



*Unofficial translation from Russian<sup>1</sup>*

## **TRANSCRIPT OF A MEETING WITH RUSSIAN DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER SERGEY RYABKOV<sup>2</sup>**

**'The Iran Nuclear Deal: Russia's Interests and Prospects for Implementation'**

Center for Energy and Security Studies (CENESS), Moscow, Russia, August 14, 2015

[KHLOPKOV]<sup>3</sup> Mr. Ryabkov, welcome, and thank you very much for joining us despite your busy schedule. The Iranian nuclear issue has been one of the central topics of CENESS research for many years. Over the past five years we have organized 22 events in Moscow focusing on the Iranian nuclear program; this is the 23<sup>rd</sup>. There have also been five workshops in Tehran. I would like to use this occasion to convey my gratitude to representatives of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Moscow and of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) who are present in this conference room. I would like to thank them for their assistance in pursuing cooperation with Iranian researchers and scholars on the subject of nuclear energy and nuclear nonproliferation, as well as for their trust in offering us opportunities to visit some of the Iranian nuclear facilities, including the Bushehr NPP and the Tehran Nuclear Research Center.

Our gathering today is not an ordinary CENESS meeting. We are joined in this conference room by about 70 representatives of Russian research organizations, foreign diplomats, and Russian and foreign journalists. Questions to our distinguished guest today, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov, who led the Russian delegation at the Iranian nuclear talks, have also been emailed to me by scholars and researchers representing the leading international research organizations from 10 different countries, as well as former officials of such bodies as the UN and the IAEA. We have collated these questions, and I will try to put as many of them as I can to Mr. Ryabkov in the limited time that we have.

To proceed to the actual questions, Mr. Ryabkov, I would like to begin from your vision of the background of the Iranian nuclear talks, their progress, and their main outcomes. Russia has been involved in the talks between the P5+1 and Iran since 2006. You have been in charge of this work at the Russian Foreign Ministry since August 2008. What do you think was the most difficult period during this long marathon? Was it the final stage of the talks, when the ministers would arrive at Vienna and then return to their capitals without a final agreement being reached? Was it the period in 2011-2012, when I think largely because of the IAEA Director-

---

<sup>1</sup> The translation was made by the Center for Energy and Security Studies (CENESS).

<sup>2</sup> The audio recording of the meeting in Russian was transcribed by Dmitry **Konukhov**, Ivan **Nasteka**, and Artem **Tyutyunnikov**.

<sup>3</sup> Anton **Khlopkov**, Director, Center for Energy and Security Studies (CENESS).



General's November 2011 report on Iran, the crisis over the Iranian nuclear program was very close to the boiling point, with a distinct possibility of an armed conflict breaking out? Or was it some other period?

[RYABKOV]<sup>4</sup> First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. Khlopkov, for your invitation and for hosting this event. I would also like to thank the members of this audience for coming here today. I appreciate the interest in this meeting expressed by the expert community, members of the academia, the diplomatic corps, and the media. I think this is a good occasion to talk about what has happened, why it has happened, the objectives we pursued, the goals we have achieved, the expectations that we have, the impact the agreements reached in Vienna may well have on the situation in nonproliferation and peaceful use of nuclear energy, and the effects of that agreements on the regional scale.

You have mentioned that this is the 23<sup>rd</sup> event hosted by CENESS on the subject of the Iranian nuclear program. I salute your skill and patience in pursuing a subject that seemed completely hopeless at times. You are right to say that during the many years of these marathon talks, there were periods when it seemed that diplomacy would fail, and that the parties would resort to the use of force and military scenarios. The Russian delegation always proceeded from the notion that a military scenario was unacceptable, and that yet another military crisis in the Middle East could lead to unpredictable consequences. I would like to emphasize that at every stage of the talks, we were firm and consistent in following the directives of our national leadership, and doing our utmost to achieve a positive outcome of the negotiations.

I could say quite a lot about the role played by Russian ideas and Russian efforts in securing a positive negotiated outcome. The Russian delegation's proposals concerned many aspects of the talks, from the most general principles to specific technical solutions of the numerous and tangled issues we were facing. Many of our proposals have been reflected in the final agreements, and naturally, we have a sense of deep satisfaction over this. As to the question of the authorship and "copyright" to the various aspects of the Vienna agreements, we all worked as a team, in a genuinely multilateral format. We tried to make sure that the solutions truly reflected the balance of interests and enabled us to secure the ultimate goal, i.e. preventing a military scenario over the Iranian nuclear program, and restoring confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of that program.

Every stage of the talks was difficult in its own way. I think it would be fair to say that the stretch of the talks that immediately preceded the adoption of the Joint Plan of Action in November 2013 in Geneva was especially complicated and unpredictable. The subsequent period also required a lot of hard work, with a huge investment of diplomatic man-hours and extensive use of technical expertise. Throughout that period, we were under a lot of psychological pressure; there was a possibility of us failing to reach a deal by the agreed deadline, a possibility of the talks breaking down at the final stretch – which would of course have been extremely counterproductive

---

<sup>4</sup> Sergey **Ryabkov**, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation.



and even dangerous, given the amount of political capital invested in achieving a successful outcome. When so much is at stake and the talks break down, the repercussions of that blank shot can be very painful, and it was not quite clear what was to be done next if the talks ended in failure. In the end, however, we managed to concentrate on achieving a positive result, and even though the negotiators broke their own self-imposed pledge to conclude the talks by the end of June (they lasted for another two weeks in July), the result we have achieved is entirely satisfactory, at least to us. And I am ready to explain and to present my arguments as to why we are so certain that the outcome is a success.

In our estimate, the Vienna agreements are, on the whole, seen in a positive light by the vast majority of the international community. Naturally, there are also some differences of opinion. We are following closely the internal political debate about the outcome of the talks in the United States, Iran, and other countries. We are aware that some regional forces, some influential players in the Middle East are trying to exert a negative effect on preparations for the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). We are aware of the motives for such actions, and of these players' position on the issue. Throughout the several years of talks between the P5+1 and Iran, whenever we contacted our Israeli friends and those of our friends in the Persian Gulf who, as we understand, had serious doubts about the desirability of adoption such agreements, we always went to great lengths to explain our logic, motives and reasoning at the talks. From our own vantage point, we interacted with them, we exchanged our assessments, and tried to see how we could strengthen our arguments and even our position at the talks by taking into account the approach adopted on the issue of the Iranian nuclear program by the regional players.

