

Obama's letter to Iranian leader complicates nuclear talks

Peter Symonds
7 November 2014

As the US prepares for talks over Iran's nuclear programs, the *Wall Street Journal* yesterday leaked details of a secret letter from President Barack Obama to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei purportedly linking a nuclear agreement to cooperation in fighting Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militias.

The letter, reportedly written last month, is likely to harden opposition to a nuclear deal by those critical of the talks and last year's interim agreement. This includes the Republicans, who have just won control of both houses of the US Congress, as well as US allies in the Middle East such as Israel and Saudi Arabia.

The Obama administration came under fire for making concessions to Iran in the interim agreement, even though it offered a minimal easing of harsh economic sanctions in return for an effective freeze on, and intrusive inspections of, Iran's nuclear programs. The US and its allies continue to make unsubstantiated claims that Tehran is seeking to build nuclear weapons.

The first deadline for a comprehensive agreement expired in July, but the agreement was extended to November 24. Iran is now under pressure from the so-called P5+1 group—the US, France, Britain, China, Russia and Germany—to make significant concessions or face a further ratcheting of a sanctions regime that has slashed oil exports by 40 percent and effectively cut the country's economy off from international financial markets.

On Wednesday, Obama declared that the US would present Iran with a framework for its nuclear program but added that it was “an open question” whether a deal would be reached. While Obama blamed the “anti-Americanism” of “a sizable portion of the [Iranian] political elite,” the US is insisting that Iran dismantle or modify key elements of its nuclear

facilities—particularly its capacity to enrich uranium.

US Secretary of State John Kerry, speaking in Paris on Wednesday, said he wanted an agreement, but warned it would be “very difficult” to reach after the November 24 deadline. While dismissing the impact of the Republican majority in Congress, Kerry is clearly exploiting it to add to the pressure on Iran.

The new Congress, which will begin sitting in January, could potentially block a nuclear deal or push through legislation for even tougher economic sanctions. Asked about Obama's letter, Republican House leader John Boehner declared: “I don't trust the Iranians.” Speaking about the nuclear talks, he expressed the “hope that the negotiations that are underway are serious negotiations, but I have my doubts.”

The White House has not denied the letter's existence, but refused to comment on “private correspondence.” Kerry is due to travel to Oman for talks this weekend with Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif and outgoing European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, to be followed by full negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran in Vienna.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*'s account, Obama's letter directly linked any US cooperation with Iran against ISIS with a nuclear agreement by the November deadline. Publicly, the US has always insisted that a nuclear deal did not imply a broader rapprochement with Iran—which sections of the Iranian elite backing President Hasan Rouhani have been seeking as a means of ending the crippling US-led economic blockade.

Far from indicating concessions to Tehran, the letter suggests that the US will exact a far higher price for easing economic sanctions than heavy restrictions on Iran's nuclear programs.

Washington routinely declares that it is not cooperating with Iran in the new US-led war in Iraq and Syria, but it is already evident that Tehran is responding to US demands.

Iran's withdrawal of political support for Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki was instrumental in the US-led campaign to force him out of office and install a "more inclusive," that is, more pliable, puppet government in Baghdad.

Moreover, speaking to the media yesterday about Obama's letter, White House spokesman Josh Earnest acknowledged that "we have also discussed on the sidelines of those [nuclear] talks [with Iran] on at least a couple of occasions, the ongoing campaign that is being conducted against ISIL [ISIS]."

A senior US military official told CNN yesterday that the US had opened communications channels with Iran—via Iraqi officials—regarding American military action against ISIS. While insisting that such discussion did not involve military coordination, it was seen as necessary to "de-conflict" US and Iranian operations, including over "airspace management." This is an indication that Iran is turning a blind eye to US incursions into its airspace.

The Obama administration will no doubt seek to extract what assistance it can from Iran, but its main target in the expanding war in the Middle East is not ISIS, but the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, Iran's chief regional ally. As Washington escalates the conflict, a US-Iranian confrontation, rather than a rapprochement, is far more likely.

The *Wall Street Journal* noted that, according to unnamed sources, Obama did not inform key allies in the region, such as Israel, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (UAE), about his letter to Khamenei. The Israeli government has been critical of the US talks on a nuclear agreement with Iran from the outset. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have joined the US war in Iraq and Syria as a means of undermining Assad and weakening Iran.

Any suggestion that Obama is making concessions to Iran would prompt a sharp reaction and strain ties with US allies. Washington is already under pressure from Turkey to explicitly target Assad and support Ankara's calls for the imposition of a no-fly zone and ground buffer zones inside Syria.

Whatever the exact circumstances and reasons behind

the revelation of Obama's secret letter, the outcome will be a harder line from Washington on the upcoming nuclear talks.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact