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John Kerry

Iran Accord Address and Presser

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Well, good afternoon everybody. I want to begin by thanking you, as others have, for your extraordinary patience. I know this has been a long couple of weeks for everybody, including, above all, the press, who have waited long hours during the day for very little news, and we're very grateful for your patience. This is an historic day, but for me, it's an historic day because it represents the first time in six weeks that I've worn a pair of shoes.

Today, in announcing a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the United States, our P5+1 and EU partners, and Iran have taken a measureable step away from the prospect of nuclear proliferation, towards transparency and cooperation. It is a step away from the specter of conflict and towards the possibility of peace.

This moment has been a long time coming, and we have worked very hard to get here. A resolution to this type of challenge never comes easily -- not when the stakes are so high, not when the issues are so technical, and not when each decision affects global and regional security so directly. The fact is that the agreement we've reached, fully implemented, will bring insight and accountability to Iran's nuclear program -- not for a small number of years but for the lifetime of that program. This is the good deal that we have sought.

Believe me, had we been willing to settle for a lesser deal, we would have finished this negotiation a long time ago. But we were not. All of us -- not just the United States, but France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia, China, and the EU -- were determined to get this right. And so we have been patient, and I believe our persistence has paid off.



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A few months ago in Lausanne, we and our international partners joined Iran in announcing a series of parameters to serve as the contours of a potential deal. Experts and commentators were, in fact, surprised by all that we had achieved at that point. After three more months of long days and late nights, I'm pleased to tell you that we have stayed true to those contours and we have now finally carved in the details.

Now I want to be very clear: The parameters that we announced in Lausanne not only remain intact and form the backbone of the agreement that we reached today, but through the detail, they have been amplified in ways that make this agreement even stronger.

That includes the sizable reduction of Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium and the number of centrifuges that it operates.

It also guarantees that Iran's breakout time -- the time it would take for Iran to speed up its enrichment and produce enough fissile material for just one nuclear weapon -- that time will increase to at least one year for a period of at least 10 years.

And contrary to the assertions of some, this agreement has no sunset. It doesn't terminate. It will be implemented in phases -- beginning within 90 days of the UN Security Council endorsing the deal, and some of the provisions are in place for 10 years, others for 15 year, others for 25 years. And certain provisions -- including many of the transparency measures and prohibitions on nuclear work -- will stay in place permanently.

But most importantly, this agreement addresses Iran's potential pathways to fissile material for a bomb exactly as we said it would -- with appropriate limitations and transparency in order to assure the world of the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program.

Now, let me explain exactly how it will accomplish that goal.

To start, the participants have agreed Iran will not produce or acquire either highly enriched uranium or weapons-grade plutonium for at least the next 15 years, and Iran declares a longer period of intent.

Iran's total stockpile of enriched uranium -- which today is equivalent to almost 12,000 kilograms of UF₆ -- will be capped at just 300 kilograms for the next 15 years -- an essential component of expanding our breakout time. Two-thirds of Iran's centrifuges will be removed from nuclear facilities along with the infrastructure that supports them. And once they're removed, the centrifuges will be -- and the infrastructure, by the way -- will be locked away and under around-the-clock monitoring by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Uranium enrichment at Natanz will be scaled down significantly. For the next 15 years, no uranium will be enriched beyond 3.67 percent. To put that in context, this is a level that is appropriate for civilian nuclear power and research, but well below anything that could be used possibly for a weapon.



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For the next 10 years, Iran has agreed to only use its first-generation centrifuges in order to enrich uranium. Iran has further agreed to disconnect nearly all of its advanced centrifuges, and those that remain installed will be part of a constrained and closely monitored R&D program -- and none will be used to produce enriched uranium.

Iran has also agreed to stop enriching uranium at its Fordow facility for the next 15 years. It will not even use or store fissile material on the site during that time. Instead, Fordow will be transformed into a nuclear, physics, and technology research center -- it will be used, for example, to produce isotopes for cancer treatment, and it will be subject to daily inspection and it will have other nations working in unison with the Iranians within that technology center.

So when this deal is implemented, the two uranium paths Iran has towards fissile material for a weapon will be closed off.

