

Claiming nuclear deal “victory,” Tehran signals readiness to ally with US

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Iran’s government is hailing the interim nuclear deal it reached last weekend with the US and its allies as a “victory,” while signaling its readiness to make huge concessions to US imperialism in return for a loosening of punitive economic sanctions that have crippled Iran’s economy.

These concessions include throwing open Iran’s economy, especially its oil and natural gas sectors, to US and European investment and helping Washington suppress opposition to its foreign policy across the Middle East, from Afghanistan to Lebanon. Under the interim agreement, Iran will freeze and roll back its nuclear program and place it under an unprecedentedly intrusive inspection regime, in return for what US officials call “modest, reversible” sanctions relief.

The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khamenei, publicly approved the interim agreement, issuing a letter praising President Hassan Rouhani for securing an agreement that “legitimize(s) the Iranian nation’s nuclear program on the international stage.”

Strings have no doubt also been pulled to make a show of “national unity.” Nevertheless, the absence of opposition inside the political establishment—the leadership of the Revolutionary Guards has either been publicly supportive or silent—indicates that the dominant factions of the Iranian bourgeoisie are working for a rapprochement with US imperialism.

In claiming victory, Iranian authorities are arguing that the interim agreement recognizes Iran’s “right,” as a Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty signatory to enrich uranium for civilian nuclear purposes. In fact, Washington disputes this claim. Almost as soon as the agreement was signed, US Secretary of State John Kerry declared that Washington has conceded no such right: the parameters of Iran’s nuclear program will be

“mutually agreed” upon as part of a final settlement between Iran and the sextet—the US, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany.

Kayhan, a daily associated with “hardline” factions of Iran’s clerical establishment, was one of the few press outlets critical of the deal, which it opposed in its editorials. It noted the conflict between Tehran’s and Washington’s interpretation of enrichment rights, titling its first editorial on the interim accord, “America was not trustworthy: Geneva agreement lasted one hour.”

Though Iran has made major concessions, *Kayhan* remarks, “The fundamental structure of the sanctions is still intact, and they are (only) supposed to talk about it in the future.”

The total sanctions relief over the half-year life of the interim agreement amounts to only \$7 billion. This is the equivalent of six weeks of Iran’s losses due to the sanctions just on its oil exports.

With the sanctions crippling Iran’s economy, large sections of the bourgeoisie have themselves been economically squeezed. The Iranian ruling elite’s overriding fear is that the socioeconomic crisis will provoke a confrontation with the working class.

Iran’s economy contracted 6 percent in the fiscal year ending last March, inflation is running at close to 40 percent, and there are 5 million unemployed in a country of 75 million.

The shift towards accommodation with Washington has long been in preparation. In mid-March, Iranian and US officials launched what proved to be a half-year-long series of secret talks. With Khamenei’s blessing, Rouhani—a protégé of Hashemi Rafsanjani, the former president who for two decades has spearheaded a push for reconciliation with Washington—stood in June’s presidential election, advocating accommodation with

the West.

This shift has been publicly promoted as a means of escaping the ruinous sanctions and avoiding a potentially devastating military confrontation with the US—as the path to prosperity and peace. In reality, the Iranian bourgeoisie is seeking to strengthen its rule, by allying with US imperialism against the Iranian working class and the oppressed masses of the Middle East.

In the aftermath of Sunday's agreement, the Iranian regime is giving a clearer indication of what this would entail, while the US and its European allies are, for their part, beginning to outline the sweeping concessions they are demanding from Tehran.

In a speech Tuesday evening marking the first 100 days of his administration, Rouhani called for free-market restructuring of Iran's economy, saying that sanctions alone are not the cause of the country's "unparalleled stagflation." He pledged to pursue subsidy reform—a euphemism for slashing and ultimately eliminating price subsidies on gasoline and cash payments now given to most Iranians to replace recently abolished subsidies on key foodstuffs and services.

Rouhani is also preparing massive budget cuts, although his government recently balked at the 30 percent cut proposed by the Majlis for fear of both the popular reaction and the economic impact.

A key element in Iran's overtures to the West and the EU is an offer of a substantial stake in the country's energy resources.

In an interview with the *Financial Times* published Tuesday, Iran's Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh said he has already been meeting with executives of Europe's leading energy companies, including France's Total, Royal Dutch Shell, Norway's Statoil, and Italy's ENI to discuss possible large scale investments in Iran's oil and natural gas fields just as soon as the sanctions are lifted. He also said he had been "indirectly" meeting with US energy companies to plan for the day when Washington allows them to resume business with Iran.

Zanganeh told the *Times* that Iran was prepared to offer the EU and US transnationals better terms than neighbouring Iraq and held out the prospect they would be able to muscle out Chinese firms, who he indicated have benefited from the lack of competitors.

Iran is also indicating its readiness to make major concessions to Washington's broader strategic interests in the Middle East, pressing for pro-Iranian forces in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq to align themselves more closely with US foreign policy.

One gets an idea of the scope and scale of the agreement being discussed by recalling the secret "grand bargain" Tehran offered to Washington in 2003, immediately after the US invasion of Iraq. In return for US pledges not to seek "regime change" in Iran, Iran offered to recognize Israel, cut off military support to Hezbollah and the Palestinian group Hamas, and assist the US in stabilizing Iraq and Afghanistan. "The ripples of detente between Tehran and Washington," writes Geoffrey Aronson in *Al-Monitor*, "may well reverberate in places long considered immune to effective diplomacy and cooperation—for example, the role of Hezbollah in Lebanon."

On Tuesday, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif said Iran would welcome an invitation to the so-called Geneva II conference on Syria. "Iran is ready to utilize all its political capacity and power, along with other regional countries to help resolve the Syrian crisis," he said.

Iran is the principal regional ally of Bashir al-Assad's regime in its war with the US- and Saudi-backed, al-Qaeda-allied opposition.

The Obama administration's decision in early September to pull back from directly launching war with Syria was bound up with its probing of Iran's readiness to seek an accommodation with Washington. It subsequently abandoned its opposition to Iran participating in Geneva II, but only if Tehran accepted as a precondition that the Assad regime must enter into a "transitional" coalition government with the Islamist opposition and other US proxies.



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