As for the period you mentioned, the period after the release of the IAEA Director-General's report, it is true that the situation that arose was fairly explosive. The talks were making next to no progress on any substantive issues. Against that backdrop, tensions were rising because on the one hand, the Iranian nuclear program continued to make tangible progress, and on the other, the sanctions that had been imposed on Iran, including the unilateral unlawful sanctions, we not yielding the desired effect. There was a growing temptation in some capitals to resort to military force.

It is only when our US and EU colleagues realized the misguided and unproductive nature of their sanctions policy, when they adjusted their course and made some new realistic proposals that the talks were finally able to make some progress. That is when a realistic chance appeared to achieve a result, and we have not wasted that chance. Let me stress that as far as I can judge, that result is seen as satisfactory by the negotiating teams that took part in the talks, by the political leadership of the respective states, and by the majority of the international community.

[KHLOPKOV] Mr. Ryabkov, over the past two or three years I have heard many of my western fellow researchers, as well as many diplomats based in Moscow, asking whether reaching a comprehensive agreement on the Iranian nuclear program would be in Russia's best interests. There were always questions about that, there were doubts as to how far Russia was prepared to go at the talks. In my view, many of the



people asking those questions had an expectation that at some point during the talks, Moscow would become a spoiler rather than an ally, and try to prevent an agreement being reached. Now I would like to put the same question to you. In your opinion, what were the Russian interests at the talks on the Iranian nuclear program and in the deal that has been adopted – other than preventing nuclear proliferation and the emergence of another nuclear-weapon capable state?

[RYABKOV] Your know, Mr. Khlopkov, we could spend the entire two hours of this meeting discussing this subject; this is something that people who specialize in this issue simply love to discuss. But I will try to give a brief answer, and I can later field questions from the audience on this subject.

To begin with, who said that even if due to some dramatic events our relations with an influential group of countries have become cooler, that in itself should dictate our refusal to cooperate on issues that are clearly a matter of Russian national interest? Our national interest is that, *first*, there should not be a new conflict in the Middle East, and no further destabilization in the region.

*Second*, we want to implement a consistent course towards a normalization of the situation over Iran, including the situation in the trade and economic sphere, in the areas that have come under the crippling pressure of sanctions, including unilateral sanctions imposed by the EU, the United States and several countries that have joined them. I am talking, among other things, about the military and technical cooperation, about peaceful nuclear energy cooperation, and regular trade, which implies the ability to make bank transfers.

*Third*, is it not in our national interest to strengthen the nuclear nonproliferation regime, to prevent any developments that jeopardize the central role of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in the international security system, or the role of the IAEA as the key body in charge of assistance in developing peaceful use of nuclear energy and strengthening the nuclear nonproliferation regime?

*Fourth*, we have always believed and continue to believe that it is in Russia's national interests to facilitate joint multilateral efforts that enable us effectively to address issues that are not directly related to the situation in the Middle East or to our own bilateral relations with Iran – but that have clear consequences for preserving and strengthening the prerogatives of the UN Security Council under the UN Charter, for example, and for creating a new regime that could not be used and abused in an arbitrary way. There have been plenty of examples of such misuse by our Western partners in recent years. There is a clear trend towards misusing international instruments, mechanisms and regimes to serve the political and geopolitical needs and requirements of Washington and its allies. That is why it will always be in Russian national interests to facilitate international cooperation, including cooperation in multilateral formats, which makes it possible, through the use of diplomatic instruments, to limit such trends, to prevent them, and to forestall any attempts at exploiting the international system in order to serve the narrow utilitarian interests of a small group of countries or individual states. As the foreign policy of what is





historically termed “the West” is becoming increasingly egotistic, I think this is the best path we can follow. If we simply stand aside and enthusiastically proclaim what we believe is the truth and the right way of doing things, this will cause nothing but scorn of the Western decision-makers. It would be far more productive to sit at the same negotiating table with them, and use negotiating instruments to achieve tangible results.

Some will say, “but what about the oil prices?” My answer to that is, what do you think would have happened to the oil prices had Russia refused to take part in these talks? Wouldn’t the deal with Iran have been reached even if Russia stood aside? I think it would, but the terms of that deal would have been far less advantageous for Russia. There would have been effects and repercussions for the UN Security Council, the IAEA, and the nuclear nonproliferation regime that we have now managed to avoid. As for the oil price, let us see how they are determined. With the global demand currently at 94 million barrels, the Iranian production, including its export potential (and there are Iranian colleagues in this conference room who will perhaps disagree with me), but Iranian production and exports will take more than a few months to be restored to their former levels. Let us also recall that the sanctions on Iran have yet to be lifted, although we counted on those sanctions being lifted as soon as possible, and we are working on that. Nevertheless, it is up to specialists to calculate how much additional oil must be brought to market in order to further reinforce this trend towards lower oil prices. Over the past three years OPEC has been ramping up production despite falling demand. And even though prices have fallen, more oil will be brought to market in the near future. I would like to ask members of this audience, have you ever wondered what will happen to the profitability of potential U.S. exports of shale oil, given the current price levels? Will substantial amounts of U.S. shale oil reach the global market or not?

To summarize this part of my argument, the oil market depends on psychology. Any market, including the commodities markets, is based on the psychology of the market players, the stock brokers, who clutch a Starbucks coffee and watch nervously the direction of the chips. I don’t know how it all relates to the need to install modern equipment in the Iranian oil fields or upgrade the Iranian refineries, but I know for a certainty that if Russia were to boycott the talks on the Iranian nuclear program, the situation in terms of the dynamics of the oil prices would have been about the same, or perhaps even worse.

Or is anyone actually arguing that Russia should have worked to sabotage any deal? Should it have pretended to be involved in the talks, and then veto UN Security Council Resolution 2231? Is that the course of action recommended by those who believe that our work in Baghdad, Almaty and Vienna ran counter to Russian national interests? We don’t think that this is the right course to follow.

