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made a spectacular intervention at the UN General Assembly at the end of September, waving a drawing of a bomb and literally laying down Israel's line in the sand: Iranian possession of enough highly-enriched uranium (HEU) to make a nuclear device could not be allowed. The tenor of the negotiations changed over several months, as the objective refocused to prevent an Israeli strike rather than on solving the basic problem of Iranian nuclear capacity. The fear of military intervention once again raised the question, so often asked since the beginning of the crisis in 2002: have we tried everything to find a diplomatic resolution to this crisis?

A ministerial meeting of the E3+3 group was scheduled in New York for September 27, 2012. The Russian minister, Sergey Lavrov, cancelled at the last minute; officially, he was ill, but there is reason to believe that he did not appreciate the E3 ministers' September 2012 letter to the other Foreign Ministers of the EU Foreign Affairs Council calling for new European Union sanctions on Iran.

The E3+3 ministers agreed in New York to study the possible parameters for a revised “Baghdad offer.” This U.S. idea, which held sway at the State Department and in think tanks, was “more for more”: ask more from Iran, but offer more in

The objective in 2012 refocused to prevent an Israeli strike rather than Iranian nuclear capacity.

terms of lifting sanctions. U.S. authorities initially saw this offer to be substantial, but it was watered down progressively as the November U.S. presidential elections approached. Once the elections were over, the United States confirmed what had become an unambitious plan.

An initial meeting of E3+3 experts was held in London on October 10 to start discussing the possible revised parameters of an offer. At that time, a significant divergence of opinion emerged between Russia and China, on the one hand, and the rest of the E3+3 on the other, as the two powers reckoned that pretty much all sanctions should be put in the balance to make for a very attractive offer. E3+3 policy directors met in Brussels on November 21, with their experts, in order to move forward. Previously, during a November 15 videoconference among the E3+3, the Americans had presented the outline of their proposal to revise the Baghdad offer. It merely updated the three demands concerning 20 percent enrichment. It also included, in addition to the offers in the May 2012 Baghdad package, a temporary suspension of certain sanctions (gold and precious metals, export to Iran of petrochemical products) as well as a commitment from the EU (but not the United States, at that stage) not to adopt new sanctions following those of October 15.

The Russians refused to consider any further demands placed on Iran. Not only that, they suggested that the group withdraw some of its demands and offer the Iranians more. The Russians and Chinese worked together on a new proposal, also submitted on November 15. This draft sought the suspension of 20 percent uranium enrichment in Iran (without dismantling Fordow or removing the stockpile), along with a few verification measures, in exchange for recognition by the E3+3 group of Iran's right to enrich uranium and the suspension of the European oil embargo.

France then began to study the idea of a "roadmap" that we could bring to our partners, and which would meet Iran's demands to "go beyond the 1st phase" of confidence-building measures in regard to 20 percent enrichment. We estimated it would take a matter of days, a maximum of two weeks, to put together a reasonable "roadmap," given that all the elements had long been worked on at our end.

On December 6 in Berlin, the E3+3 finally approved the update of the offer made to Iran in Baghdad in May 2012. They agreed on a "political chapeau," first suggested by the British, which placed this revised offer in the context of a possible extension beyond the first phase of confidence-building measures. The British and Germans were disappointed by the wait-and-see attitude of the Americans. A clear change in approach took place as of the summer of 2012 in London (related to a change in their policy chief, from Mark Sedwill to Simon Gass, and the Iran task force chief, who was now Ajay Sharma): the Foreign Office, and likely the British Prime Minister's office, explicitly wished to set possible oil sanction relief and maintenance of uranium enrichment in Iran at the top of the

negotiations list. Sanctions relief on oil had so far not been envisaged as a top-tier measure. Berlin, with a long-standing position in favor of the right to enrichment, leapt into the British breach and also called for drafting a more attractive offer. But the Americans refused to enter the debate on what would be an acceptable state for the Iranian nuclear program, and the issue was left to stand temporarily. The Russians and Chinese did not press the issue, and seemed satisfied with the prospect of renewed contacts with Iran.

Almaty

The first half of 2013 was marked by a new series of meetings held in Kazakhstan: the E3+3 met the Iranian negotiator, Saeed Jalili, in Almaty on February 26 and 27, then again on April 5 and 6. Despite exchanges that were, for the first time, quite substantial, the group in Almaty found a sizable gap between the Iranian position and their own. Iran was only prepared to discuss very limited measures. These would result in a *status quo* for the nuclear program, while the demand for recognition of Iran's right to enrich and for lifting the most important sanctions remained. In these circumstances, it did not seem possible to plan a new meeting. Negotiators agreed on a "time out" until after the June 2013 Iranian elections.

June 2013–January 2014: from Rouhani to the Implementation of the Geneva Agreement

The election of Hassan Rouhani as President of Iran in June 2013 opened the way to renew negotiations. His victory over the nuclear negotiator himself, Saeed Jalili, and the fact that the issue of sanctions relief had dominated the election campaign was a sign that Iranian diplomacy might be changing track. It was difficult to identify the Iranians' real objective: would they really accept an agreement with a strong framework (meaning verification and restrictive measures on sensitive aspects of the nuclear and missile program), an agreement that would require significant concessions?

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We reminded our partners of the period when Rouhani was in charge of nuclear negotiations (2003–2005). It is true that during that period Western diplomacy achieved some partial successes: the Tehran agreement of October 2003 on suspension of uranium enrichment; the Paris agreement in November 2004 on a second suspension; a global negotiation process involving the E3/EU and Iran.

But it was also a period marked by Iran's duplicity and failure to truly keep their commitments. President Rouhani's memoirs touch on the Iranian approach to releasing information on the covert program, and they are eloquent: dissimulation, wasting time to avoid being brought before the UN Security Council, leading the Europeans along, a policy of *fait accompli*, research on enrichment proficiency.¹

President Rouhani very quickly asserted that the nuclear crisis could be solved in three to six months. As president, he chose a Minister of Foreign Affairs who was well known to the E3+3: Javad Zarif, former Permanent Representative of Iran to the United Nations, very knowledgeable about the United States and Western diplomatic codes. The Iranian minister, a pleasant man with a perpetual smile, gave an energetic presentation in perfect English of Iran's "new approach." It was an attempt to override the *petitio principii* of the previous team and focus on negotiating the final state of the Iranian nuclear program. The idea was to come to mutual approval of enrichment means within a year, in exchange for relief from all sanctions. There was, however, a reiteration of arguments (like sanctions are illegal and Iran's rights must be recognized), no more discussion of any kind of commitment to suspend particular activities (the 20 percent question was to be "addressed" during negotiations), and the Iranian minister made no mention of the Arak reactor.

I mention in passing that it is difficult to carry out fruitful negotiations when the starting point is the declaration that UNSC resolutions are "illegal." Furthermore, developments on the ground must not contradict the basis of negotiation; yet, for example, construction on the Arak facility continued (and indeed was of increasing concern to international observers, who feared a repeat of the Israeli "Operation Opera" strike which destroyed the Iraqi Osirak nuclear plant in 1981).

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Nevertheless, the E3+3 ministers welcomed the new tone of the new Iranian leadership overall, while underscoring the need to review each item and the precise terms of the Iranian proposal. When the E3+3 ministers held their first meeting with Javad Zarif, I began to outline two key points of the French position: because Iran had stated that it was not seeking to develop nuclear weapons, it had to accept the consequences of that policy; the E3+3 would then, in exchange, be

willing to accept Iran's right to develop peaceful nuclear power capacity.

In early October, it became clear that negotiations outside the framework of the E3+3 group would be dangerous. We began to work on the broad outlines of the regulation of the Iranian program, covering materials (production, existing

capacity, stockpiles), militarization and, ideally, ballistic capacities (even though we were aware from the outset that it was unlikely that we would obtain genuine guarantees). More precisely, we were at that time seeking to stop the enrichment of uranium to 20 percent; a suspension of R&D activities; the closure of the Fordow site; the conversion of the Arak plutonium production reactor into a light-water reactor; abandonment of the heavy-water plant (which is used to enrich uranium) co-located with the reactor; removal of stockpiles at 3.5 percent from Iran (with potential for recovery in future years, if Iran were to develop nuclear power plants); and the application of the highest standards of verification (using the Additional Protocol, Code 3.1, of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)).

