

A Nuclear Tale of Two Cities: Tehran and Moscow

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Tehran

Where are we?

- Iran has enough uranium enriched to 60% in the isotope U-235 to make enough 90% enriched, or weapons-grade, uranium for an efficient nuclear weapon. This is such a short hop that the International Atomic Energy Agency, the IAEA, does not exclude that it could happen between visits. The next public reporting will be in September.
- All continuous monitoring systems that were specified by the Iran Deal in 2015 have now been disconnected. This includes monitors and cameras that tracked the enrichment of uranium and the production of advanced centrifuges. The IAEA is deeply concerned that “continuity of knowledge” will be difficult to reestablish.
- As of Monday, the technical part of the agreement for re-entering the Deal appears to have been completed, under EU leadership. Outstanding issues may include:
 - De-listing of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO).
 - Economic guarantees for Iran with respect to another US withdrawal.
 - Traces of man-made uranium particles at multiple sites, for which Iran has not provided credible explanations to the IAEA.

How did we get here?

- President Trump took the U.S. out of the Iran Deal in 2018.
- One year later Iran began breaching its restrictions on the amount and enrichment level of its uranium stockpile, and on the number and capability of its enriching centrifuges.
- Iran prevented the IAEA from collecting monitoring and camera data, and then turned off the monitors and cameras.
- Evidently President Trump’s “Maximum Pressure” campaign failed.

What can we do about this?

- We should make every effort to return to the Deal.
- This may require further discussion about listing of the IRGC as an FTO, although some reports suggest that Iran has dropped this demand.
- It may also require economic guarantees from Europe, as some reports have indicated.
- The uranium particles detected by the IAEA are not connected with the Deal. They are instead connected with the ability of the IAEA to draw a “Broader Conclusion” about nuclear materials and activities in Iran. This has direct implications for the level and intrusiveness of safeguards that will be required in Iran even after some of the clauses of the Deal expire. We should emphasize this and get on with re-entering the Deal.

Moscow

Where are we?

- Russia seized the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in Eastern Ukraine and is using it as a military base. There was a fire when they first took over the plant in March.
- It is the largest nuclear power plant in Europe. It is similar to Fukushima Daichi.
- The IAEA says that a nuclear disaster at Zaporizhzhia cannot be ruled out. The consequences would be similar to those at Fukushima. There would be hundreds of thousands, and potentially millions, of people displaced for generations, in Ukraine, Romania, Moldova, Belarus, Turkey, and Russia, depending on the weather conditions.
- Last Friday there was shelling at the Zaporizhzhia site. Ukraine and Moscow accuse each other. There was damage to a power line, but no radioactivity was released. The IAEA has been very concerned about the situation since the Russians took control and is trying to get access. Russia and Ukraine have just now agreed to this.

How did we get here?

- NATO expanded to Poland in 1999 and the Baltic states in 2004
- NATO foreign ministers expressed openness to Ukraine joining in 2006
- The Maidan Revolution in Ukraine resulted in a pro-Western government in 2014
- Russia invaded Crimea and supported separatists in the Donbas region in 2014
- The Ukrainian constitution was amended to include the goal of joining NATO in 2019
- Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, accompanied by nuclear threats.

What can we do about this?

- The end of the Ukraine war is up to Ukraine and Russia.
- However, we can propose win-win steps that enhance strategic stability, and that Putin can take as “victories,” to make it easier for him to end the war.
 - New Conventional Forces in Europe Agreement, including limits on military build-ups and exercises near sensitive borders.
 - New Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Agreement, only in Europe, only nuclear, but including all non-strategic weapons.
 - New Missile Defense Agreement that limits anti-ICBM missiles.
 - New START+, eliminating 400 silo-based ICBMs on both sides.
 - Coordinated nuclear declaratory policy: Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, No First Use, Last Resort in case of Imminent Existential Threat.
- What lessons can we learn?
 - Overall, diplomacy needs to be applied early and consistently.
 - Iran’s nuclear ambitions are a threat to its neighbors. The JCPOA was containing Iran and can provide the basis for future safeguards. We should never have exited the deal and we should make every effort to rejoin it.
 - Russia’s expansionist policy is a threat to its neighbors. NATO accession is the right of sovereign countries to resist this threat, but strategic stability measures should have been pursued with Russia, rather than letting them fall by the wayside, and should be actively pursued now.