I would like to note that an assessment of the work we have done, and of its significance in terms of Russian interests and its impact on international affairs, has been made in a July 14 statement by Russian President Vladimir Putin, as well as a statement by the Russian Foreign Ministry and numerous remarks on the subject by



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. I have nothing to add to that assessment. Everything I have just said is my personal opinion, and my attempt to give an answer to those people who criticize the Vienna agreements conscientiously, in genuine belief that they run counter to Russian interests – as well as to those people whose criticisms are merely an exercise in self-promotion.

**[KHLOPKOV]** Mr. Ryabkov, as part of the implementation of the Vienna agreements, one of the projects assigned to Russia is re-purposing the Fordow facility. This uranium enrichment facility is to become a research and nuclear technology center specializing primarily in the production of stable isotopes used in nuclear medicine. What are the time frames for this project? When can we expect this work to be completed, and is there an understanding of how it will be financed?

**[RYABKOV]** Rebuilding and re-equipping the Fordow facility is one of the key elements of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and of the entire package of the Vienna agreements. One part of the centrifuge cascades at Fordow will be re-purposed to produce stable isotopes. Some of the other centrifuges there will be, shall we say, mothballed. Maybe the term is not entirely appropriate, but in my view, it accurately reflects the reality. We will work with our Iranian colleagues to organize the production of stable isotopes. Several rounds of Russian-Iranian meetings have already been held. Let me say right from the start that the process is being discussed in a bilateral format. The time frame, from the beginning of the discussions until the launch of production, is several years. The time frame between the beginning of discussions until reaching an agreement on what will be done, how, when, and other specific modalities, is several months. These relevant bilateral contacts will continue.

We believe that no external financing for implementing this solution will be required. The whole project will be built on a commercial basis. There will be specific price parameters, so this is how we hope to implement this project. Let me also emphasize that the idea of launching production of stable isotopes for medical purposes at the Fordow facility was initially proposed by Russia, and we are very happy that it has been agreed. I will not go into details of specific negotiations about that idea, i.e. when it was proposed, how it was discussed, and what happened at different time periods. But the fact remains that we will eventually implement the proposal, which was developed by experts of the Rosatom state nuclear corporation, among other people. This is the most suitable solution; it is acceptable to all the participants in the negotiating process as one of the ways of achieving confidence in the peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear program. My understanding is that the Iranian side is fine with this solution since the Iranians have made large investments in that facility, so losing it completely would probably be hard for Tehran to accept. To summarize, we have identified a good arrangement that should be acceptable to everyone, and we will make a contribution to its implementation.

**[KHLOPKOV]** Mr. Ryabkov, the JCPOA includes the removal of excess amounts of low-enriched uranium (LEU) from Iran in exchange for natural uranium – but the plan does not say where exactly the LEU will be taken to. The media speculate, often referring to unnamed negotiators, that the material will be removed to Russia. Has this



issue been agreed, and is the possibility being considered of using this material to create the IAEA LEU bank in Kazakhstan?

[**RYABKOV**] Yes, this is the second area in which we will cooperate with Iran in a bilateral format as part of implementing the JCPOA. It has been decided that the excess of low-enriched uranium accumulated in Iran – we are talking about approximately 8 tonnes of material – will be removed to Russia in exchange for natural uranium supplies. Just as with the Fordow situation, we are now at the stage of bilateral discussions with Iran. For obvious reasons, I will not go into details because this is still a work in progress, as we say. But since this project should also be built on a sustainable commercial foundation, without any external or even our own internal financial injections, it would be wrong to disclose the details at this time. But we have reached an understanding, and we have this agreement in place.

As for how to use the Iranian material, the LEU bank you have mentioned will be established in Kazakhstan in accordance with an agreement with the IAEA, which is now ready for signature. We have considered this option at various stages. I cannot confirm at this time that this option is at the top of the list, but we are not ruling it out. Much will depend not on us but on our Iranian colleagues. I do not want to second-guess the eventual decision, but the objective of removing excess amounts of low-enriched uranium represents an unprecedented set of opportunities, and a basis for some unique solutions. We are satisfied that we will be making a practical contribution into achieving an objective that will make the Vienna agreements more resilient and productive, and that will hopefully ensure their problem-free implementation.

[**KHLOPKOV**] Mr. Ryabkov, another facility where a lot of work will have to be done as part of implementing the Vienna agreements – probably more work than at any other Iranian nuclear facility – is the heavy-water research reactor in Arak. This facility is to undergo a major modernization, which will include reducing its power output and replacing some of the equipment that has already been delivered and installed. Under the terms of the JCPOA, an international consortium will be set up to implement this project. Will Russia be a part of that consortium? Also, under the terms of the Vienna agreements, spent nuclear fuel from the research reactor in Arak is to be shipped from Iran for the lifetime of the reactor. Is there an understanding as to where that spent fuel will be shipped to?

[**RYABKOV**] Let me start from the last question – it certainly will not be shipped to Russia. Under Russian laws and regulations, spent fuel can be removed to Russia only from Soviet or Russian-made reactors, or Russian-designed reactors. As for nuclear waste, as you know, there is a ban on importing nuclear waste into Russia from abroad. So our current thinking is that when the heavy-water reactor in Arak is reconfigured (and this is a fairly complex process; under the JCPOA, the facility is to be redesigned and rebuilt, which includes the removal of the existing reactor calandria and changing the configuration of the channels in the core of the reactor, among other things) the production side of things and the design side of things will be handled by an international consortium. The composition of that consortium has yet to be



determined, and as to the potential Russian contribution, we are ready to participate in that consortium. But given that the Arak reactor, which has already reached an advanced stage of completion, is not of Russian design, we believe that the leading role in rebuilding it in cooperation with the Iranian colleagues should be played not by Russia but by other members of the P5+1.

**[KHLOPKOV]** On November 11, 2014 authorized Russian and Iranian organizations signed contractual documents to implement a project of building the second stage of the Bushehr NPP, which will consist of the No 2 and No 3 reactors. This is probably the only NPP project in the Russian nuclear industry's portfolio that will be fully financed by the customer itself, without any Russian credit financing. What kind of impact do you think the Vienna agreements will have on the implementation of that project? My other question related to the Bushehr NPP is this: who will make fuel for the new reactors? What are the plans?