Geneva, Act I: “the Zarif Plan”

On October 15 and 16, the policy chiefs of the E3+3, with EU High Representative Cathy Ashton, met Zarif and his deputy minister, Abbas Araghchi, in Geneva. The Iranian minister (suffering from back pain) gave a PowerPoint presentation of his ideas, with the objective titled “Closing an unnecessary crisis: Opening new horizons.” These ideas included:

- a “common objective”: ensuring that Iran’s exercise of its right to nuclear power, including enrichment, would remain entirely peaceful—sanction relief being a prerequisite;
- a final step using the Supreme Leader’s *fatwa* (a religious ruling) against Iran building or possessing nuclear weapons, but allowing R&D and enrichment at Natanz and Fordow according to mutually accepted terms, operation of the Arak reactor under “proliferation-resistant” conditions, cooperation on civilian nuclear applications with transparency and international monitoring by the IAEA, along with relief from all sanctions;
- a first phase, which would include addressing: production and stockpiles of 20-percent enriched uranium; the level of activities at Natanz and Fordow; increased IAEA monitoring; purchase, transport, insurance and repatriation of Iranian oil revenues; financial transactions; and national restrictions on petrochemical products, automobiles, gold, and other precious metals.

Zarif did not mention the unresolved issues of the Iranian nuclear weapons program; he simply planned on having Iran sign an agreement with the IAEA. He emphasized that there would be no roll-back of the Iranian program.

Behind these big ideas, it nonetheless became apparent during a second, more detailed session with Iranian Deputy Minister Araghchi alone that there were still significant differences with Iran. Araghchi made a distinction between technology, which Iran would continue to develop, and the production of enriched

uranium, which was recognized as the heart of our concern. Any gesture made by Iran would be in reciprocity for gestures made by the P5+1, but the first phase could include the complete suspension of enrichment to 20 percent, the conversion or dilution of the 20-percent stockpile, a plan to convert the Arak facility (which was not a high stake for Iran because the start-up had already been postponed), and further measures on transparency (but not the Additional Protocol, because of measures passed by the Iranian parliament).²

An entire session was devoted to sanctions. The E3+3 reaffirmed their position on the first phase: suspension of sanctions on petrochemical products, gold and precious metals, civil aviation products, and a commitment from the UNSC and EU not to adopt new sanctions. Iran reaffirmed it sought the full suspension of sanctions in the first phase.

The discussions in Geneva were carried out in a more constructive and fluid atmosphere than previous encounters, confirming that Iran had modified its approach to negotiations. But still, the Iranian positions remained imprecise and rather far from our own. Our group held a united front, although the British, once again, opened up many new pathways on their own. The Americans seemed to remain very cautious, reiterating basic parameters.

Geneva, Act II:

Revelation of the Secret U.S. Diplomatic Channel and a Clash with France

Negotiations continued in Geneva on November 7, 2013. The E3+3 experts came together without Iran to specify the first-phase parameters would last six months. In reality, this work, which went on late into the night, was only a façade: the main U.S. experts were absent, replaced by a second-string team. In the midst of the discussions, U.S. policy chief Wendy Sherman handed her counterparts a very different kind of document, secret and not fully finalized, that integrated the three elements demanded by Iran in October's Zarif Plan: a common objectives or preamble, a first phase, and a last phase. On the evening of November 7, it gave rise to a tense exchange between the French policy chief and the U.S. Undersecretary of State, Bill Burns, with regard to a perceived betrayal of confidence: the Americans had not informed us of the content or even existence of these discussions.

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Nevertheless, this was the proposal that served as a basis for E3+3 ministerial-level discussions over the next two days. Because of its shortcomings, it seemed unacceptable to me. The U.S. document did not provide an explicit commitment by Iran not to develop or obtain nuclear

weapons; did not address the question of enrichment over the long term (which Iran sought to make unconditional); did not include a satisfactory plan for handling the stockpile of uranium enriched to 20 percent (Iran demanded that, in the first six-month period, allowances be made for needs linked to future research reactors); did not limit production of centrifuges to those needed to replace broken ones; and did not suspend all activities associated with the construction of the Arak reactor and the manufacture or testing of its fuel. As soon as I arrived, at the end of the morning of November 8, I gave my counterparts, and in particular U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, our demands for shoring up the five major points of the text that we felt necessary.

At the same time, the Americans saw that Iranians were backpedalling on certain points that they believed had been agreed upon in Oman. The British and German ministers stayed on the sidelines, ready to accept any results that satisfied both the Americans and the Iranians. As of that moment, negotiations essentially moved forward between three ministers—American, French, and Iranian.

On Saturday November 9, I went on the radio station *France Inter* to explain our demands. Tensions mounted. The U.S. delegation was annoyed, while the British and Germans encouraged us to be more flexible, meaning to withdraw our demands.

At the end of the morning, I met with Secretary Kerry, who was impatient to push ahead. No concessions were made. I expressed my disagreement with both the method and substance of the proposal: France would not accept a watered-down agreement. After a very tense debate, we finally reached an agreement on a revised proposal addressing the five problematic points. We made our proposal to the rest of the group when the Chinese deputy minister arrived that afternoon. Kerry, who admitted the merits of our positions, advocated for the French demands. After discussion, our partners endorsed the text. Sergey Lavrov, a habitually loquacious diplomat whose contributions bore mostly on procedure, sharply criticized the process as it had occurred—he was unhappy both with the backchannel and with what he saw as a hasty and unprofessional way to conduct negotiations in Geneva. But the P5+1 nevertheless approved a text to be submitted to Javad Zarif at the end of the afternoon.

That evening, Zarif saw that the group's position was substantively unanimous. He had thought that the whole group would have accepted the secret agreement with the Americans, so he expressed—or feigned—surprise at the slightly revised text. At the end of a long exchange of ideas, it appeared that Iran was not ready to accept the text as presented. Zarif delivered a vehement tirade against the “changes” in the agreement that had supposedly been reached in Oman with

The U.S. draft from the secret Oman talks seemed unacceptable to me because of five shortcomings.

the Americans. He even hinted at a complete end to negotiations. Ashton and the P5+1 ministers suggested that a new meeting of policy chiefs should be scheduled to resolve the outstanding issues, and it was set for November 20.

In the meantime, Iran fine-tuned its “narrative” about the alleged transparency of its program and signed an agreement on November 11 with the IAEA in Tehran: a “Framework for Cooperation” that gave the impression that the possible military dimensions of the Iranian program would finally be seriously addressed. For my part, I had a deep and sincere conversation with John Kerry between November 9 and 20 on the form and substance of the negotiations, to ensure that the backchannel “process” used by the Americans in Oman would not be repeated.

Geneva, Act III: Interim Agreement

Negotiations on the ministerial level began again on November 22 at the Intercontinental Hotel in Geneva. The method was clarified in comparison to Geneva II: Cathy Ashton negotiated on the basis of the E3+3 mandate concerning each of the five key issues.

Zarif prevaricated for three days, but ultimately accepted our demands. This included a ban on fuel testing (I explained to John Kerry how important it was to block the development of fuel for Arak, not just its production, which would allow for a real freeze of this worrying part of the program, or “plutonium path”), and an important footnote on the production of centrifuges was moved.

The U.S. Secretary of State, with his usual show of will, played the U.S. trump card to Iran: the promise of releasing \$3.6 billion in frozen Iranian assets. A strange discussion took place on the subject of what became known as the “billion for the pilgrims.” The Americans first lobbied for “directing” part of the funds freed up to specific purposes, including payment to Saudi foundations to be allocated for Iranian pilgrimages to Mecca. The Iranian minister did not take kindly to this condition. In the end, the earmark was removed from a part of the amount, which was added to the \$3.6 billion

initially offered by the Americans, moving the total to \$4.2 billion.

The parties reached the Joint Plan of Action (JPOA), or what became known as the interim agreement, on November 24 at dawn.

Another Month to Determine Implementation

Experts began negotiations on implementation on December 9 in Vienna; the first meeting went on until the 13th. While progress was made, it quickly became apparent that the

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implementation. In addition, Iran made a sudden declaration of the existence and production of a new, advanced-generation centrifuge (later it became the IR-8, but at that time it did not yet have a name) before interrupting the discussions on the pretext of a U.S. announcement that individual Iranian companies linked to nuclear proliferation would be subject to sanctions.