The same is true for the plutonium path. We have agreed Iran's heavy-water reactor at Arak will be rebuilt -- based on a final design that the United States and international partners will approve -- so that it will only be used for peaceful purposes. And Iran will not build a new heavy-water reactor or reprocess fuel from its existing reactors for at least 15 years.

But this agreement is not only about what happens to Iran's declared facilities. The deal we have reached also gives us the greatest assurance that we have had that Iran will not pursue a weapon covertly.

Not only will inspectors be able to access Iran's declared facilities daily, but they will also have access to the entire supply chain that supports Iran's nuclear program, from start to finish -- from uranium mines to centrifuge manufacturing and operation. So what this means is, in fact, that to be able to have a covert path, Iran would actually need far more than one covert facility -- it would need an entire covert supply chain in order to feed into that site. And to ensure that that does not happen without our knowledge, under this deal, inspectors will be able to gain access to any location the IAEA and a majority of the P5+1 nations deem suspicious.

It is no secret that the IAEA also has had longstanding questions about the possible military dimensions of Iran's nuclear program. That is one of the primary reasons that we are even here today, and we and our partners have made clear throughout the negotiations that Iran would need to satisfy the IAEA on this as part of the final deal. With that in mind, Iran and the IAEA have already entered into an agreement on the process to address all of the IAEA's outstanding questions within three months -- and doing so is a fundamental requirement for sanctions relief that Iran seeks. And Director Amano announced earlier this morning that that agreement has been signed.



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Now, our quarrel has never been with the Iranian people, and we realize how deeply the nuclear-related sanctions have affected the lives of Iranians. Thanks to the agreement reached today, that will begin to change. In return for the dramatic changes that Iran has accepted for its nuclear program, the international community will be lifting the nuclear-related sanctions on Iran's economy.

And the relief from sanctions will only start when Tehran has met its key initial nuclear commitments -- for example, when it has removed the core from the Arak reactor; when it has dismantled the centrifuges that it has agreed to dismantle; when it has shipped out the enriched uranium that it has agreed to ship out. When these and other commitments are met, the sanctions relief will then begin to be implemented in phases.

The reason for that is very simple: Confidence is never built overnight. It has to be developed over time. And this morning, Foreign Minister Javad Zarif expressed his hope that this agreement can be a beginning of a change of the interactions between Iran and the international community.

That is why none of the sanctions that we currently have in place will, in fact, be lifted until Iran implements the commitments that it has made. And some restrictions, including those related to arms and proliferation, will remain in place for some years to come. And I want to underscore: If Iran fails in a material way to live up to these commitments, then the United States, the EU, and even the UN sanctions that initially brought Iran to the table can and will snap right back into place. We have a specific provision in this agreement called snapback for the return of those sanctions in the event of noncompliance.

Now, there will be some who will assert that we could have done more -- or that if we had just continued to ratchet up the pressure, Iran would have eventually raised a white flag and abandoned its nuclear program altogether. But the fact is the international community tried that approach. That was the policy of the United States and others during the years 2000 and before. And in the meantime, guess what happened? The Iranian program went from 164 centrifuges to thousands. The Iranian program grew despite the fact that the international community said, "No enrichment at all, none." The program grew to the point where Iran accumulated enough fissile material for about 12 -- 10 to 12 nuclear bombs.

I will tell you, sanctioning Iran until it capitulates makes for a powerful talking point and a pretty good political speech, but it's not achievable outside a world of fantasy.

The true measure of this agreement is not whether it meets all of the desires of one side at the expense of the other; the test is whether or not it will leave the world safer and more secure than it would be without it. So let's review the facts.



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Without this agreement or the Joint Plan of Action on which it builds, Iran's breakout time to get enough material -- nuclear material for a weapon was already two to three months. That's where we started. We started with Iran two months away with enough fissile material for 10 bombs. With this agreement, that breakout time goes to a year or more, and that will be the case for at least a decade.

Without this agreement, Iran could just double its enrichment capacity tomorrow -- literally -- and within a few years it could expand it to as many as 100,000 centrifuges. With this agreement, Iran will be operating about 5,000 centrifuges for a fixed period of time.