**[RYABKOV]** We do in fact hope that the No 1 reactor of the Bushehr NPP will be followed by others; we hope that even the No 2 and No 3 reactors will not be the end of our bilateral cooperation with Iran. We believe that the potential for our cooperation is much greater than that. One of the results of our negotiators' work on the JCPOA is that very good conditions have been put in place for our continued cooperation in this area. Anyone who studies this subject can read the text of the JCPOA and its annexes, and also read UN Security Council Resolution 2231 of July 20 to ascertain that all the necessary preconditions for such cooperation on a mutually beneficial, economically sound basis have been put in place. We welcome the interest in this work expressed by our Iranian colleagues.

Our thinking is that, just as with the No 1 reactor of the Bushehr NPP, fuel for all the subsequent reactors, which we hope to build in Iran together with our Iranian colleagues, will be supplied from Russia for the entire lifespan of these new reactors. We have always been very wary of using non-Russian fuel in Russian-designed reactors. Attempts [by foreign suppliers] to develop fuel for Russian-designed reactors are an extremely complicated, labor-intensive, and, in our opinion, economically unviable business. Nuclear fuel must pass very complex and rigorous certification procedures, and its use will always be associated with certain risks. Integrating foreign fuel into fuel loads consisting mostly of Russian-made assemblies could potentially lead to physically destabilizing effects in the reactor core. The arrangement we currently have for the No 1 reactor at Bushehr is working very well, and no-one has any complaints about it, including our Iranian friends and our Rosatom colleagues. We believe the same arrangement should be used for other nuclear energy projects implemented as part of bilateral Russian-Iranian cooperation.

**[KHLOPKOV]** Mr. Ryabkov, the next question is about the arms embargo on Iran. It was initially imposed to encourage Iran to pursue more constructive dialogue at the nuclear talks. The comprehensive nuclear agreements have been reached, but the embargo is to remain in place for another five years. Is it right to say that the Iranians were not persistent enough at the final stage of the talks to secure the lifting of the embargo? The second part of the question is this: do the Vienna agreements specify





that the list of armaments that is contained in the UN Security Council resolutions on cannot be supplied to Iran for another five years, nor can it be imported from Iran?

[RYABKOV] Strictly speaking, this is not an embargo, this is a new regime. There will be no embargo. There will be a permits regime, whereby arms supplies that fall under one of the seven categories of the UN Register of Conventional Arms will have to secure the UN Security Council's approval. This is an obvious emergency brake mechanism, and the countries that want to prevent Iran from pursuing normal military and technical cooperation with its foreign partners can always use that emergency brake. But such use will not be cost-free. As we know, it will entail certain political costs; it will require explanations and reasoning; it will require certain procedures and debates.

So it is true that the permits regime will remain in place for five years. This is because the agreements reached in Vienna have a comprehensive nature. It was not possible to achieve 100-per-cent satisfaction of every party's expectations from the talks. Every decision in each individual area is the result of different forces pushing in different directions. Furthermore, all individual areas are interlinked, and this is exactly why the talks have proved so long and difficult. Each individual aspect had to be weighed to find the right balance, which is a very complicated business.

I cannot confirm what you said about this being the Iranian delegation's own choice. This is not the right way to formulate this question. I can only confirm that each party was left not entirely satisfied with the outcome. But the degree of our satisfaction with the overall result far outweighs any degree of dissatisfaction with any individual aspects of the agreement. I am talking about the initial starting points where the process began, and the result, the common denominator that was found, the impressive result of persistent diplomatic efforts. On the issue of the embargo, it also seemed at the beginning that no compromise was possible. But as the negotiations progressed, we identified a mechanism that I believe will be effective, just like in many other aspects – and it can be defended using the logic of the overall approach.

We are now beginning to implement the Vienna agreements. The JCPOA says that the document enters into force 90 days after the approval of the agreements. After that, there will be other milestones, large and small, on the way towards implementation. We are talking about the sequence of these steps, the procedure of lifting various sanctions, and the establishment of the Joint Commission under the terms of the Vienna agreements. Any contentions issues at the Joint Commission – and such issues will inevitably arise, since we deal with such a complex subject – will be decided in the P5+1 and Iran format, in the same spirit of cooperation that we had during the talks, and that enabled us to achieve a successful outcome.

[KHLOPKOV] Mr. Ryabkov, my last question, and then we will allow members of the audience to put their own questions to you. You have already mentioned that the Russian Foreign Ministry is watching closely the domestic debate about the Vienna agreements in the P5+1 countries and in Iran. What do you think about the situation in the United States, where, as far as I can judge, this debate has proved far more heated



than some had expected? What is the likelihood of the Congress blocking Iran deal, and even breaking the U.S. president's veto on such a decision?

[RYABKOV] I don't think that the U.S. debate has proved more heated than expected. To be honest, we expected that things will be about as they are now. The thing is, on a whole range of aspects these agreements represents, in my opinion, the only possible solution of an old and intractable problem. The intractability of this problem is actually the reason why people in some capitals and in some countries had been laboring under a set of delusions as to what is possible and what is desirable.

In 2012 President Putin proposed a mechanism of resolving the crisis over the Iranian nuclear program in his article on the subject of Russia's foreign-policy course. The mechanism boiled down to recognizing Iran's right to pursue peaceful use of nuclear energy, including uranium enrichment, and placing the Iranian nuclear program under comprehensive international controls. President Putin wrote at the time that if these two conditions were to be met, all the sanctions against Iran could be lifted. Now, in August 2015, it is entirely safe to say that this precise arrangement is at the core of the JCPOA, as well as the step-by-step and reciprocal approach to a comprehensive settlement of the crisis over the Iranian nuclear program. Nothing is being done all at once under the terms of the JCPOA, and no-one receives everything they wanted in one fell swoop. The approach to lifting the sanctions is also based on a sequential, step-by-step process.

This step-by-step and reciprocal approach was also proposed by Russia, by the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. In other words, the concept and the methodology of the settlement are based on Russian ideas. We are not trumpeting this from the rooftops, there is no reason for that, and in a sense, we have not actually invented anything new. The approach we proposed is merely a quintessence of common sense. But, unfortunately, the problem was so old and politicized that many politicians, especially in the United States, had very different ideas, and abandoning those ideas is very difficult. I understand those people, especially since they probably believe that U.S. interests, as well as some other countries' interests, would have been better served by keeping up the massive pressure on Iran in order to extract far greater concessions than the ones reflected in the JCPOA. But this path led to a dead end. The sanctions are not producing the desired effect, they are useless, they damage the foundation of relations and their political component, and they poison the atmosphere.