Discussions resumed from December 19–22 in Geneva before halting again, this time because of the announcement that the new, advanced IR-8 centrifuge would be installed at the Natanz pilot facility. The P5+1 were unanimous in their rejection of this development, saying it was unacceptable and contrary to the spirit and the letter of the agreement; the dispute rose up to the policy level. Substantial divergences remained on other nuclear topics (such as the link between the schedule for dilution of 20-percent-enriched uranium and the schedule for releasing frozen oil revenues, the precise definition of measures associated with the Arak heavy water reactor, and R&D issues). Discussions of sanctions relief were more constructive. The Iranians didn't bother to take a "good faith" attitude in negotiating the document. In fact, the "nucleocrats" seemed to take a harder line with diplomats, with Iranian atomic energy authorities trying to save what they could from Zarif's concessions.

A new session was held after Christmas, until the wee hours of December 31. The Americans moved ahead slowly on the "slices," or monthly payments to be made to the Iranians—releasing the \$4.2 billion all at once was out of the question, for fear of Iran "cashing in" and then not delivering on the nuclear measures.

The problem of the new centrifuge was still not resolved. It would be settled in early January after new discussions between Helga Schmid, Abbas Araghchi, and the IAEA yielded a "gentlemen's agreement," supposed to be secret. The centrifuge could remain in place, on the condition that it was not connected to a uranium supply. The agreement could go into effect on January 20, using a "longest day" schedule whereby—thanks to the time difference between Tehran, Vienna, Brussels, and Washington—Iran's nuclear actions and the suspension of sanctions could take place successively, but on the same day.

February–November 2014: Two Failures in the Long-term Negotiations

Long-term negotiations began in February 2014, in the Palais Cobourg hotel; the Austrians had offered to host and finance the negotiations. These took the form of "conversations" to "familiarize" Iranians with the main points that the group wished to see in the agreement, known as "building blocks." These "building blocks" were considered to be the expression of an ambitious ideal rather than real objectives by some of our partners.

The policy chiefs of the E3+3 held a meeting to define the framework for the method in Geneva on January 21, 2014. On February 12 in Berlin, the experts

added technical refinements. The French positions (holding a firm line) converged with those of the Americans. U.S. objectives were clearly stated, and not limited to a breakout time—that is, the interval required for Iran to produce enough fissile material for one bomb. The agreement was initially designed to cover a 20-year period; questions on the possible military dimension of the Iranian nuclear program (coined possible military dimension, or PMD, by the IAEA) were stated as indispensable. The British and Germans mentioned a more limited objective of simply extending the breakout time. Russia's positions were the farthest from the rest of the group. It wanted a reaffirmation of Iran's right to enrichment; wanted an account of the difficulties associated with decommissioning Fordow; and had reservations in regard to the inclusion of ballistic missiles in the negotiations.

Meetings were organized in monthly sessions by policy chiefs in Vienna, interspersed with expert meetings to look more deeply into the policy issues raised. There were meetings with Iranians about every two weeks. P5+1 members took on different “building blocks”; France analysed possible military dimensions (PMD) issues. PMD had always been an essential point for France, as it signaled the lack of clarity of Iran's true intentions regarding its nuclear program. PMD cast a shadow on all other nuclear developments. A threat is always the product of capabilities and intentions.

The launch meeting was held in Vienna from February 18–20. Discussions remained general. Zarif complained to Ashton that the P5+1 were not lifting the sanctions effectively and that relief was only theoretical. In reality, at least at the outset, these problems were related to the uncertainty of the Iranian Central Bank and the indecision of Iranian authorities about the flow and use of funds released from sanctions. The Iranian negotiators also emphasized from the start that certain points would not be altered by negotiation, such as their refusal to consider “breakout time” as a relevant parameter for the discussion; importance of R&D (presented as not covered by the JPOA); that PMD was to be handled with the IAEA (which Iran accused of piling up endless questions on a “fabricated” subject); their demand for sanction relief from the UNSC; and that progress in the size of the agreement would depend on the duration of the agreement.

As soon as the next experts meeting was held, from March 5–7, 2014, the Iranians adopted a maximalist position on enrichment. For the Arak plant, the Russians presented a conversion model that maintained the use of heavy water but relied on low-enriched uranium. The Americans suggested a model using light water, with heavy water as a neutron reflector (which intensifies the nuclear chain reaction). The Chinese advanced the possibility of civil nuclear cooperation with the Iranians.

During the policy chiefs' meeting on March 18 and 19, Zarif exercised his usual willfulness: he declared that the drafting phase of the agreement should be

scheduled for May. The U.S. policy chief, Wendy Sherman, broached the subject of lifting sanctions in the context of a long-term agreement, offering an approach by stages and by categories of sanctions. Araghchi rejected this and reasserted that “nearly all” sanctions should be lifted as of Day One. The sticking point was once again enrichment: Iranians affirmed that the “limits” mentioned in the JPOA were limits to expansion of their program, and not reductions thereof. On the subject of Arak, the Russians and Americans continued to push for their own options, while the Chinese added their own variant. We supported the U.S. option, in solidarity.

The sticking point in spring 2014 was once again enrichment.

The expert meetings that took place from April 3–5 were not conclusive. The Iranian expert, under pressure from the French expert to answer the group’s questions with precision, suggested that the Iranians had assessed the breakout time at four years, given the current state of the program. During this meeting, the Russians, without any prior consultation, mentioned the possibility of using some of the Fordow centrifuges to produce stable radioisotopes, a seemingly more acceptable application of nuclear science, but which would have the serious drawback of keeping centrifuges in Fordow.

The policy meeting on the 8th and 9th of April was devoted to “building blocks,” in particular with regard to Security council resolutions and PMD (French policy chief Jacques Audibert reaffirmed our demands: clear information on the past and the present program, and also measures like stringent verification and restrictions for the future). Discussions on enrichment were tense, as the Iranians insisted that they wished to expand their activities in the future. A symbolic meeting of the joint commission was held at the end of this series, to observe the satisfactory application of the Geneva agreement.

Consultations with E3+3 policy chiefs were held in Brussels with Cathy Ashton on April 29 and 30, to prepare for what the High Representative expected to be the start of the active negotiation phase. The positions of Western nations and the Russian and Chinese were far apart, but the Russians were not opposed to using our position as a starting point. The negotiation method remained unclear (Ashton seemed to imagine that she would be sitting in a room alone with Zarif and a laptop).

On May 6 and 7, there was a meeting of the E3+3 and Iranian experts on the sidelines of the preparations for the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Iranian positions were unchanged, and in fact had regressed on certain points such as monitoring and verification. In regard to Arak, the Iranians continued to listen politely to the successive “improvements” in the Russian and U.S. options, while merely replying with

proposals for the management of spent fuel. (The Chinese, meanwhile, had their own proposal for Arak.)

The policy chiefs continued the work from May 14–16. A strange scene played out in a darkened room in the International Conference Centre in Vienna. Minister Zarif, armed with a portable projector, showed a PowerPoint on the final agreement, which he said he had put together without consulting all his deputies. He used the term “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action,” which was later adopted.

This session was followed by talks between the Americans and the Iranians on June 8 and 9 in Geneva. Helga Schmid attended. Nicolas de Rivière, who had just replaced Audibert as French policy chief, emphasized the need to preserve the unity of the group and to refuse the use of parallel channels. He met with the two Iranian Deputy Ministers in Geneva on June 11, at the Iranian Ambassador’s residence. The encounter was cordial, but there were real substantive differences. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov also met with the Iranians in Rome on June 13 and reported no progress. A serious problem emerged with PMD, because the Iranians had ceased cooperating with the IAEA and refused to reengage as long as the Agency had not officially closed the issue of exploding-bridgewire detonators (“EBW”), a technology with very limited civilian applications that could not be documented by Iran, but with clear military implications in that it allowed for the proper trigger of a nuclear device.

At the end of this series of consultations, the P5+1 met with Iran from June 16–20 and delivered a presentation, in the form of an informal working document that set forth the principal demands of the P5+1 (or E3/EU+3) without going into the technical details.