Without this agreement, Iran would be able to add rapidly and without any constraint to its stockpile of enriched uranium, which already at 20 percent was dangerous and higher than any of us were satisfied was acceptable. With this agreement, the stockpile will be kept at no more than 300 kilograms for 15 years.

Without this agreement, Iran's Arak reactor could produce enough weapons-grade plutonium each year to fuel two nuclear weapons. With this agreement, the core of the Arak reactor will be removed and filled with concrete, and Iran will not produce any weapons-grade plutonium.

Without this agreement, the IAEA would not have definitive access to locations suspected of conducting undeclared nuclear activities. With this agreement, the IAEA will be able to access any location, declared or undeclared, to follow up on legitimate concerns about nuclear activities.

There can be no question that this agreement will provide a stronger, more comprehensive, and more lasting means of limiting Iran's nuclear program than any realistic -- realistic alternative. And those who criticize and those who spend a lot of time suggesting that something could be better have an obligation to provide an alternative that, in fact, works. And let me add this: While the nations that comprise the P5+1 obviously don't always see eye-to-eye on global issues, we are in full agreement on the quality and importance of this deal. From the very beginning of this process, we have considered not only our own security concerns, but also the serious and legitimate anxieties of our friends and our allies in the region -- especially Israel and the Gulf States. And that has certainly been the case in recent days, as we worked to hammer out the final details.

So let me make a couple of points crystal-clear: First, what we are announcing today is an agreement addressing the threat posed by Iran's nuclear program -- period -- just the nuclear program. And anybody who knows the conduct of international affairs knows that it is better to deal with a country if you have problems with it if they don't have a nuclear weapon. As such, a number of U.S. sanctions will remain in place, including those related to terrorism, human rights, and ballistic missiles. In addition, the United States will continue our efforts to address concerns about Iran's actions in the region, including by our providing key support to our partners and our allies and by making sure we are vigilant in pushing back against destabilizing activities.



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And certainly, we continue to call on Iran to immediately release the detained U.S. citizens. These Americans have remained in our thoughts throughout this negotiation, and we will continue to work for their safe and their swift return. And we urge Iran to bring our missing Americans home as well.

And we also know there is not a challenge in the entire region that would not become worse if Iran had a nuclear weapon. That's why this deal is so important. It's also why we met at Camp David with the Gulf States and why we will make clear to them in the days ahead the ways in which we will work together in order to guarantee the security of the region. The provisions of this agreement help guarantee that the international community can and will address regional challenges without the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran.

Second, no part of this agreement relies on trust. It is all based on thorough and extensive transparency and verification measures that are included in very specific terms in the annexes of this agreement. If Iran fails to comply, we will know it, because we're going to be there -- the international community, through the IAEA and otherwise -- and we will know it quickly, and we will be able to respond accordingly.

And before closing, I would like to make -- I would like to say thank you to some folks who really made a difference in the course of all of this. And I want to begin by thanking my president, President Obama, who had the courage to launch this process, believe in it, support it, encourage it, when many thought that the objective was impossible, and who led the way from the start to the finish. The President has been resolute in insisting from the day he came to office that Iran will never have a nuclear weapon, and he has been equally -- equally strong in asserting that diplomacy should be given a fair chance to achieve that goal.

I want to thank my Cabinet colleagues -- excuse me -- for the many, many contributions that they have made -- Treasury Secretary Jack Lew, Defense Secretary Ash Carter, the entire DOD -- the department, but I especially want to thank my partner in this effort who came late to the process but has made an essential contribution to our achievement of this agreement, and that is Energy Secretary Ernie Moniz, who has put many long days here in Switzerland -- here and in Switzerland -- during these negotiations and, frankly, whose background as a nuclear scientist just proved to be essential in helping us, together with former foreign minister and Vice President Salehi, to be able to really work through very difficult issues, some of the toughest and technical issues.

I want to thank the members of Congress -- my former colleagues -- for their role in this achievement, particularly in designing and passing sanctions legislation that did exactly what the UN resolution set out to do, and that is bring Iran to the table in order to negotiate. It helped us achieve the goal of these negotiations, and I appreciate their counsel and I look forward to the next chapter in our conversations. Whatever disagreements might sometimes exist, we all agree on a goal of a Middle East where our interests are protected and our allies and our friends are safe and secure.