Incidentally, when UN Security Council Resolution 1929 was adopted, the latest in the series of resolutions imposing sanctions on Iran, the resolution that imposed coercive measures on Iran under the terms of Chapter VII of the UN Charter, we privately made it very clear to our U.S. and EU colleagues that Russia would not allow any further resolutions containing sanctions against Iran to be approved. Realizing the seriousness of such signals, Washington and Brussels then chose the path of unlawful unilateral sanctions, thereby delivering one blow after another against the established system of international relations and the doctrine of international law. But this was their deliberate choice, which our US, NATO and EU colleagues made a long time ago, back in 1999, when they launched an aggression



against Yugoslavia. The checks and balances are being eroded, and the parties are becoming increasingly unwilling to play by the rules. There is a growing desire to reshape the world to fit one's own interests. This is how the parties that regard themselves as victors in the Cold War want to play. This was also reflected in the U.S. and EU policies on Iran. I am glad that in the end, we have managed to correct this imbalance using the "Iranian subject matter" – I hope my colleagues from the Iranian embassy will forgive such a turn of phrase.

[**KHLOPKOV**] Thank you, Mr. Ryabkov. Colleagues, you can now put your own questions to the Russian deputy foreign minister.

[**OZNOBISHCHEV**]<sup>5</sup> Why has the Iranian deal become possible at this precise moment? It is because all the parties have become wiser? And my second question: how would you rank the components of the success? Whose contribution has proved decisive?

[**RYABKOV**] I think the correct and boring answer would be as follows: this was the result of a team effort. Everyone was genuinely trying to find a solution, and no-one was using the talks as a smokescreen for ulterior motives.

The less boring answer is that no-one can dispute the key role played in achieving the Vienna agreements by the United States and Iran. But I would also like to stress that at every stage of the talks, immediately after the end of the phase where the parties merely stated their initial positions, and as soon as they started actually to search for realistic solutions – there had never been a period during the real, genuine talks when any party would seek to play behind the curtains, in the shadows, leaving the other parties in the dark.

Yes, it is true that some solutions were discussed on a bilateral U.S.-Iranian basis – but there were also discussions on a bilateral Russian-Iranian or Russian-U.S. basis. The ideas generated at such bilateral discussions would then immediately become the subject of a broader debate involving all the parties, i.e. the P5+1 states and Iran. Some of the proposals would first be discussed in a narrow circle of "the most interested parties", or "friends of a solution", in diplomatic parlance, before being discussed by all the participants. The role of the EU and of the European External Action Service is hard to exaggerate; they coordinated the talks, they summarized the outcome of the discussions, and in fact they were the ones essentially drafting the text, together with Iranian representatives. Russia, meanwhile, proposed a whole series of solutions on specific issues that were proving difficult to resolve. The solution on the Arak research reactor was found with active Russian participation. Other examples of the Russian delegation's contribution include UN Security Council Resolution 2231 and several aspects of the JCPOA reflected in the annex that covers the issue of transparency. I could list many elements where Russia made a major contribution, but I see no point in doing that.

---

<sup>5</sup> Sergey **Oznobishchev**, Senior Research Associate, Center for International Security, Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS).



As to why the agreements have been reached at this particular moment in time, work has been under way with increasingly positive returns since 2012-2013. The media representatives in this conference room will confirm that every time I met them on the sidelines of each successive round of talks, it was proving increasingly difficult to explain what was going on at the negotiations. The subject matter was too complicated and difficult, and there was a lot of responsibility in terms of making decisions. This is why it has taken us from 2012 until 2015. I don't think there was a link to any particular date in the calendar. Nevertheless, keeping in mind that the next U.S. election campaign kicks off in the fall, it is good that we have already managed to complete the talks.

[**BATSANOV**]<sup>6</sup> The arrangements reached on the Iranian nuclear program will now have to be implemented. What is your vision of that process? Looking at the ongoing debate in the United States, among other things, I have concerns that on the one hand, there is a danger of the emergence of new interpretations of the Vienna agreements, and on the other, there could be a series of new accusations against Iran, including charges of Iran acting in breach of the provisions of the JCPOA. What kind of problems do you think the implementation of the JCPOA may run into?

[**RYABKOV**] As a general observation, I would like to say that the agreements reached in Vienna is far more detailed and straightforward, in a good sense of the word, than an average international agreement tends to be these days. There are much fewer "constructive ambiguities", of these best friends of any diplomat, in the JCPOA than in many other documents. This is exactly why it took us so long to reach these agreements. The Iranian party, the P5+1 as a whole, and each individual member of the P5+1 could not allow a newly born text to be immediately dismantled and destroyed by critics as imprecise, vague, subject to different interpretations, etc. One of the difficulties now facing the opponents of the JCPOA is that there is very little room for any attacks against that document from this particular angle.

Another aspect of the matter is this: everything that has been written down represents a set of voluntary commitments. Just like any agreement, this is a distillation, a quintessence of ideas and political will, of the steps a country is ready to take. The document stipulates the sequence of steps to be taken by each individual party. The IAEA will certify the steps to be taken by Iran; the Joint Commission will review any issues that may arise from the implementation of commitments by the P5+1 which Iran may raise, and vice versa.

We hope that the delicate subject of the deal being approved by the U.S. Congress will be resolved, and that there will not be enough members voting against that deal to overrule the president's hypothetical veto if the Congress votes against the Vienna agreements. This is my personal opinion, this is not an official position, let alone

---

<sup>6</sup> Sergey **Batsanov**, Director, Geneva Office, Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs; former Soviet Union and Russian Federation Ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.





some kind of signal. This is simply my personal view of the developments from the outside.

Our Iranian colleagues have doubts as to how consistently, diligently and fully the United States and the EU will fulfill the terms of the document as far as the lifting of sanctions and closer cooperation, including peaceful nuclear energy cooperation is concerned. But here, too, I don't think that this will be a matter of interpretation of the document by the United States and the EU. This will be a question of implementation, performance, and compliance rather than ambiguity. To resolve any potential problems in this area, we will work at the Joint Commission. The modalities of the commission is a matter of technique, these things can be resolved to everyone's satisfaction. I think an important role will be played by permanent missions of P5+1 countries and Iran in New York. The IAEA will fulfill its own duties, but the politics and the discussions of any stumbling blocks will be taking place in New York. I foresee nothing that could lead us into a deadlock.