The Setback of the July 2014 Announcement

Negotiations started again on July 2, 2014. The Americans sent Deputy Secretary Bill Burns and adviser Jake Sullivan to Vienna: they had been part of the “Oman Channel.” It soon appeared that no agreement would be reached before July 20—an important date, since it marked six months after beginning the implementation of the JCPOA—as the Iranians were not ready to make the necessary concessions.

Time passed slowly for the experts in the corridors of the Palais Cobourg in Vienna. Meetings were called for no reason other than meeting. John Kerry was delayed by his attendance at a diplomatic conference between the United States and China. A ministerial meeting was finally held on July 13; we could only observe that there was no agreement. We agreed upon the extension of the interim Geneva text until November 24, the anniversary of the 2013 agreement.

The week of July 13–20 was spent in laborious discussions on the terms of this extension. The Americans soon yielded to the Iranians, renewing the monthly

release of oil revenues. Offsets obtained on the production of uranium enriched to 20 percent were superficial. During this period, the French delegation got into the habit of walking through the Stadtpark to escape listening devices, and it was there that a new approach to PMD was developed, known as the “restrictive list.” We worked with our service to hone this approach throughout the summer and into September.

The Period of “Reconfiguring” the Cascades

As in the previous September, the UN General Assembly coincided with the renewal of negotiations. In 2014, as in 2013, President Rouhani travelled to New York. Despite our skepticism, our partners, the Europeans in particular, were convinced that this would be a turning point, that Rouhani was coming to give a much-needed boost to his negotiators. The opposite occurred. President Rouhani repeated to one and all, and in particular to the three European heads of state and government, that his imperative was the immediate lifting of all sanctions.

On the technical front, the New York event opened up a long period of discussion that lasted until March 2015 in Montreux, on Lake Geneva, on the subject of a possible “reconfiguration” of the centrifuges’ cascades as a way to extend the breakout time. This technical solution was an important political signal and brought about a change in the U.S. position: the objective clearly became to increase the breakout time, rather than to define a number of centrifuges sufficient for “practical purposes,” as stated in the Geneva document. The Americans, who produced work and models from their labs, suggested a reconfiguration into “short-tapered” cascades. The Germans, based on their own specialists’ experience, followed suit and suggested a “kite-shaped” reconfiguration. Reconfigured cascades normally are less effective to enrich at high rates (but more so at low, “civilian” rates), and turning them back to their original configuration is time-consuming and can harm the machines.

In France, the CEA (Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission) analysed these different reconfigurations. We shared information with our E3 partners and the United States on the means of calculating the breakout time. Our conclusions were about the same as those of the Americans and the Germans, but there was a difference with the British, whose calculations claimed that it would take much longer to breakout and seemed to have mainly political objectives (to technically accommodate a political narrative about the robustness of

Discussing “reconfiguration” of the centrifuges’ cascades brought about a change in the U.S. position.

reconfiguration from a nonproliferation standpoint). Nonetheless, we did emphatically inform the Americans that reconfiguration was a palliative, and not a substitute for a genuine reduction of current Iranian nuclear capacity. We sent a warning to the U.S. team, who seemed set on the symbolic figure of 6,000 centrifuges, whereas we targeted a maximum of 4,500.

With regard to sanctions, the Americans had clearly thought about this issue over the summer, and they presented a potential solution to the Security Council. Their “stand alone” proposal consisted of revoking, in appearance, the old UNSC resolutions, by way of transferring them to a separate document submitted by the E3+3 (a sort of “loose leaf” or “stand alone” paper) that would be binding on other states through a resolution endorsing the agreement. This was intended to resolve the impasse because it allowed a claim that sanctions had been removed, while not including the remaining restrictive measures in the body of the new resolution endorsing the final agreement. We had doubts about the legal soundness of such a plan, not to mention its political bearing, as it seemed to us that it sent a confusing message with regard to the pursuit and applicability of nonproliferation sanctions in as much as confidence in the exclusively peaceful character of the Iranian nuclear program had not been established.

Two weeks before the November 24, 2014 deadline, negotiations were stalled and even losing ground.

After New York, the policy chiefs of the E3+3, led by Ashton, and the Iranian delegation, led by Zarif, met in Vienna on October 16. This session was preceded by a trilateral meeting on the 15th among Kerry, Ashton, and Zarif, as well as other meetings between the United States and Iran in other formats. During these meetings, the Iranians agreed to reduce their capacity to 7,800 IR-1 centrifuges for six months before scaling up to 9,400

machines—at the time, they had around 9,200 machines fed at Natanz, with an additional 6,400 installed but not fed with UF₆. However, they showed no flexibility with regard to sanction relief. This semblance of an agreement on a set figure gave the Americans—and the Russians—the impression that the agreement could be finalized by November 24.

The P5+1 then held a meeting with Iran in Oman on November 11, 2014, in the Al Bustan Palace in Muscat. The Omanis had been very insistent about hosting a negotiation session. The meeting followed the regular habit where the P5+1 had a brief on the situation after a trilateral Kerry-Ashton-Zarif consultation—in this case, on November 9 and 10 in Muscat. Two weeks before the November 24 deadline, negotiations were stalled and even losing ground. The Americans noted the complete lack of progress, and so during the November 11

plenary, Zarif reiterated his well-known basic principles—in particular, the demand that the international community should accept the Iranian nuclear program as it stood. On the technical level, the Iranians brought out new proposals on enrichment, but these were largely contrived.

So it was with some scepticism about the chances for success that the P5+1 and Iranian delegations met in Vienna on November 18, with the objective of reaching a long-term agreement before the November 24 deadline established by the Geneva agreement.

Another Deadline Missed

The next series of meetings was significant for the high level of engagement of the E3/EU+3 ministers and Iran. The negotiation session was organized around a first phase from Tuesday, November 18, to Friday, November 21, during which time the P5+1 ministers and Iran felt that, on the basis of some new ideas, it would be possible to decide on an extension of the negotiations.

As soon as the meeting began on November 18, the P5+1 took stock of the November 11 meeting in Oman, at which time the Iranians had held a hard line. Ashton then set the stage for the coming week by announcing Zarif's plan to return to Tehran on the 21st to obtain instructions necessary for unblocking the negotiations. Discussions went forward with policy chiefs and experts all week. When the 21st arrived, British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond, Kerry, and I observed that there were still differences between our positions and Iran's. I suggested to Kerry that we return to Paris together to express our disapproval of Iran's refusal to budge.

That same day, Zarif informed the press that, because the P5+1 had not made any proposals that were worth presenting to Tehran, he was cancelling his return trip to Iran. Kerry met with Zarif in the afternoon and decided to stay in Vienna. He claimed that he believed that Zarif had the political determination to succeed in reaching an agreement, and he wished to explore some “new ideas” that had been submitted by Iran. In the end, the P5+1 and Iran made the joint decision to extend the negotiations until June 30, 2015, in two stages: four months (bringing it to the end of March 2015) to agree on the policy framework and three months to draw up the technical annexes.

I insisted on this time frame. At first, Kerry hoped for a much shorter period, thinking that he could not keep the U.S. Congress “on hold” much longer. We, on the contrary, thought that time was on our side because of the impact of sanctions on Iran. I also mentioned the need to “leap frog” over the NPT Review Conference in May. I knew the conference would be difficult because of the impasse on the question of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East—the Americans had not really been thinking about the importance of this particular diplomatic

deadline. Iran was chairing the non-aligned movement and could hold sway at the NPT Review Conference from that position, complicating issues relating to non-compliance that were high on the agenda of the conference. Experience of the interim deal also showed that from policy framework to implementation details, there were a lot of issues to be fixed that would not benefit from interference with another diplomatic forum.

The second Viennese session concluded with a new extension, despite the fact that it began with an Iranian reversal on the question of low-enriched uranium stockpiles: Iran no longer wished to ship these stockpiles to Russia, as they had announced in New York in September, but sought to keep them in-country for transformation into fuel for the Bushehr nuclear power plant. The Iranians based their arguments on the ambiguous language of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed on November 11, 2013, by the Rosatom State Energy Corporation of Russia and the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran; they read the agreement as enabling the production of fuel for Bushehr from uranium enriched in Iran. Their point of view was that this supported the industrial vocation of their program.