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And I want to especially thank my friend and my exceptional colleague, the Under Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, who has piloted -- she has led our team, which you can tell is still pretty enthusiastic, notwithstanding the long stay -- and she has really done so with just an amazingly strong will, with a clear sense of direction, very steady nerves, hardly any sleep -- and she's been doing that for several years, folks, with amazing periods of time away from home and away from family. She and our absolutely brilliant, tireless team of experts and diplomats have done an absolutely incredible job, and frankly, they deserve the gratitude of our nation. I also want to thank those who've served on the U.S. negotiating team in the past who were not here for the close but who were indispensable in helping to shape this negotiation -- particularly former Deputy Secretary of State Bill Burns, Jake Sullivan, who were absolutely essential in the earliest days.

I also want to thank my counterparts from every other delegation. All of the political directors were absolutely stunning in this. It's been a privilege of my public service to be able to work with the teams that I have worked with here and in the other cities we've been. Our counterparts have made absolutely critical contributions to this. This was a team effort. French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius; British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond; Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov; German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier; and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

I also want to thank the high representatives of the EU, there's several -- Javier Solana, Dame Cathy Ashton, and her successor, Federica Mogherini, who helped shepherd these past weeks in such an effective way. I also want to thank her deputy to the high representative, Helga Schmid, who, together with Wendy, they just formed an incredible unity, and they facilitated and guided our talks with enormous dedication and skill.

All of these leaders and the legion of aids who contributed countless hours to assisting us really set a new standard for international cooperation and hard work. And the fact that we have stood together and maintained our unity throughout these 18 months lends enormous weight and credibility to the agreement we have forged, but it also offers everybody a sign of possibilities, a sign of encouragement for those who believe in the power of diplomacy and of negotiation.

Thank you also to the Government of Austria, which has very generously hosted this last round of talks -- perhaps for a bit longer than it may have expected -- and it has also hosted countless rounds before this one, so they've made a very special contribution to this. And I'll tell you, all the police and the folks in the hotels and everybody in Austria, Vielen dank. We thank you for a really remarkable welcome.

I want to thank the other nations that have hosted these talks -- this has been sort of a traveling circus -- in particular Switzerland, Oman, Turkey, Russia, Kazakhstan, Iraq, and my home country, the United States.



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And I am particularly grateful -- we are particularly grateful, all of us, to the sultan of Oman, for his very personal engagement and support for the possibility of an agreement. He and his government were there to help every step of the way.

And I finally want to express my deep respect for the serious and constructive approach that Iran's representatives brought to our deliberations. The president of Iran, President Rouhani, had to make a difficult decision. We all know the tensions that exist. Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, a tough, capable negotiator, and patriot, a man who fought every inch of the way for the things he believed, and sometimes these were heated and passionate exchanges. But he and his team, while tough, always professional, always dedicated to finding solutions to difficult problems. And we were, both of us, able to approach these negotiations with mutual respect, even when there were times of a heated discussion, I think he would agree with me at the end of every meeting we left with a smile and with a conviction that we were going to come back and continue the process. We never lost sight of the goal that an agreement could bring and the best long-term interests of all concerned.

Now, we are under no illusions that the hard work is over. No one is standing here today to say that the path ahead is easy or automatic. We move now to a new phase -- a phase that is equally critical and may prove to be just as difficult -- and that is implementation. The 109 pages that we have agreed upon outline commitments made on both sides. In the end, however, this agreement will live or die by whether the leaders who have to implement it on both sides honor and implement the commitments that have been made.

There is reason to be optimistic. In January of last year, we took the first step by adopting the Joint Plan of Action. Man, were we told by skeptics that we were making a mistake of a lifetime -- that Iran would never comply, that this was a terrible agreement. But you know what? They were dead wrong. All sides met their obligations. The diplomatic process went forward. And we are already nearing almost two years of Iran's compliance, full compliance, with the agreement.

The entire world has a stake in ensuring that the same thing happens now. Not only will this deal, fully implemented, make the world safer than it is today, but it may also eventually unlock opportunities to begin addressing regional challenges that cannot be resolved without this kind of an agreement being in place in the first place. The past 18 months have been yet another example of diplomacy's consummate power to forge a peaceful way forward, no matter how impossible it may seem.