[KOZIN]<sup>7</sup> A very important decision has been reached in Vienna, and everyone who understands its significance welcomes it. But logical questions now arise about the Israeli nuclear program, or, more specifically, the Israeli nuclear weapons program. It would be entirely logical to suggest that the next step in the area of WMD in the Middle East should be Israel's decision to relinquish its nuclear weapons. Israel already has such weapons, whereas Iran did not have them, and Tehran has agreed not to seek them. In your personal opinion, how can the problem of the Israeli nuclear weapons program be resolved? Should it be in the P5+1 format, a G8 format, or an international conference on establishing a WMD-free zone in the Middle East, which is provisionally scheduled for 2016?

[RYABKOV] Russia has always called on Israel to join the NPT, and it will continue to do so. The practical implications of this are clear. We will also continue to call on Israel to ratify the Chemical Weapons Convention. We believe that achieving universal membership of these basic arms control and nonproliferation instruments remains one of the primary goals for the foreseeable future.

I am not sure that you and I have the same understanding about convening the conference on a Middle Eastern WMD-free zone in 2016. Unfortunately, one of the outcomes of the recent NPT Review Conference was the end of the previous mandate given to the co-sponsors and the facilitator (that position was held until recently by the Finnish ambassador Jaakko Laajava) to work towards convening such a conference, in accordance with a decision by the 2010 RevCon. We are now trying to identify workable solutions that could help us achieve progress in that area, but the situation has changed in terms of the framework of our work. In that sense, the adoption of the JCPOA is a major impetus, a major driving force. We hope that Israel will also draw its own conclusions from what is going on, and that we will see tangible progress in the specified areas in the foreseeable future. I think that one

---

<sup>7</sup> Vladimir **Kozin**, Chief Adviser; Head, Group of Advisers to the Director, Russian Institute of Strategic Studies (RISS).



possible format is a conference on establishing a zone free of nuclear and all other weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems, as formulated back in 1995 in the Middle East resolution adopted by the RevCon. That is the best format, especially since we have had some initial, probing, informal contacts on this subject involving Israeli representatives in recent months.

[**DVORKIN**]<sup>8</sup> What do you think awaits the IAEA Additional Protocol in Iran? Will IAEA inspectors be allowed to inspect the Parchin facility? Also, can you tell us whether the issue of imposing limits on the Iranian missile program was ever raised during the several years of the talks?

[**RYABKOV**] We have no doubts whatsoever that very soon, Iran will begin to apply the Additional Protocol to the IAEA Safeguards Agreement on a provisional basis; the same applies to modified Code 3.1. This document, which was adopted under the IAEA auspices, stipulates that the IAEA shall be notified in advance of any nuclear program development plans and any specific facilities that will be built or re-configured. This will give us greater transparency and access in our cooperation with Iran. Taking into account the separation of powers in the Islamic Republic, and the prerogatives of the Iranian parliament, I would like to hope that Iran will ratify the Additional Protocol. This, however, will depend on progress in implementing the Vienna agreements. A general understanding about Iran's progress in this area has been reached.

As for access to the Parchin facility, this subject was discussed at the talks. In the context of implementing transparency measures and special decisions reached with regard to IAEA inspectors' access to Iranian facilities, I hope we will resolve this issue. The IAEA and Iran intend completely to resolve and to settle all questions with regard to the so-called possible military dimensions (PMD) before the year's end.

The subject of the limitation of the missile program was also discussed, but it has not been reflected in the JCPOA, with the exception of the embargo aspect. The limitations regime will be the same as the one for the arms embargo, but it will remain in place for eight years. In both cases a reference has been made to the release of IAEA Broader Conclusion that all nuclear material in Iran remains in peaceful activities, whichever comes first. In other words, limitations on exports of conventional weapons to Iran will be lifted after five years or after the IAEA has reached Broader Conclusion, if such a conclusion is reached sooner than that. On the issue of exports of missile technologies, the same principle will apply, the only difference being the eight-year period. There were no further decisions at the talks about the Iranian missile program.

[**MACFARQUHAR**]<sup>9</sup> Yesterday the Secretary of State Kerry raised concerns with Mr. Lavrov about visit in July of Brigadier General Qasem Soleimani of Iran to

---

<sup>8</sup> Vladimir **Dvorkin**, Chief Research Associate, Center for International Security, Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS).

<sup>9</sup> Neil **MacFarquhar**, Chief, Moscow Bureau, New York Times.



Russia. As you know he is under UN travel ban, that Russia has accepted. So, why Russia felt the need to host him now and what is your reaction to the criticism, critics of the deal who feel like the step-by-step approach of lifting the sanctions will not work?

**[RYABKOV]** I see no connection whatsoever between this story and the implementation of JCPOA. No connection. We are as ever fully and completely committed to both implement JCPOA faithfully according to spirit and letter and do what is required from Russia on a bilateral basis with Iran regarding both Fordow and transfer of excessive material into Russia. General Soleimani alleged visit to Russia is something that we cannot confirm; I possess no information on this whatsoever. I do not believe there was any reason to claim that he visited Russia last week, when this issue first surfaced in the US and subsequently was brought forward by Wall Street Journal and all others.

Besides, I'll draw your attention to the fact that the US administration last year transferred four individuals from Guantanamo prison to one of the Middle Eastern countries. Those persons were in sanction lists approved by UN Security Council. Four persons, without any explanations, any consultations. We have their names and can offer those to New York Times, if your desire would be so. It is a trouble, how people regard the issue of full and complete implementation of UN Security Council resolutions. On Soleimani, as I said, I have no information whatsoever that he visited Russia.

**[ROTH]**<sup>10</sup> If the US Congress rejects the Iran deal, what will Russia's reaction be? Are there any concrete steps you see, in particular about uranium enrichment in Iran and arms sales to Iran?

