

UN Security Council tightens sanctions on Iran

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The United Nations Security Council voted Wednesday for its fourth sanctions resolution against Iran, as part of a US-led effort to isolate and weaken the Tehran regime, using Iran's nuclear power program as a pretext. The resolution was adopted by a 12-2 vote, with Turkey and Brazil opposing and Lebanon abstaining.

Turkey and Iran had sought to avert a new sanctions resolution with a last-minute diplomatic foray last month, resulting in an agreement signed in Tehran between Brazilian President Lula da Silva, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. This compromise was dismissed by the Obama administration and relegated to one sentence in the Security Council document.

As in the three previous Security Council resolutions—two in 2006 and one in 2008—the key bargaining took place among the permanent members with veto power. The US, Britain and France introduced the resolution, and China and Russia proposed amendments to water it down and insure that their own economic relations with Iran did not suffer. China is Iran's largest single trading partner and has signed \$120 billion in oil industry deals there, obtaining more than 10 percent of its oil imports from Iran.

The ten-page resolution is a mass of legalistic verbiage that incorporates the sanctions already imposed in three previous resolutions, as well as the findings of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the arm of the UN that monitors compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The substance of the new sanctions is far less important than the overall direction of US and UN policy. The resolution expands the arms embargo against Iran, blacklists 25 state-run firms and 15 controlled by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Iran's largest military force. One named individual, Javad Rahiqi, head of an Iranian nuclear center, is subject to a travel ban and asset freeze.

The resolution urges UN member states to inspect all air and sea cargoes bound for Iran for materials potentially related to nuclear weapons development, but stops short of authorizing the use of force to compel searches of ships in international waters.

More significant is the resolution's green light for additional sanctions to be imposed by member states, particularly those in

the European Union that are major trading partners with Iran. There are multiple passages urging various forms of restrictions on trade and investment with Iran, essentially a menu of pre-approved actions to weaken the Iranian economy.

US Defense Secretary Robert Gates said the day before the Security Council vote that he expected quick action by many governments to adopt measures that go beyond those explicitly mandated by the resolution.

Leaders of both the Democrats and Republicans in Congress said they expected new legislation tightening existing restrictions, perhaps this month. The US government already bans most trade with and investment in Iran by American corporations, but additional measures could affect foreign subsidiaries and foreign companies that do business in both the US and Iran.

President Obama hailed the sanctions resolution, declaring it sent an "unmistakable message. ... Actions do have consequences and today the Iranian government will face some of those consequences."

Iran's U.N. Ambassador Mohammad Khazaee denounced the resolution as a US-led conspiracy against Iran. "No amount of pressure and mischief will be able to break our nation's determination to pursue and defend its legal and inalienable rights," he said. "Iran is one of the most powerful and stable countries in the region and never bowed—and will never bow—to the hostile actions and pressures by these few powers and will continue to defend its rights."

China's U.N. Ambassador Zhang Yesui claimed the vote was directed at preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and not aimed against "the normal life of the Iranian people."

The Russian Foreign Ministry stated that Moscow supported the resolution in part because it was drafted to "exclude the possibility of employing force." Similar rationalizations were employed in support of US-backed resolutions against Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq in 2002, which were then cited by the Bush administration as a pseudo-legal basis for the US-led invasion and conquest of the country.

The resolution obtained less support on the Security Council than any previous Iran sanctions measure. While Turkey and Brazil had been expected to oppose the measure, the abstention by Lebanon came despite heavy US diplomatic pressure,

including a call Wednesday morning from Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to Lebanese President Michel Suleiman.

The Lebanese cabinet includes ministers from Hezbollah, the Shi'ite-based party and militia that fought a month-long war in 2006 with invading Israeli troops in southern Lebanon, and which has close ties to Iran. The cabinet deadlocked 14-14 over whether to support the resolution.

The American media continues to stoke up public opinion against Iran. The *Washington Post* published an analysis of the Security Council resolution on its web site, headlined, "Obama's efforts on Iran sanctions fall short of expectations," quoting former Bush administration officials denouncing the decreased support on the Security Council, and pointing out that previous Bush-sponsored resolutions on Iran passed by 15-0 or 14-0 votes.

"The resolution was also far weaker than the administration originally had hoped for," the *Post* claimed, "in part because US officials had to pay a high price to win Russian and Chinese cooperation. US sanctions were ended against Russian firms that had been linked to Iran's nuclear and missile programs, and China's economic interests in Iran were walled off from the sanctions."

Two articles published in the *New York Times* Tuesday were part of the anti-Iran campaign. The first, written by David Sanger, said the Obama administration had organized classified intelligence briefings for members of the Security Council on the alleged Iranian nuclear weapons program.

"The briefings, according to foreign diplomats and some American officials, amount to a tacit admission by the United States that it is gradually backing away from a 2007 National Intelligence Estimate," Sanger wrote. "It is using new evidence to revise and in some cases reverse conclusions from that estimate, which came to the much disputed conclusion that while Iran had stepped up its production of nuclear fuel, its leadership had suspended its work on the devices and warhead designs needed to actually build a weapon."

The 2007 NIE became an obstacle to those in the Bush administration who wanted to launch a military strike on Iran, either unilaterally or in conjunction with Israel, before Bush and Cheney left the White House. Its formal rescinding would represent another step in preparing the political climate for the use of force.

The second *Times* article claimed that Israeli officials had visited Beijing in February, shortly before China shifted its position and agreed to adopt a fourth sanctions resolution. While the Chinese audience seemed uninterested in "evidence" of Iranian nuclear activities, "they really sat up in their chairs when we described what a pre-emptive attack would do to the region and on oil supplies they have come to depend on," an Israeli official told the *Times*.

This suggests that China's acquiescence in the latest round of sanctions was obtained, at least in part, by the threat of a unilateral Israeli assault on Iran if the resolution was blocked. It

has been widely reported that Israel now stations submarines armed with nuclear weapons in the Persian Gulf, openly targeting the Islamic Republic for nuclear annihilation.

In addition to legitimizing further economic and diplomatic action against Iran by the major imperialist powers, the Security Council resolution was provocatively timed. It was passed only three days before the first anniversary of the presidential election in which Iranian President Ahmadinejad won a second term, a fact that Obama was careful to point out in his remarks on the resolution.

Opposition groups supported by the United States and the European powers—the so-called Green Movement—have threatened to stage anti-government demonstrations in Tehran and other cities on the anniversary, Saturday, June 12.

The Islamic fundamentalist regime has taken preemptive action, mobilizing large numbers of the paramilitary Basij force—some statements have claimed as many as two million—to suppress any overt show of opposition.

The Supreme Leader of the Islamic regime, Ayatollah Khamenei, made his first appearance at a public Friday prayer service in Tehran since the period immediately following the election. He warned opposition leaders like Mirhossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi that their past record of service to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, founder of the Islamic Republic, would not necessarily protect them. "Some came with the imam from Paris and, after a while, due to treason, were hanged," he said, referring to Khomeini's return from exile during the 1979 revolution against the Shah.



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