

Obama hails Iran deal as US strategic triumph

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The Obama administration and Iran's government have both gone into overdrive to promote Thursday's framework agreement between Tehran, the US, the four other permanent members of the UN Security Council, and Germany for the "normalization" of Iran's civilian nuclear program.

If the deal results, as planned, in a comprehensive final agreement by June 30th, it will represent a major strategic shift for both Washington and Tehran.

Since the revolutionary overthrow of the dictatorship of the US-backed Shah 36 years ago, a constant in US foreign policy has been unrelenting hostility to Iran's clerical-bourgeois regime. The US supported Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war and implemented a "dual containment" policy directed against both Tehran and Baghdad following the 1991 Gulf War. In 2002, it proclaimed Iran part of an "axis of evil," even after Tehran had assisted Washington in the occupation of Afghanistan. In 2003 and again in 2007, the Bush-Cheney administration set in motion plans for war with Iran.

Since 2011, as Obama boasted Thursday, the US and its European Union allies have subjected Iran to the most punishing economic sanctions regime in history.

Washington's ostensible goal in the nuclear negotiations with Iran, which were initiated through secret talks dating back to early 2013, has been to ensure that it will take Iran at least a year to effect a "nuclear breakout"—that is, to build a nuclear weapon in defiance of Tehran's Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty obligations and the oft-repeated pledges of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, that the Islamic Republic will never nuclearize.

The US and the other great powers do want to maintain their virtual monopoly on nuclear weapons. But the nuclear issue, which was first trumpeted by Bush and Cheney in 2002-2003 to serve as the pretext for an impending war on Iran, has always been secondary. The fundamental issue has been and remains compelling the Iran bourgeoisie to forgo any challenge to US hegemony in the Middle East.

Under yesterday's framework agreement, Iran has made sweeping concessions to the US and its EU partners on the nuclear issue. It will be subjected to the most intrusive International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections regime ever devised, with Iran ceding to IAEA inspectors the

power in perpetuity to enter any site or facility in Iran that they deem "suspicious."

Iran's capacity to enrich uranium and its existing stockpile of enriched uranium will be drastically reduced for the next 15 years. Key elements of its civilian nuclear infrastructure are to be dismantled, with the Fordow nuclear enrichment facility converted into a research center and the Arak heavy water research reactor redesigned and rebuilt so as to prevent the production of weapons-grade plutonium.

US critics of the agreement are complaining that it does not clearly spell out the time frame and conditions under which the US-EU economic sanctions will be "suspended," nor those imposed by the UN Security Council. But this is precisely the point: while the agreement details numerous things Iran must do or not do for 10, 15 and, in some cases 20 years or more, it gives the US and its allies great latitude as to when the sanctions will cease.

Moreover, the agreement stipulates that should the US and EU deem Iran in non-compliance, the economic sanctions will automatically "snap back." The UN sanctions will also continue to be wielded as a constant threat against Tehran, since they are to be incorporated into a new UN Security Council resolution endorsing the final Iran-P-6 agreement, with provisions for their re-imposition in the event a still-to-be-defined dispute resolution mechanism fails to settle a complaint about Iran's fulfillment of the terms of the deal.

While Obama is touting this as a diplomatic triumph for the US, Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif has called it a "a win-win," based on the fact that the agreement concedes, at least on paper, Iran's right to a full-cycle nuclear program, and none of its nuclear facilities are being permanently shut down.

In reality, the Iranian bourgeoisie, reeling under the impact of the economic sanctions and terrified of a challenge from the working class, is desperate for an accommodation with the US.

The Obama administration and those sections of the political and military-security establishment, such as the *New York Times*, that are supporting the deal, do so based on a series of predatory calculations—above all, that an accommodation with Iran will strengthen US imperialism's hand against its most important and formidable geo-strategic rivals, Russia and China.

These calculations include:

1) That US imperialism can do business with Iran's clerical-bourgeois elite.