Obviously, every country that has been at the table over the past 18 months has had its own domestic perspective to consider. The United States is no exception. Back home, the future of Iran's nuclear program has long been the focus of a lot of debate, and I have absolutely no doubt that debate is going to become even more intense in the coming days. I'll tell you what, we welcome the opportunity to engage.



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These are vitally important issues, and they deserve rigorous but fact-based discussion. I've heard more talk in the last days about concessions being made and people racing. We have not made concessions. Lausanne is more than intact. And the facts are what should define this agreement.

From the start, President Obama and I have pledged that we would not settle for anything less than a good deal -- good for Americans and good for our partners, our friends, our allies, good for the future of the Middle East, and good for the peace of mind of the world. That is what we pursued and that is what we insisted on through long months of hard negotiations, and that is precisely what we believe we have achieved today.

I will just share with you very personally, years ago when I left college, I went to war. And I learned in war the price that is paid when diplomacy fails. And I made a decision that if I ever was lucky enough to be in a position to make a difference, I would try to do so. I believe this agreement actually represents an effort by the United States of America and all of its member -- its colleagues in the P5+1 to come together with Iran to avert an inevitability of conflict that would come were we not able to reach agreement. I think that's what diplomacy was put in place to achieve, and I know that war is the failure of diplomacy and the failure of leaders to make alternative decisions.

So we have a chance here and I hope that in the days ahead that people will look at this agreement hard for the facts that define it and that we will be able to fully implement it and move forward.

I'd be happy to take a few questions.

Moderator: The first question, it's from Indira Lakshmanan of Bloomberg News. Go ahead.

Question: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Mr. Secretary, what do you say to critics who say that lifting the UN arms embargo will fuel an arms race that endangers U.S. allies in the Middle East?

Secretary Kerry: Can you put it a little closer? I can't hear you very well.

Question: Sorry. What do you say to critics who say that lifting the UN arms embargo will fuel an arms race that endangers U.S. allies in the Middle East, making it unlikely that Congress will endorse the deal? And what's the Administration's plan if Congress rejects the agreement with a veto-proof majority? And last, what do you say to U.S. energy companies and other businesses who will remain under U.S. primary sanctions, putting them at a disadvantage against nations who now will be allowed to return to investment and trade in Iran? Thank you.



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Secretary Kerry: Well, let me answer the second one first. With respect to companies that want to rush to do business in Iran, it is absolutely true that because of the embargo by the United States, American companies will not be part of that rush -- unless specifically exempted, and very few are. So the reality is that, indeed, other countries will make a different choice. This is something Congress is going to have to consider, whether or not over the course of time, Iran, if they fully comply, whether they think it makes sense to continue.

But let me underscore, because this goes into your first question, and that is about the arms embargo. First of all, there were seven participants in this negotiation. Three of them believe there should be no embargo whatsoever, and four of them believe there should be a continuation. The result of the negotiation is that it not only continues for five full years, which is a pretty lengthy period of time during which a lot of other things can begin to happen, but it also continues under Chapter VII, Article 41, so that it is fully enforceable and has the force of the United Nations Security Council. Now, to have achieved that when three of the nations could have said no deal and walked away or you could have had a different outcome I think is significant, number one.

Number two, and this is very important, the United Nations Resolution 1929, which is the resolution that basically brings us here and set in motion the sanctions, says specifically that if Iran comes to negotiate -- not even get a deal, but comes to negotiate -- sanctions would be lifted. We're not doing that with respect to the arms embargo, even though not only have they come to the negotiation, they have in fact negotiated a deal.

So we have plenty of time over the next few years to address whatever the next steps will be in that issue, but I think that we did very well to hold on to that particular restraint, and we'll see where we go in the future.

Question: Congressional -- the congressional override and the veto? On the -- what will the Administration do if Congress has a veto-proof majority rejecting the deal?

Secretary Kerry: If Congress were to veto the deal, Congress -- the United States of America would be in noncompliance with this agreement and contrary to all of the other countries in the world. I don't think that's going to happen. I really don't believe that people would turn their backs on an agreement which has such extraordinary steps in it with respect to Iran's program as well as access and verification.

