Momentum builds around US nuclear deal with Iran

Keith Jones
26 November 2013

Important sections of the US ruling class have signaled their support for the "interim agreement" which the Obama administration, its European Union allies, and China and Russia have reached with Iran over its nuclear program.

Under the deal, announced early Sunday morning, Tehran will roll back and freeze much of its nuclear program and open its nuclear facilities to a highly intrusive inspections regime. In return, the US and the EU will marginally relax punishing economic sanctions that have more than halved Iran's oil exports and frozen the country out of the world banking system.

With the interim agreement in place, Iran and the P-6 (the US, Britain, France, Russia, China and Germany) are to negotiate a final agreement on further steps Iran must take for the remaining sanctions to be lifted.

The shift in US policy toward negotiating a deal with Iran had been in preparation for some time. Yesterday, reports emerged that in March, US officials—led by US Deputy Secretary of State William Burns and Jake Sullivan, the top foreign policy advisor to Vice President Joe Biden—secretly traveled to the Persian Gulf emirate of Oman to pursue talks with Iranian officials.

This was followed by a secret May visit with Iranian officials in Oman by Secretary of State John Kerry, ahead of Iran's presidential election in June. That election produced the victory of Hassan Rouhani on a platform of reaching an agreement with the United States, after other major candidates were excluded by the regime's Guardian Council. (See: "Moderate" cleric wins Iranian presidential election").

These long-running negotiations point to some of the considerations behind the Obama administration's decision not to launch a direct attack last September on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, a key Iranian ally, against whom Washington had waged a two-year proxy war, relying on Sunni Islamist forces tied to Al Qaeda.

Washington calculated that it could extract sweeping concessions from Iran—which is reeling under the impact of the sanctions and whose ruling elite is terrified of rising discontent in the working class—and perhaps harness the Iranian regime to its foreign policy.

Iran's economy has been ravaged by what are arguably the most extreme sanctions ever imposed on a country outside the context of war. Tehran is being granted only $7 billion of sanctions relief over a six-month period. This includes supervised access to $4.2 billion of its own money—barely 5 percent of the $80 billion of Iranian funds frozen in the world banking system—and the suspension of sanctions on the import of petrochemicals and trade in gold and auto parts.

Tehran has signaled that it is ready to throw open Iran's economy, including its oil industry, to US and EU investment. Moreover, it has indicated its willingness to assist the US in stabilizing the broader Middle East, from Afghanistan to Syria, pointing to the role it played in helping the US install Hamid Karzai as Afghanistan's puppet ruler at the 2001 Bonn conference.

The ultimate aim of US policy is to impose a neo-colonial regime in Iran aligned with the global policy of US imperialism, as existed before the 1979 Iranian Revolution overthrew the brutal regime of the Shah.

Washington undoubtedly hopes to integrate Iran into the US "pivot to Asia"—Obama's signature foreign policy initiative, aimed at isolating China.

Exulting that the Iran deal "opens the door to a range of geopolitical possibilities available to no American leader since Jimmy Carter," the *New York Times* wrote: "Mr. Obama has wanted to bring in Iran from the cold since he was a presidential candidate, declaring in 2007

© World Socialist Web Site

that he would pursue ‘aggressive personal diplomacy’ with Iranian leaders, and ruling out the concept of leadership change, which was popular at the time. But the president has sought to avoid being consumed by the Middle East, in part so he could shift America’s gaze to Asia.”

Just as the initial deal with Iran was announced on Sunday, Washington delivered a sharply worded war threat to China about its dispute with Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. Denouncing China’s plans to set up an air defense zone around the islands, US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said: “This unilateral action increases the risk of misunderstanding and miscalculations. … We are in close consultation with our allies and partners in the region, including Japan. We remain steadfast in our commitments.”

Under the terms of the US-Japan Security Treaty, the US is committed to go to war against China should a conflict erupt between China and Japan over the islands.

The initial deal with Iran has been generally well received by the US and European media, though there are some dissenting voices. In an editorial titled “Iran’s Nuclear Triumph,” the *Wall Street Journal* urged Congress to immediately impose further sanctions—something prohibited under the interim agreement—so as to scuttle the deal with Tehran.

On Monday, Robert Menendez, the Democrat who chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and a self-avowed “skeptic” of any US rapprochement with Iran, said he expects legislation will soon be tabled in the Senate imposing further sanctions on Iran. But he indicated that such legislation “will provide for a six month window,” corresponding to the duration of the interim deal, “to reach a final agreement before imposing new sanctions.”

Last week, two “elder statesman” of the US national security establishment, the Democrat Zbigniew Brzezinski and the Republican Brent Scrowcroft, issued an open letter endorsing the Obama administration’s overtures to Tehran.

The shift in US policy toward Iran initially caused consternation among Washington’s Middle East allies, particularly Israel and Saudi Arabia. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the interim agreement an “historic mistake,” announcing Sunday that Israel would not be bound by it—an implicit threat that it will mount a unilateral attack on Iran. The London *Sunday Times* recently reported that Saudi Arabia had offered to provide logistical assistance to an Israeli attack on Iran.

On Monday, however, the two US allies seemed to indicate they were moving toward grudging acceptance of the deal. The Israeli prime minister announced that he had accepted Obama’s offer for Israeli officials to begin consultations next week with their US counterparts on what further concessions should be extracted from Iran as the price for a final agreement.

On Sunday, the Saudi regime said nothing. Yesterday, it issued a terse statement of support, saying that “if there are good intentions,” the interim agreement could constitute “a first step towards a comprehensive solution for Iran’s nuclear programme.”

The concern of the Israeli and Saudi regimes is not the Iranian nuclear program, but the risk that a US-Iran rapprochement might reduce their own strategic importance to the US.

The diplomatic opening to Tehran “could alter other American calculations in the region,” explained the *New York Times*, “from Syria, where the Iranian-backed group Hezbollah is fighting alongside President Bashar al-Assad’s government, to Afghanistan, where the Iranians could be helpful in brokering a postwar settlement with the Taliban. The prospect of such a long-term strategic realignment is precisely what has so alarmed American allies like Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf Emirates and Israel.”

The Iranian government, with the support of Ayatollah Khamenei, the Islamic Republic’s supreme leader, has presented last weekend’s agreement as a “victory,” claiming that Iran’s right to enrich uranium has been recognized.

Secretary of State Kerry has flatly denied this, noting that the agreement stipulates that the parameters of any Iranian nuclear program are to be “mutually agreed upon” between Tehran and the P-6.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site