Since 1989, Tehran has repeatedly signaled its readiness to make a "grand bargain" with Washington, only to be rebuffed by successive US administrations, Democratic and Republican alike. In the wake of Washington's 2003 invasion of Iraq, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, approved a secret offer to the Bush administration under which Iran would have recognized Israel and cut off military support to Hamas and Hezbollah, if Washington agreed to abandon its drive for regime change in Tehran.

The current Iranian president, Hasan Rouhani, who has spearheaded the drive for rapprochement with the US, is a protégé and confidante of the ex-president Hashemi Rafsanjani, who for years has led a faction of the Iranian bourgeoisie that champions an orientation to the US and EU and opposes those elements around the Revolutionary Guards who have developed close commercial ties to China and military-security collaboration with Russia.

2) That the re-establishment of diplomatic and commercial ties with Iran, including the opening up of its economy to US and EU investment, will provide American imperialism with increasing influence and leverage over the Iranian elite, enabling it to exploit fissures within Iran's ruling circles and, if necessary, effect regime change.

This is spelled out in yesterday's *New York Times* lead article co-written by Michael Gordon and David Sanger, both senior writers with close ties to the US military-intelligence apparatus. After noting that under Thursday's agreement, many of the restrictions on Iran's nuclear program will expire after 15 years, they write that this amounts to "a bet that after 15 years, Iran will be a far more cooperative international player, perhaps under different management."

3) That Iran can be harnessed to assisting the US in restabilizing the Middle East under American hegemony. The US and Iran are already tacitly cooperating in the military campaign to prop up Iraq's government against the Islamic State.

4) That an accommodation with Iran can strengthen the US world position against Russia and China in multiple ways.

China is now Iran's biggest economic partner and most important foreign investor. Russia has long been Iran's biggest foreign military supplier. While this partnership took a hit in 2010 when Russia failed to deliver on a contract to supply S-300 ground-to-air missiles, citing UN sanctions, last January, during a visit of the Russian defence minister to Tehran, the two sides signed a new military cooperation deal.

In explaining the deal, Iranian Defence Minister Hossein Dehqan said Iran and Russia have a "shared analysis of US global strategy, its interference in regional and international affairs, and the need to cooperate in the struggle against the interference of foreign forces in the region."

A nuclear deal and the resumption of relations between Tehran and Washington will allow the US to contest for economic and geo-political influence in Iran, with the objective first of neutralizing Russian and Chinese influence and, ultimately, harnessing Iran directly to its strategic drive against them.

In arguing for his Iranian gambit, Obama has also repeatedly warned that if the US were to reject so favourable a nuclear deal, it would be blamed by the "international community." What Obama really means is that the US drive against Russia and China is making it increasingly problematic for Washington to rely on them as partners in pressuring Iran, including in upholding the sanctions, and that Washington's best course is to seal a deal with Tehran now.

There are substantial sections of the US establishment who oppose any accommodation with Iran's current regime, which they cannot forgive for its association with the overthrow of the Shah and its obstruction of US policy in the region.

But apart from pathological hatred for any regime that impedes US world domination, there is deep-rooted concern that the opening to Tehran is throwing the balance of power askew by undercutting Washington's traditional allies in the region.

In Israel, Saudi Arabia and Turkey there is acute fear that Obama's turn toward Iran could ultimately lead to a revival of the Washington-Tehran axis that existed when the Shah was the prized US asset in the region.

Predictably, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has railed against Thursday's agreement, saying it "would threaten the survival of Israel." In the last 48 hours, various spokesmen for the Israeli government and military have reiterated that Israel reserves the right to attack Iran in "self-defense."

Saudi Arabia has publicly welcomed the agreement. This is only because it deems it unwise to publicly go against the Obama administration under conditions where it is relying on US support for its war on Yemen, which targets Houthi rebels allied with Iran. Behind the scenes, however, Riyadh is said to be expressing its alarm and anger to Washington.



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