Uncomfortable with Iran's arguments, the Russian delegation tried to convince us that Tehran was misinterpreting the terms. Sergey Ryabkov, the Russian policy chief, mentioned the minimum criteria of eight power plants required to justify production of fuel in Iran; no reference was made to the transfer of Russian intellectual property rights on fuel to Iran, nor to the use of locally-enriched uranium. The United States, France, and the other E3+1 countries explained to the Iranians that this about-face on enrichment changed the calculation of the volume of enrichment capacity that Iran would be authorized to retain. Indeed, it was in response to the reduction of the stockpile to about 300 kg that the P5+1 had previously accorded a higher number of centrifuges than initially foreseen.

It was clear the U.S. delegation was interested in the Iranian phasing proposal.

Faced with this firm opposition, the Iranians qualified their positions at the end of the negotiation session, in particular during the ministerial sessions: if the P5+1 quickly lifted all sanctions, the stockpiles could be reduced by shipping them out of the country, as provided in the option of export to Russia. If sanctions were to be lifted at a later date, Iran would

need time to transform the stockpiles into fuel for Bushehr.

The "new ideas" that the U.S. delegation used to justify the extension of negotiations in fact grew out of the Iranian proposals on enrichment, ideas that first took root in the Oman meeting on November 11. These ideas were of two sorts: first, Iran proposed to reduce enrichment capacity through the reconfiguration of centrifuges by thirds, which we felt was an artifice and expressed in

imprecise terms; second, they proposed a phasing mechanism over fifteen years and committed the Iranian program to industrial purposes, with an upper range of 80,000 SWU (Separative Work Units). Although the U.S. delegation denied it to us, it was clear at the time that they were interested in this Iranian phasing proposal.

Prior to the opening of this negotiation session, we organized a meeting at the IAEA with the U.S. and British delegations to give more details to Tero Varjoranta, Deputy Director General and Head of the Department of Safeguards, on our approach to the resolution of PMD issues in the context of a long-term agreement. This meeting enabled us to agree on a final version of the list of required measures for access as well as the terms for managing that access. The list was held back and kept secret, as we agreed with the U.S. and British delegations. We would address the concept only when an agreement seemed close to being achieved.

December 2014—July 2015: Around the Lake and Back to Vienna

The year 2015 began under the cloud of the Republican majority in the U.S. Congress, darkening the administration's ambitions. Republicans tabled the Kirk–Menendez bill, followed by the Corker–Cardin bill, both related to activities with Iran; the first called for more sanctions, and the second, less demanding, for the submission of any agreement to Congress and the possibility of voting a motion of disapproval. On their side, the Iranians kept up the fiction that negotiations had almost succeeded in November, only failed because the Americans backed off at the last moment, and that otherwise the agreement “was there.” Javad Zarif said that, like the Americans under Republican pressure, he was facing growing pressure in Tehran from conservatives who had taken his negotiating team to task in the *Majles* (Iranian Parliament).

On January 18, the E3+3 policy chiefs and the Iranian negotiators met in Geneva. These discussions followed three days of negotiations between the U.S. and Iranian teams, and meetings between Kerry and Zarif on January 14 in Geneva, then January 16 in Paris. Negotiations focused on the question of enrichment, seen as the key issue that could open the door to success. The Americans were still advocating reconfiguration in short-tapered cascades, with an initial reduction to 5,000 IR-1 machines, rising to 7,800 at the end of six-and-a-half years, and holding there until year 10 (a slight increase in capacity was envisioned up until year 15). The Americans took a stronger stance on other issues: they wanted IR-1 only for R&D (eventually, IR-2 m at the end of the agreement), the U.S. option for reconversion only possible for the Arak facility, and the refusal of stable isotope production at Fordow. The Iranians rejected the U.S. proposal on enrichment.

Abbas Araghchi announced another important development: with regard to sanctions, the Iranians were no longer interested in the “stand-alone document” option, proposed in September, for handling UNSC resolutions. And yet neither were they in favor of the “roadmap” method, preferred by our delegation as well as the Russians. This roadmap method involved one single resolution, presenting the successive phases of sanction relief in step with the implementation of Iran’s actions of engagement.

On January 26, a significant development occurred. For the first time since the end of the Eurodif³ litigation, a meeting was held in Paris, on the CEA premises, with a delegation from the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI). The CEA director of international relations welcomed his Iranian counterpart. Faced with negotiations that were trading water on the future of Fordow, we wanted to show our partners that we could, once again, offer proposals and bring our civil nuclear expertise to the table. Our suggestion to install a linear accelerator—a major piece of scientific equipment—at Fordow was more solid and more attractive to the Iranians than the U.S. idea of setting up a center for observing cosmic particles to replace the enrichment work. Iranian specialists seemed interested. But they continued to advance their initial position: yes to the linear accelerator, but they also wanted to retain other purposes for Fordow, specifically enrichment and the production of stable isotopes. Our French preference was for a facility devoted only to research, without centrifuges.

It was essential to hold to the longest term possible for the agreement to serve as a precedent.

The E3 met the Iranians in Istanbul on January 29, 2015. The Iranians half-heartedly accepted a reconfiguration in short-tapered cascades (clearly experts from the AEOI believed this risked damaging the machines), but they rejected the phasing figures suggested by the E3+3. Iranian experts said the best expectation would be a short-term reduction to 6,000 machines and a return to 9,400 machines (about 20 percent more than the U.S. proposal)

in two-and-a-half years (less than half the time). Negotiators Araghchi and Ravanchi presented a longer schedule, covering ten years (3+3+4). But discussions dried up on other issues, in particular because the Iranians insisted on having the details of the group’s calculations on breakout time, which the E3 experts refused to release because the information could impact proliferation.

During the Wehrkunde meeting on February 8 in Munich, I emphasized to John Kerry, who had begun to talk in terms of a ten-year agreement, that it was essential to hold to our objective of the longest term possible for the agreement. Speaking with Zarif, I underscored the risks of regional proliferation if the

agreement were to be perceived as weak; I reiterated this thesis regularly (“only a robust agreement can guarantee credibility”).

Enter Messrs. Moniz and Salehi (“Ernie and Ali”)

Bilateral conversations between the United States and Iran were planned for February 20–23 in Geneva. (By that time, the United States always had a first go with the Iranians, then the rest of the group would join in for follow-up discussions.) An E3+1 videoconference was held beforehand. The U.S. policy chief announced that U.S. Energy Secretary Ernie Moniz would henceforth accompany John Kerry. Moniz, an affable scientist with a calm, pedagogical demeanor, would have to face off with Ali Salehi, Chairman of the AEOI. They also announced that President Obama wanted to know before the end of March if a solid basis existed for advancing the negotiations.

The plan tabled by the Americans, which they believed agreeable to the Iranians (as of the security conference in Munich), included increasing the number of centrifuges from 5,000 to 7,800 over six years (with reconfiguration). The Americans informed us that they could accept a breakout time of nine months for years 11 to 15. U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman sent an unclear message on U.S. flexibility in regard to R&D—what type of R&D activities would the United States ultimately tolerate, only first-generation machines or more advanced ones? As for sanctions, Sherman announced, to our satisfaction, that there would be no more “creative ideas” for handling UNSC resolutions beyond the “stand alone” document already proposed.

The assessment of the Geneva consultations by the P5+1 was presented at the EU delegation premises in Geneva on February 22. The biggest news was that Salehi’s arrival was a sign of the abandonment of the reconfiguration formula. The Iranians flip-flopped. We assessed that the AEOI had gained the upper hand internally and had convinced whoever needed to be convinced that reconfiguration would be too damaging for the centrifuges. However, for the first time, Iran offered instead to reduce its enrichment capacity by about one-third over ten years (6,000 IR-1 with 500 kg of UF₆ at 3.5 percent, or 6,600 with 300 kg of nuclear matter). No figure was agreed upon at the end of the session, but the P5+1 acknowledged real progress. The rest of the enrichment “package” had not changed: significant differences remained on R&D and the timeline for years 10 to 15. A total impasse also continued with regard to lifting UNSC sanctions. Despite the mixed results, the Americans began to exert pressure on the French and wanted “the PMD cards on the table” and the list sent to the Iranians of people and sites we wanted access to.