This agreement will withstand the test of scrutiny in the next days, and I look forward to being part of that debate, obviously. We will brief Congress immediately. We will be deeply engaged in it. But I am confident that people will not choose to turn their back on the rest of the international community, on this opportunity to change a relationship, and this opportunity which is the only viable alternative to be able to guarantee there is a peaceful nuclear program and that they will not succeed or choose to get a weapon.

Moderator: The second question is from Arash Azizi of Manoto.



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Question: Secretary Kerry, it wouldn't be a surprise to you that the sanctions -- both the nuclear sanctions and others -- have deeply hurt the Iranian people, from the airplanes that are falling, to the children who have needed medicine. When the Iranian people watch this presser tonight, mostly are thinking when and how quickly will the sanctions lifted, and how quickly can they see the result?

And they'll also be wondering that in a political atmosphere, when every single Republican contender has promised to scuttle the deal, aren't you worried that the hard efforts that you've made during this last little while will be undone by the next Administration? And what guarantees can this Administration make to prevent that?

Secretary Kerry: Well, as I said, there are a series of steps that are spelled out very, very clearly in this agreement that Iran has agreed to take, that are necessary to expand the breakout time and to begin to build confidence. Those steps will begin the moment after Congress has had its review time of this agreement. At that point Iran, when it sees the results, will begin to reduce its enrichment, begin to dismantle its centrifuges and take the steps necessary to expand the breakout time and provide confidence. So that is about 60 days away. And then a few months after that the IAEA will conclude and the other things will happen. So somewhere in the vicinity of four to six months or so, depending on how rapidly Iran is able to perform its initial functions. It's really dependent on Iran how fast that will happen, but I expect it to be somewhere in a matter of months -- maybe six or so; hard to say exactly -- and that will begin to make a difference.

With respect to this agreement, look, surviving the future, I really believe deeply that if Iran fully implements with two years already under Iran's belt, during which time Iran's program has effectively been frozen, and they have begun to show people that they're not able or ready to make a bomb, I am convinced that no one will see the common sense of turning away from that so that all of a sudden the next day Iran can go out and enrich more and do everything that you've just tried to prevent. I am convinced that whoever is our next president will see the wisdom of this agreement and they will leave it in place.

Moderator: Our final question is from Jay Solomon of The Wall Street Journal.

Question: Thank you. Secretary Kerry, Iran's most powerful political figure, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, was not here in Vienna, and has repeatedly voiced skepticism or suspicion about agreements with the United States. He's also said in recent days that his country will continue its opposition to U.S. foreign policy. What assurances did you get from Minister Zarif and other Iranian officials that the supreme leader does, in fact, back this agreement? And why are you confident Tehran won't back out of the deal like they did in 2009 on the nuclear fuel swap? Thank you.



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Secretary Kerry: Well, first of all, I never said I was confident that -- I am like everybody else here, and I said this very clearly in my comments a few minutes ago. I said the fact of the signing of this agreement does not eliminate all of the challenges. It's the implementation that will matter. And I'm not going to stand here and tell you that everything's going to work without a bump, without a hitch in the road, without some misunderstanding or some effort that needs clarification.

What I do know is that the negotiators absolutely affirmed to us on several occasions, and most importantly in the last 24 hours, that they are operating with a full mandate from the president, Rouhani, and from the supreme leader.

And in a negotiation, you lay down the procedures that are expected to be taken and you lay down the consequences for not doing that. Both of those are absolutely evident and clear in this agreement, and so we obviously look forward to the implementation, but I'm not the person to vouch for the fact -- which I can't -- as to exactly every step or moment in time that's going to be taken in the next days in terms of compliance. But we have put in place ample mechanisms with respect to compliance and with respect to accountability. So I feel very confident about our ability to protect our interests, to protect the security interests that are stake, and I full, frankly, expect over the next days to see this process at least begin to be followed up on.

Moderator: Thank you all very much.

Question: For the Iranian [inaudible] --

Moderator: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Question: -- not saying anything.

Secretary Kerry: Well, I answered some, but you got to bear with me because this is the longest I've stood up for quite a while, guys. So I'm going to move out.