**[RYABKOV]** This is truly my hope, that there would be vote of approval, if not so, than the rejection will happen to an extent that would be surmountable by the US Administration. Otherwise we will face a situation when JCPOA will be in place, UN Security Council Resolution 2231 will be in place, and the only outcome would be that the US will not act accordingly. We are hopeful that nothing in this hypothetical scenario will actually happen. We think that JCPOA is fully defensible. It's so self-explanatory, if you wish, that the one wants to find ways how to undermine this whole construction, this whole building should use only political arguments and not the substantial ones. We do not have a plan for this negative scenario, and we do not anticipate any action at this point. We are hopeful as others within the P5+1 Group that the common sense and obvious reasoning behind this would prevail.

**[MIZIN]**<sup>11</sup> What is the potential impact of the Iran deal on the arms control process, given that the implementation of the New START treaty and the INF treaty has, on the whole, been a success, despite certain complications with interpreting the

---

<sup>10</sup> Andrew **Roth**, Reporter, Moscow bureau, Washington Post.

<sup>11</sup> Viktor **Mizin**, Leading Research Associate, Institute of International Studies, Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO-University), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.



implementation of some INF provisions? Has any kind of understanding been reached bilaterally with the United States in the context of the Iranian nuclear talks? Or will there be a new pause until after the election of a new U.S. president in November 2016?

[**RYABKOV**] I believe the thing we will have to wait for is not the outcome of the U.S. presidential election, but the moment of understanding and recognition by the United States that nuclear disarmament issues and nuclear reductions cannot and should not be discussed separately from a whole host of other strategic stability factors. In fact, these factors are growing more numerous. In such circumstances, frankly speaking, I can see no reason to undertake any practical steps in terms of further dialogue with the United States on nuclear arms control or further nuclear reductions. We are facing multiplying problems related to the deployment of the missile defense system, the Prompt Global Strike, the prospect of offensive weapons being deployed in space, growing military activity of different kinds (including military exercises), as well as activities in terms of deploying new forces in the direct vicinity of Russian borders, and so on and so forth. So this is not really a question of who becomes the next U.S. president, or how it affects the climate of our relations. This is rather a question of substance: will there be – either before or after the change of administration in Washington - any revision of views with regard to the link between these processes and their impact on strategic stability. I have grave doubts that such a revision is possible.

These aspects were not discussed during the Iranian nuclear talks; this was not our intention or the Americans' intention. I think this is how it should be. We had plenty of work as it was. But you are right to say that both sides are fully implementing the New START treaty. I would even say that treaty's implementation has been perfect. I am talking about inspections, arrangements with regard to exhibitions, obligations with regard to numerical limits, etc. This is an important factor of stability that has a general salutary effect, and we hope this will continue. We also have a viable and effective instrument of discussing various practical issues related to the New START treaty in the form of the Bilateral Consultative Commission; the next sitting of that commission will take place in the fall.

[**DYAKOV**]<sup>12</sup> My question is not about Iran. Could you explain the Russian stance on the Nuclear Security Summit that will take place in Washington in late March – early April next year?

[**RYABKOV**] Actually, I don't want us to deviate from the subject of the agreements on the Iranian nuclear program. Still, I will answer your question. We were involved in preparations for the previous summits, and we took part in those summits. Our approach to that participation was very diligent and effective in terms of implementing the decisions reached by those summits. But at the second Nuclear Security Summit, which was held in Seoul, we began to realize that the agenda was

---

<sup>12</sup> Anatoly **Diakov**, Chief Research Associate, Center for Arms Control, Energy and Environmental Studies.





being exhausted. The decisions reached at the first summit in Washington in 2010 were genuinely significant, and they filled a certain niche. The subsequent summits, however, were beginning to scrape the bottom of the barrel. Witness, for example, the emergence of various exotic ideas that, in our view, merely served to distract us from the things that really need to be done in the area of nuclear security. These negative trends became even stronger at the third Summit in The Hague. In view of those trends, Russia has decided to take part neither in preparations for the next summit, which is scheduled for 2016 in Washington, nor in the summit itself.

I would like to emphasize that such a decision was taken solely for the reasons I have just outlined. It has nothing to do with the cooling of our relations with the United States, or the situation in the southeast of Ukraine, or the return of Crimea to the Russian fold. There is no political aspect to that decision. It is merely a result of sober analysis and realization that everything that could be achieved in the format of such summits has already been achieved. Further work must now take place where it has always been taking place, i.e. in the framework of relevant conventions and of the IAEA. And this is exactly what we are going to do in the future.

[ZHEBIN]<sup>13</sup> Specialists are now arguing as to whether the arrangement used to resolve the Iranian nuclear crisis can be emulated for the Korean peninsula. You have said that the concept and even the methodology of the JCPOA are, to a large extent, based on a 2012 article by President Putin. Do you think the same concept and methodology could be used to resolve the Korean situation? I am talking primarily about recognizing North Korea's right to peaceful use of nuclear energy and to launch satellites for the benefit of science and its economy, provided that Pyongyang relinquishes intercontinental ballistic missile launches and the military component of its nuclear program.

[RYABKOV] I would be wary of drawing parallels between the Iranian nuclear program and the nuclear issue of the Korean peninsula. Also, the reading of the situation in Pyongyang, as far as I understand it, is radically different from how the situation was and is perceived in Tehran. There are, of course, certain ideas, methods, and experience of working on the subject of the nuclear issue of the Korean peninsula. I cannot say, however, to what extent the "phased and reciprocal approach", which has become such an integral part of the Iranian debate, can be applied to the Korean situation. It is, nevertheless, quite obvious from what you've just said that North Korea should once again become a member of the NPT. But as to how this can be done and what is needed to achieve this - we will have to work on that.

I do not think that any direct parallels can be drawn between the nuclear issue of the Korean peninsula and the Iranian nuclear program. Other approaches must be found. On the whole, the situation in Northeast Asia requires collective decisions. Russia has proposed some ideas on how we could build trust and move towards forming some initial multilateral security formats in that region. I am talking only about Russian

---

<sup>13</sup> Aleksandr **Zhebin**, Head, Centre for Korean Studies, Institute of the Far East, Russian Academy of Science (RAS).



proposals now. This is not the same as the six-party format, which worked for a period, but then ground to a halt.