Montreux

The P5+1 and Iran met in Montreux on March 5, 2015. The main development was that the Iranian delegation expressed its willingness to guarantee a breakout time of at least one year for a period of ten years, even though Iran continued to reject the relevance of the concept. The U.S.–Iranian convergence on the

On March 5, Iran was finally willing to guarantee a breakout time of at least one year for ten years.

target figure of 6,104 centrifuges was confirmed—which the policy directors agreed was significant.

However, the Iranians backpedaled again on the question of exporting its stockpiles of UF₆ at 3.5 percent over 300 kg. They did not rule out export to Russia, but said they would prefer other solutions, such as conversion into uranium dioxide oxide (UO₂) for the production of fuel pellets (this process was not operational in Iran), or dilution (a solution that the P5+1 found absurd because it meant

Iran would enrich, only to immediately dilute back, which openly proved the absence of any economic rationale for the enrichment program). Iranian demands on R&D remained excessive: Iranians wanted to continue R&D on all available models (IR-2 m, 4, 6, and 8) and they wanted to produce negotiable numbers of IR-8 centrifuges, at least, starting in 2022.

The question of the future of Fordow was still not resolved. The Iranians wanted to keep 1,300 machines in one of the two tunnels, even if they conceded to no enrichment therein. But they did not want to decommission the facility. Instead, it would remain under seal, ready to start up again “in case” (“an insurance policy” in the event of an enemy attack on the fuel enrichment facility at Natanz). In the second tunnel, the Iranians said they were interested in installing a linear accelerator, in the context of French cooperation.

For Arak, the Americans appeared to accept the Iranian heavy-water design, even though they had always maintained that such acceptance could only be a final-hour concession when all the other pieces had fallen into place. But to us, it was not a problem of substance: the Iranian design was acceptable to us with regard to nonproliferation because it would minimize the quantity and quality of plutonium produced.

On sanctions, the Iranians were adamant and intransigent on their position concerning the nonproliferation resolutions of the Security Council. They said they could not accept keeping any of the UNSC measures. Instead, they offered measures that seemed insufficient to us for nonproliferation.

The Montreux meeting was carefully orchestrated by the Iranians. Zarif chose to invite all the delegations to lunch at an Iranian restaurant on the shores of Lake

Geneva, followed by a lakeside stroll. Despite the efforts to produce perfect photo opportunities, the series was disappointing due to the Iranian step backward on enrichment (the issues of stockpiles and Fordow in particular). We left the meeting with the impression that the UNSC sanctions had become the thorniest obstacle. Demands for immediate relief apparently came directly from President Rouhani (whose brother was present at Montreux), who believed that it would not be possible to gain acceptance from conservatives in Tehran without that concession.

Lausanne I

Negotiations were to continue in Lausanne from March 18–20. On March 15, the Iranians met with the Americans, and on the 16th, a ministerial meeting was held in Brussels among Iran and the E3. With only about two weeks to go before the policy framework of a final agreement was due, the meetings were unproductive in putting pressure on Iran. The general atmosphere was one of confusion, and the Americans were impatient. Journalists camped out in the hotel lobby, constantly vying for negotiators' attention.

During this Lausanne I session, the United States made several concessions, in particular with regard to R&D and the course of the nuclear program between years 10 and 15. These concessions came without discussion and agreement within the group, and consequently led to some concern from the E3—especially in regard to R&D. On sanctions, the United States again advocated the option of the “stand-alone document” with a “snapback” mechanism. Despite our repeated demands, the United States did not share a precise draft of this proposal with us.

The session, which was getting bogged down in any event, ended abruptly on March 20 when the death of President Rouhani's mother was announced (also the mother of his brother, Hossein Fereidoun, member of the delegation). The Iranians went home to Tehran for the ceremony and for the Iranian New Year's celebration on March 21, as no agreement seemed forthcoming.

The rest of the group at Lausanne I discovered that the United States had worked with experts from the team of European External Action Service (EEAS) assisting Helga Schmid on a text bearing on a mechanism for resolving disputes in the event of an Iranian refusal of access. This text had been shared with the Iranians, who appeared to accept the principle. It was based on the Joint Commission's (E3+3, High Representative of the EU, and Iran) power, given a majority vote of five out of eight, to force Iran to grant access to a site within a period of up to 24 days. We immediately commented on this mechanism, which was a strange departure from the Additional Protocol's application of ordinary law. We sought an access mechanism that would be stronger

than the Additional Protocol, not weaker, and informed the IAEA about this development.

With regard to the PMD action list and clarification of past activities, Ryabkov agreed that the list could be given to the Iranians, on the condition that it was not presented on behalf of the P5+1. Schmid handed over the list, in a scene typical of this negotiation: Araghchi first refused to take the list, then accepted it while stating that receiving the document in no way constituted an agreement on the approach.

On many points during the Lausanne meeting, the United States maintained a fuzzy position on whether or not their ideas had been approved by Iran. During our exchanges with the Iranians (E3–Iran exchanges in particular), their delegation sent a clear message that they considered the nuclear package nearly wrapped up (except for years 10 to 15), and that discussions should focus on lifting all UNSC sanctions at once.

It then became clear that the Americans, pressed by time, were looking not so much for a very robust agreement as for an agreement that Iran would accept and that would, in the view of the U.S. administration, be “better than what we have now.” Sherman constantly spoke of “parameters that would certainly be desirable, but which Iran could not accept,” and said that the United States therefore preferred not to put them on the table. In terms of President Obama’s public declarations, U.S. demands would be limited to maintaining breakout time to one year for a period of ten years. Beyond that, everything was open. For the first time, the Americans mentioned a breakout time of only seven months as of year 11. The most disturbing points on the nuclear aspect were the reappearance of a number IR-2m’s; the shape of the enrichment program for years 11 to 15 and the associated breakout time; the rate of R&D over the first ten years; and uncertainty on the effectiveness of the access procedure which was supposed to go farther than the Additional Protocol and guarantee the quality of verification on site.

In the days following Lausanne, because of the differences in approach between the Europeans (especially France) and the Americans, the E3 and the United States, as well as Frederica Mogherini who had replaced Ashton on November 1, 2014, met briefly on the evening of Saturday, March 21, near a runway at Heathrow airport. The meeting was tense. John Kerry kept a stony face while I once again explained our positions: we wanted an agreement, but a robust one to serve as a precedent for the region and beyond. A weak agreement would implicitly allow a regional arms race, rather than call for de-escalation. On the nuclear enrichment package, I reiterated that we sought a full year breakout time, if possible through year 15. The R&D provisions seemed overly favorable to Iran, as they allowed retention of too many capabilities. On UNSC sanctions, I repeated our preference for maintaining the Council’s role (“roadmap approach”), underscoring our doubts on some of the aspects of the U.S. approach, such as the feeble binding

nature of the provisions, the option offered to Iran via the Joint Commission to ignore its commitments, and doubts as to whether Russia (with its conservative views on UNSC jurisdiction) would support this scheme. Finally, on the method, I emphasized that the final phase had to be co-managed by all parties, in particular those within the E3+1, and said that we hoped for the rapid consolidation of a draft framework with the EEAS holding the pen. While having this conversation, I was in constant contact with the French president.

Lausanne II

Negotiations started again on March 26 and carried on until April 2, beyond the March 30 deadline set by the U.S. Congress. That week, many ministerial, policy, and expert meetings in all shapes, sizes, and forms took place, also including long sessions between the Iranians and the Americans, with the participation of Kerry and Moniz, in the presence of a European Union representative.

I raised our demands again: not more than 5,060 centrifuges in Natanz, no breakout time shorter than nine months, a 15-year plan, a clear path for years 11 to 15, real limits on R&D, inspections to take place (if possible) sooner than planned by the U.S. project (24 days), a credible “snap-back.” I also raised the question of how Iran was likely to allocate the 100 billion dollars—the commonly agreed estimate of their frozen assets at that point—that they might receive at the end of the first year of the agreement.

The meeting room in the basement of the Beau Rivage hotel was a lively scene. John Kerry promised his colleagues that an agreement with Zarif could be reached “in two hours.” Zarif, a talented actor, did not hesitate to admonish the P5+1 forcefully and to single out John Kerry, as we watched in amazement. On March 26, the Saudis launched air strikes on Yemen, accentuating the impression that there were high stakes at play in the region between Saudi Arabia and Yemen, Sunnis and Shiites; the nuclear question was vital.

