

Kerry's Doubletalk on Iran's Previous Military Developments



State Department Spokesperson John Kirby and Secretary Kerry
Video Conference June 16, 2016

On Tuesday, June 16, 2015, Secretary of State John Kerry held a video conference with a number of

news media journalists on prevailing issues. Less than fourteen days remain till a definitive Joint Plan of

Action might be available for Congress review under the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act

(INARA). That is, if there isn't a delay. This video conference revealed still yet another stunning

concession on the critical element of Iran's previous military developments (PMD): perfect knowledge

of all prior nuclear developments making IAEA verification virtually impossible. Kerry was backtracking

on his November 2013 and April 2, 2015 statements.

[Watch](#) the State Department videoconference with Secretary Kerry:

Witness this [exchange](#) with Michael Gordon of the *New York Times*:

QUESTION: Sir, I'm Michael Gordon, *New York Times*. You

mentioned that possible military dimensions, which is the term of art for suspected nuclear design work and testing of nuclear components, has to be addressed as part of a prospective Iran agreement. Do these concerns need to be fully resolved before sanctions are eased or released or removed or suspended on Iran as part of that agreement? Is that a core principle or is that also negotiable? Thank you.

SECRETARY KERRY: Michael, the possible military dimensions, frankly, gets distorted a little bit in some of the discussion, in that we're not fixated on Iran specifically accounting for what they did at one point in time or another. We know what they did. We have no doubt. We have absolute knowledge with respect to the certain military activities they were engaged in.

What we're concerned about is going forward. It's critical to us to know that going forward, those activities have been stopped, and that we can account for that in a legitimate way. That clearly is one of the requirements in our judgment for what has to be achieved in order to have a legitimate agreement. And in order to have an agreement to trigger any kind of material significant sanctions relief, we would have to have those answers.

Armin Rosen, [writing](#) in *Business Insider* considered Kerry's answer contradictory to what the Secretary had said back in April:

This is a crucial question. Without Iran divulging the degree of its past work on nuclear weaponization, inspectors will have a harder time establishing a baseline for assessing Iranian compliance with the terms of a deal.

Disclosure on the nuclear program's military dimensions is also an early yardstick of Iranian good faith.

The International Atomic Energy Agency submitted 12 queries to Iran about its weaponization work in 2011. Tehran had [only responded to one of them as of February 2013](#), and the IAEA's leadership has acknowledged that [it doesn't think Iran will come clean before the June 30 deadline](#).

That makes some sense from Iran's perspective, as the country's negotiators have deftly used the ambiguities surrounding the country's weaponization work for negotiating leverage. But that rationale disappears once a deal is signed, at which point the sides will have spent whatever leverage they had while theoretically having a mutual incentive to make the agreement work. And it won't work as well if inspectors don't have an understanding of the full extent and history of Iran's nuclear program.

Here's why Rosen thought Kerry's answer contradictory and problematic in understanding how a definitive JPOA was verifiable:

Kerry's answer is puzzling for a number of other reasons. The administration's assessment of the nuclear dimensions of Iran's program is not just secret, but non-disprovable for anyone who hasn't seen US or allied intelligence on Iranian weaponization.

Kerry's answer doesn't mesh with repeated IAEA claims that the Agency [can't verify "that all the activities in Iran are for peaceful purposes."](#)

And Kerry doesn't elaborate about "what they did." Was Iran testing nuclear detonators, or diverting fissile material to a weapons program? Is the extent of Iranian weaponization work greater or less than the public record – which establishes that Iran [may have tested nuclear weapons triggers](#) at the Parchin facility up until 2003,

and [maintained a research group dedicated to weaponization activities?](#)

Kerry's statement raises more questions than it answers. But it appears that the Obama administration isn't going to insist on full Iranian disclosure of the extent of its nuclear program as part of a comprehensive deal.

Here's why:

That's a shift from just two months ago; right after the parties reached a preliminary deal, when Kerry