[**AVERKOV**]<sup>14</sup> According to media reports and comments by experts, one of the topics discussed between Russian and Iran was a proposal to set up a state-owned Russian trader that would receive Iranian oil and supply Russian goods to Iran in return. The same arrangement would be used to finance Russian industrial projects in Iran. How feasible is such an arrangement, and how satisfactory would it be for Russian business following the introduction of sanctions against Russia and after a phased lifting of sanctions against Iran in the foreseeable future? My second question: what is the likelihood of S-300 SAM systems being supplied to Iran, and could third parties be involved in those exports?

[**RYABKOV**] Regarding the S-300 systems, the decision to allow such exports to Iran has already been made by the Russian president. The modalities of such exports are now being discussed. I think this is a purely bilateral subject, and no participation of any third countries will be required.

As for the “oil for goods” arrangement, the sanctions against Iran have yet to be lifted – and I don’t mean only the unilateral U.S. or EU sanctions. These sanctions, in our opinion, should not hinder legitimate economic cooperation, including cooperation in the form of such quasi-barter or fully barter arrangements, the goods exchange arrangements we are now talking about. This is why we want this work to continue, and we are determined to carry on with it. As to how the situation after the suspension and the subsequent lifting of sanctions against Iran could affect such goods exchange arrangements, you should put this question to specialists. We have the Intergovernmental Russian-Iranian Commission, we have various economic ministries and agencies, business operators, banks, oil traders, etc. I think they understand the dynamics of the process, and they will waste no time adapting these arrangements to new realities to make sure that bilateral cooperation remains unaffected and utilizes its full potential.

[**KHLOPKOV**] Mr. Ryabkov, allow me to put these last two questions, as the moderator of this meeting. The first question: President Obama mentioned in his Prague speech that if the crisis over the Iranian nuclear program were to be resolved, the driving force for missile defense construction in Europe would be removed. Senior U.S. officials have on several occasions interpreted that statement by President Obama even further. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov recently drew his U.S. colleagues’ attention to that statement by the U.S. president. Have there been any positive signals from Washington in that regard, or are they merely coming up with new interpretations of what President Obama said in Prague?

My second question is this: given that China and the United States have yet to ratify CTBT, it is clear that the question of Iranian ratification was not raised during the talks between the P5+1 and Iran. Nevertheless, there have been regular Russian-

---

<sup>14</sup> Viktor **Averkoy**, Research Associate, Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies (CAST).



Iranian meetings, including meetings with your own active participation. Has Russia been raising the issue of CTBT ratification at its discussions with Iran - or, as a first step towards fully joining the treaty, the possibility of the monitoring stations already built in Iran becoming part of the International Monitoring System (IMS)? A total of five monitoring stations are to be built as part of the Iranian segment of the IMS. As I understand, three of these stations have already been installed, and for a brief period they were even connected to the IMS in the past.

[RYABKOV] We have indeed noticed that in recent days, representatives of the U.S. administration have been emphasizing the broader interpretations of the signal sent by President Obama in 2009 in Prague. They say that the European adaptive phased approach plans for missile defense, which had only just been formed back at the time, were not linked solely to the Iranian nuclear program. They stress that President Obama also spoke about the Iranian missile program, i.e. an issue that has not been resolved, as far as Washington is concerned. I would like to say that it is completely unthinkable to us when, amid a conflict of such level and a complete disorganization scenario in current international relations, anyone can imagine the use of medium-range ballistic missiles with conventional warheads against targets in Europe. This could conceivably be done only by terrorists, by lone extremists who can never gain possession of such weapons or actually use them. Military specialists may have their own opinions, but personally, I can completely rule out such scenarios. I therefore conclude that the U.S. administration is merely trying to come up with spurious arguments in order to justify their decision – taken for entirely different reasons – to ramp up the deployment of missile defense in Europe. We have always insisted that once that program reaches an advanced stage, it will begin to undermine the Russian strategic nuclear deterrent, though it will not negate that deterrent completely. Now that the situation with the Iranian nuclear program has been resolved, it has become even more difficult for the U.S. administration to come up with plausible arguments, and we will continue to highlight that fact.

Now to your question about the CTBT. In fact, there aren't that many countries left that have yet to sign or ratify the CTBT. There are eight states left from the so-called 44 Annex 2 states. We believe that many members of that group, as well as other countries that have yet to ratify, are following very closely the processes taking place in Washington and estimating the chances of a U.S. ratification of the CTBT by the Senate. We hope that the U.S. administration's efforts in this area will be successful. We believe that the chance has not yet been lost, provided that the effort is strong and consistent. So I think the Iranians are right to point out that they are not the most important country among those that have yet to ratify.

As to connecting the Tehran seismic station to the IMS and to the servers of the Provisional Technical Secretariat of the CTBTO Preparatory Commission in Vienna, that would be a significant step. It would be an important element in the system of confidence-building measures by the Islamic Republic following the adopting of the Vienna agreements. I would like to emphasize, however, that this issue is not covered by the agreements, and it was not discussed in Vienna. This is a separate discussion about what could be done by the states that have yet to ratify the CTBT, and about the



effects of such a step in a broader context, the context of achieving universal membership of tried and tested international legal instruments that add stability to the international security system.

**[KHLOPKOV]** Mr. Ryabkov, thank you very much for taking the time to speak to us today, and for providing such detailed answers to our questions about the Vienna agreements. I think there are still plenty of questions left to ask, but you have certainly clarified some of them.

Let me also draw the audience's attention to the banner behind us, which mentions the 2017 Moscow Nonproliferation Conference. CENESS has already begun preparations for that conference, which has become a regular international event, and which has certainly demonstrated its relevance. Those of you who plan as far ahead as we do at the Center for Energy and Security Studies can now mark it in their calendar that our next flagship event will take place in the fall of 2017. We are looking at dates in the second half of October. We will have a firm date over the next few months, taking into account the international calendar of key events focusing on international security, WMD nonproliferation, and arms control. We hope these dates will work for the researchers, officials, and nuclear industry representatives who traditionally take part in our events and make a good use of them.

Finally, let me thank my colleagues who helped to organize this event: Dmitry Konukhov, Ivan Nasteka, and Artem Tyutyunnikov, as well as our interpreters, Andrey Salnikov and Aleksey Grinin. Thank you all, and until our next meeting at CENESS events.

**[RYABKOV]** Thank you.