The meetings throughout the week were confusing. Moniz regularly came to report on the discussions held behind closed doors with Salehi. But the conversation was constantly changing, and the questions were very technical. Foreign Secretary Hammond, close to our positions, addressed the British concerns, in particular on the R&D issue (they were more and more troubled by this), but pressure on the Americans was intense. The Chinese negotiators talked about the “snap-back,” which was an important part of the ministerial exchanges, and the French UNSC expertise was very useful in this regard. The mechanism that we ultimately chose was the result of a proposal I made to Russian Foreign Minister

The meetings throughout the week at the end of March were confusing.

Lavrov, then accepted by the P5+1, which provided for sanction relief at the end of a given period, unless a permanent member of the Security Council opposed it: this made it possible to reinstate sanctions in the event of a violation, without the possibility of a Russian or Chinese veto.

Mogherini, the EU High Representative, found it difficult to manage the meetings. Nonetheless, this series of negotiations made it possible to reach a preliminary agreement on April 2 between the P5+1 and Iran concerning the key parameters of the agreement, even though Lavrov had left and Ryabkov had returned to Moscow. A written document was partially approved—Kerry had given up on a full agreement due to lack of time. The delegations shared many working documents, even though the status of these documents and the nature of endorsements were unclear. Everything else was left for the subsequent three-month period to work out the technical annexes.

The Lausanne document itself had three versions of different substance, in fact, with the one recorded at 6:45 a.m. considered official. The document with the key parameters of the agreement was not made public but—with a stroke of subtlety!—the P5+1 and Iran agreed that the content could be revealed as long as no contradictions appeared with what other parties to the negotiations were presenting. This was the principal of non-contradiction that Kerry cherished ... but the Americans immediately chipped away at that by presenting a “fact sheet” to Congress that put the U.S. point of view in a positive light.⁴

The Lausanne agreement was robust with regard to Iranian enrichment capacities through year 10, calling for a breakout time of one year. It was also strong on the subject of the conversion of the Arak research reactor and transparency measures. Discussions on Iranian capacity in years 11 to 15 and on the limits to R&D capacities of advanced centrifuges were more fraught. In the end, an agreement was finally reached, but at the price of concessions by the P5+1.

The “snap-back” provision was crucial to guaranteeing implementation.

On sanctions, conditional relief was approved (the condition being the implementation, verified by the IAEA, of Iran’s commitments). Sanctions would be lifted progressively (economic and financial sanctions first, those linked to nonproliferation in the next phase). The precise phasing remained to be defined, as well as the restrictions that would remain in effect. Nevertheless, the Iranians seemed to accept the

reversible character of relief and the renewal of sanctions in the event of violation of the agreement. Even if the precise definition of the methods were not agreed upon, the principle of the “snap-back” provision was still crucial to guaranteeing implementation.

From Key Parameters to the Final Agreement

The P5+1 and Iran met in Vienna from April 22–24, 2015, to continue negotiating after the Lausanne intermediary agreement of April 2. Helga Schmid, the competent policy chief of the European Union, and the Iranian deputy ministers Abbas Araghchi and Majid Takht-Ravanchi, began meeting on April 22. The P5+1 experts arrived in Vienna the same day. The policy chiefs concluded this series during bilateral meetings and a plenary session on April 24.

The Iranians came to Vienna affirming that they only wanted to discuss sanctions, mainly economic ones. Their argument was that the nuclear package had been defined in Lausanne. They demanded guarantees from the United States and the European Union on the effective implementation of sanction relief. They confirmed that they considered as approved the Lausanne working documents on enrichment capacities in years 1 to 10, as well as the “snap-back” and access conditions.

Discussions picked up in New York on April 29 and continued until May 7, on the sidelines of the first week of the NPT Review Conference. There were two objectives: establishing a substantive draft agreement with the EEAS and Iran, and reviewing technical draft annexes with the EEAS and Iran with the support of the P5+1. The French delegation and the IAEA experts present in New York made contact in order to look into PMD, access procedures, the procurement channels for sensitive goods that would continue to be controlled under the agreement, and verification. Schmid and the Iranian negotiators began redrafting the main text—abandoned since July 2014—by chapters (preamble; enrichment and stockpiles; Arak, heavy water, and reprocessing; transparency; sanctions; implementation), based on both the July 2014 text and the “key parameters” of Lausanne.

On May 5, a complete text, a fair amount still in brackets, was released to the different negotiating teams. At the same time, the EEAS had worked with Iranian experts to draft annexes on the nuclear program and sanctions. The EEAS regularly informed the P5+1 experts of the state of advancement. A draft on Arak, heavy water, and reprocessing was ready for release. Work continued on sanctions, and a draft annex on implementation was produced. At the same time, E3+3 experts held meetings to continue on unresolved issues (procurement channel, etc.).

The Iranians seemed to want to run out the clock for the end of June on the nuclear question, dragging their feet on the annexes. In the meantime, they tried to push us to drop those details that were necessary for a robust agreement. On the main text, issues of substance remained including the timeline for years 11 to 13, the transition plan at Fordow, PMD and activities linked to military uses, the procurement channel, and the arms embargo (which was a UN sanction dating back from the very first sanctions resolutions, which we deemed necessary to keep well into the life of the agreement). In regard to the nuclear annexes, the Iranian refusal to take into consideration any elements outside of the Lausanne working documents made it impossible to advance significantly.

Discussions among the P5+1 and Iran experts on technical annexes continued in Vienna from May 12–14. The policy chiefs arrived in Vienna on May 15 to assess the progress of this phase. Extending the New York efforts, the group and Iran were able to draw up the first drafts on enrichment and transparency annexes—most of the text was in brackets. In addition to the matters of substance that were not resolved in Lausanne, the text revealed new disagreements. There were also divergences with the Iranian delegation in regard to the method; they felt that any issue not covered by Lausanne could not be part of the negotiations. At the same time, the P5+1 experts continued to prepare the next phases of the negotiations on the procurement channel, how European and U.S. sanctions would be lifted, and the role of the IAEA.

The Iranians took every opportunity to slow down the discussions on the substance of nuclear issues, seeking to gain time. The Europeans sent strong messages to try to break down this approach. The Americans were completely silent during this negotiation session.

From June 4–6, the Iranians openly blocked any substantial progress on drafting the main text and the annexes, while accusing the P5+1 of putting “new subjects”—not approved in Lausanne—on the table. It was partly true that the Americans brought some new items, often details, although it was not clear if they were reacting to pressure from their own Congress, or if they were seeking to introduce new demands for later negotiation. On the nuclear question, the main obstacles focused on the question of access to military sites and PMD resolution, how to include restrictions for years 10 to 13 in the agreement, and the transition plan for Fordow (stable isotopes and removal of inoperative centrifuges). On sanctions, discussions with the Iranians were also laborious. The E3 received a draft proposal on the Joint Commission, drawn up by the Americans, but no formal negotiations were held within the group.

There was still a mini-crisis in June 2015.

During the session from June 10–12, negotiations hit a wall. On the nuclear issue, the discussion on technical annexes made no progress; on the major disagreements (years 11 to 13, PMD, access, Fordow, etc.), Iranians were inflexible in their positions. It was a mini-crisis. On sanctions, the discussion on

annexes did not advance either, other than through the transmission, by the group, of suggested wording on the effects of lifting sanctions. The Iranians rejected the proposed resolution as submitted and insisted that Security Council controls should end after ten years. The E3/EU+1 experts held consultations on the methods of operation of the channel of procurement and, in the presence of representatives of the U.S. and EU Treasury departments, on the coordination of relief from economic and financial sanctions.

June 18 and 19 were more constructive days, even if the essential differences on substance remained. The Iranians probably felt that they had gone too far the week before. The deadline was approaching, and the Iranians seemed to favor this kind of “diplomacy on the brink.” The dialogue between Russia and Iran progressed on stable isotopes at Fordow. The Iranians said that they wanted to seriously engage with Russia on the export of uranium stockpiles. Discussions between the P5+1 and Iran on Arak moved forward slowly; China was still reluctant to accept the project-management role, strange as it may seem, even though they proposed civilian cooperation. The E3 policy chiefs held consultations with the head of the Chinese delegation to offer their support to China in this regard. On PMD, the Director General of the IAEA, Yukiya Amano, mistrustful of Tehran’s intentions, preferred to postpone his response until a new invitation to visit Iran. It seemed that the representatives of the Iranian ministry of foreign affairs had little influence on the AEOI nuclear experts, as Salehi was ill and unable to take part in the negotiation. However, the Iranians pushed to advance on the sanctions part of the agreement, in particular to obtain specifications on the effects of sanctions relief.

Over the weekend, discussions went on in Vienna. On June 22, Zarif travelled to Luxemburg to meet the E3 ministers on the sidelines of the European Council on Foreign Relations. A bilateral meeting between Zarif and me took place, an opportunity to raise the points of greatest concern to us. A meeting between the E3, Mogherini, and Zarif was also organized.

The policy chiefs returned to Vienna on June 25, where the experts had remained, and stayed until the final agreement on July 14. These three weeks were very intense, taking up the final arbitrages, or “trade-offs” on the nuclear question (in particular R&D), led by Moniz, with Salehi out of hospital and accompanied to Vienna at the beginning of July by Zarif. We paid close attention to the Americans on the subject of acceptable parameters. PMD matters took an unexpected turn with the renewal of a specific IAEA–Iran path (Amano went to Iran on July 2) and the discussion concentrated on access to the single site of Parchin—which had long been suspected of having hosted experiments on high explosives relevant to a nuclear weapon—which became central, and which the British and I insisted on in agreement with the IAEA. I met Amano several times. A draft was proposed for the UNSC resolution on sanctions relief, and in particular the policy decisions on different time frames for maintaining residual sanctions (procurement channel, arms embargo, missiles). We also took the initiative to write a letter signed by the three Europeans and John Kerry in order to protect European businesses trading with Iran who feared becoming the targets of unilateral U.S. sanctions, even after the UN sanctions were lifted.

After the successive extensions of the interim JPOA until July 7–13, Lavrov and I exerted great pressure over the weekend of the 11th and 12th, leading

John Kerry to conclude and call on Zarif to make the final decision. I set the deadline of July 14, France's national holiday, in order to wrap up the negotiation.

From the July 14 Agreement to Implementation Day

In the following six months, until the announcement of Implementation Day on January 16, 2016, we did not reduce our efforts to maintain stringent requirements concerning the first measures of decommissioning established in the agreement.

The Iranians were anxious and wanted to mitigate some of the constraints. We were able to guarantee the effective removal of Fordow centrifuges reasonably

This was a reminder we must always remain vigilant in monitoring compliance in the years to come.

quickly, obtain indispensable detail on the characteristics of the centrifuges, and submit to the IAEA a version of the Iranian enrichment and R&D plan that was closer to the final JCPOA plan. In the final version, there were higher allowances for installation of Iranian centrifuges in years 14 and 15, accepted more or less implicitly by the Americans despite the danger for the region. This is a reminder, if needed, that we must always remain vigilant and firm in monitoring compliance with the agreement in the years to come.

Historic Success

All in all, the agreement signed on July 14, 2015, which can honestly be called "historic," came after twelve years of crisis and as a result of twenty months of negotiation (using the dates of October 2013–July 2015; the pre-Rouhani period was not a real negotiation and was under a different Iranian President).

It represents a success on many different fronts, among all the participants and among the various foreign policy goals of each country.

Iran only accepted serious negotiations because of the cost of sanctions and the threat of military action.

First, this agreement is a diplomatic success. It shows that, under certain conditions, diplomatic action can yield spectacular results when the participants employ willpower and resolution. It is clear that, despite its denials, Iran only accepted serious negotiations—after years of fruitless discussions with the P5+1—because the cost of sanctions had become exorbitant and because the threat of military action, implicit but genuine, threatened in the

background. It is also remarkable that the five permanent members of the Security Council were able to agree on this key issue of collective security when they are divided on so many others (Syria, Ukraine, the list goes on). The united front that the P5 presented to Iran was a determining factor in this agreement.

It is a success for the United States. The Obama administration wanted it, they spared no effort to reach it, but the price was some non-negligible concessions and uncertainties. Often, they presented their “partners” with a *fait accompli*—“a done deal.” Having managed to move the agreement through Congress without impediment, the administration won hands down, and established what will certainly be recorded as the main foreign policy legacy of this U.S. presidency.

Iran also obtained what was most essential for their country: relief from the sanctions that were strangling the economy, without really compromising its civil nuclear program, which will nonetheless be significantly slowed down over the next ten years. It is a success for international diplomacy (China, Russia, US and Europe) and for European diplomacy: the three Europeans, who had been involved in the issue since 2002, remained—despite some tactical distractions—well united throughout the negotiations. The successive High Representatives of the European Union, under mandate from the UN Security Council and backed up by efficient teams, gave a new visibility to the Union on this subject of such great importance for international peace and security.

Specifically, France played its role by providing constructive resolve to ensure that the final agreement was sufficiently robust and credible. In close contact with our Head of State, I personally was deeply involved. We offered strategic vision, political determination, and technical expertise, as well as the close cooperation of diplomats from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, CEA engineers, and intelligence services.

The agreement will also create conditions for further development in three areas. First, while the agreement can be considered robust for the first ten or even thirteen years, beyond that period Iran will quickly regain its capacity to expand its nuclear activities. Some concessions obtained during negotiations will help them to prepare for that time, such as the possibility of carrying out certain research and development activities on sophisticated centrifuges, progressive increases in capacity, no limits after the thirteenth year on the production of new centrifuges, and the lifting of measures restricting the import of sensitive materials after eight years. The attitude of Iran in the weeks leading up to Implementation Day, and continuing tests of its ballistic missile program, have

The agreement is a diplomatic success, for the United States, for Europe, for France, and for Iran.

confirmed that they seek to exploit any loopholes in the agreement. We must remain vigilant with regard to implementation, using the tools provided by the agreement, whether via the methods for reinforced IAEA monitoring or, if necessary, the “snap-back.”

Second, the agreement opens the path to a more cooperative attitude from Iran on the international scene and especially in regional matters. This remains to be confirmed by concrete tests in the short and medium term, in particular in Syria as well as in Lebanon, Yemen and Iraq. Nothing is certain. We can set our targets and must work to achieve them through a united foreign policy.

Third, we are betting that sanctions relief and the opening up of Iran will, in the long term, help to lead to political and social changes that will bring more freedom and prosperity to that country. Recent election results are encouraging. Such changes are to be applauded, even if a large uncertainty remains.

Overall, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action represents a monumental effort from a huge number of different experts, diplomats, scientists, and other leaders. The success of the deal—after years of intransigence, stalls, and setbacks—is an encouraging symbol of what we can accomplish with tenacity and continued discussion. In order to ensure that the agreement remains robust, we must continue to be exacting and determined in our efforts to ensure the implementation of the agreement, both with respect to Iranian nuclear obligations and effective sanctions relief.

Notes

1. Hassan Rouhani, *National Security and Nuclear Diplomacy* (Tehran: Center for Strategic Research (2011).
2. See for instance declarations by the chairman of the Foreign Affairs committee of the Majlis, Alaedin Boroudjerdi: “Regarding the Additional Protocol, Majlis has approved a law obliging the government to suspend the voluntary implementation of this protocol which was being carried out at a certain point,” quoted in “Majlis not to accept Additional Protocol,” PressTV, September 30, 2013, <http://edition.presstv.ir/detail/326921.html>.
3. Under agreements concluded in the 1970s, with pre-Revolution Iran, the government of Iran had taken an indirect stake in Eurodif (*European Gaseous Diffusion Uranium Enrichment Consortium*), an enrichment company incorporated in France, in exchange of a \$1 billion loan to CEA, the French atomic energy commission. As a consequence, Iran was supposed to receive, for a period of 10 years, enriched uranium for nuclear power plants it was planning on building simultaneously (one of which was Bushehr, which has been recently completed, after much delay, by Russia’s Rosatom). Iran breached those commitments shortly after the Revolution, which resulted in a protracted litigation and negotiation between the two governments (against a backdrop of state-sponsored terrorism and hostage-taking). The dispute was settled only in 1991: Iran remained a shareholder, but lost its right to obtain enriched uranium.
4. See Office of the Spokesperson, U.S. Department of State, “Parameters for a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action Regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran’s Nuclear Program,” April 2, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/04/240170.htm>.