

Obama defends Iran nuclear pact as Pentagon prepares for war

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In an interview with the *New York Times* published Monday, President Barack Obama spelled out his attitude toward the deal announced last Thursday with Iran on the country's nuclear program. Obama made it clear that Washington sees the agreement with Tehran to severely limit its nuclear activities and subject them to an unprecedentedly intrusive inspection regime as a kind of "test" of the Iranian government, even as the US maintains its option to launch a war against Iran.

The interview, given to Thomas Friedman, the *Times* foreign affairs columnist who served as one of the newspaper's most ardent advocates of the unprovoked US war on Iraq, was organized as a means of countering a wave of hostile criticism from the Republican Party in the US and the right-wing Zionist government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel.

In the *Times* interview, as in earlier statements on the deal, Obama stressed that military action remained among the "options on the table," should Washington deem Tehran out of compliance with the agreement.

Describing the US posture in relation to the negotiations, Obama said: "It's not as if, in all these conversations, I'm leaving all my rifles at the door. We're walking into these negotiations and everyone knows we've got the most firepower. And we're not relinquishing our capacity to defend ourselves or our allies."

Stressing the tactical character of the push toward a negotiated agreement with Iran, Obama added: "Iran's defense budget is \$30 billion. Our defense budget is closer to \$600 billion. Iran understands that they cannot fight us.... You asked about an Obama doctrine. The doctrine is: We will engage, but we preserve all our capabilities."

Underscoring the concrete implications of Obama's

invocation of US "capabilities," the *Wall Street Journal* reported last Friday that the Pentagon has successfully tested a new upgraded version of its so-called Massive Ordnance Penetrator, or MOP, the bunker-buster bomb, which is the most destructive non-nuclear weapon in the US arsenal.

"The Pentagon continues to be focused on being able to provide military options for Iran if needed," a senior US official told the *Journal*. "We have not taken our eyes off the ball."

The upgrading of the weapon came following the conclusion by Pentagon war planners that the existing 30,000-pound MOP wasn't powerful enough to assure destruction of some of Iran's nuclear facilities, particularly the Fordow nuclear enrichment plant, which is built into the side of a mountain near the city of Qom.

A strike on such facilities would consist of two of the huge bombs dropped in sequence. "Steering two or more massive ordinance penetrators to a single entry point would have a devastating effect never before seen by a nonnuclear weapon," the *Journal* quoted unnamed US officials as saying.

In addition to militarist muscle-flexing, Obama stressed Washington's unconditional commitment to the defense of Israel. His interview was made public in the midst of a full-throated campaign by Israeli prime minister Netanyahu to block any agreement with Iran.

Netanyahu appeared on three different television networks' Sunday talk shows, denouncing the agreement as a "bad deal" that would give Iran "a free path to the bomb." He further cautioned that the deal would trigger a "nuclear arms race among the Sunni countries in the Middle East." Israel, of course, is already a nuclear power, with hundreds of nuclear weapons, and has refused to sign or abide by the terms

of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The entire debate between Washington and Tel Aviv over the agreement with Iran is based on the false assumption that Iran is pursuing a nuclear weapon, with the differences arising over whether or not the deal reached in Switzerland can deter it from this path.

In reality, the intelligence agencies of both countries agree that there is no such drive by Iran to build a bomb. The National Intelligence Estimate produced by the US spy agencies in 2007 concluded that Iran had halted its pursuit of nuclear weapons in 2003. And a recently leaked Mossad document from 2012 found that Iran is “not performing the activity necessary to produce weapons.”

For both Washington and Tel Aviv, Iran’s nuclear program is not the real issue, but rather has served as a pretext for imposing crippling economic sanctions, carrying out military and intelligence provocation and threatening all-out war.

The tactical shift being executed by the Obama administration in relation to Iran is aimed at securing a rapprochement with Tehran in order to facilitate the Pentagon’s “pivot to Asia” and the preparation for far more dangerous wars against China and Russia.

For the Israeli government, however, the lessening of tensions with Iran is seen as a double threat, diminishing the importance of the Washington-Tel Aviv axis in the Middle East as well as depriving the Zionist regime of a purported “existential threat” with which to distract the population from the steadily deteriorating conditions for the great majority of Israeli society.

Obama sought to counter Netanyahu’s campaign with a declaration of unconditional support for Israel. “Not only am I absolutely committed to making sure that they maintain their qualitative military edge and that they can deter any future military attacks, but what I’m willing to do is to make the kinds of commitments that would give everyone in the neighborhood, including Iran, the clarity that if Israel were to be attacked by any state that we would stand by them.”

The statement came in response to Friedman’s suggestion that Washington should conclude a “US-Israel Mutual Defense Treaty.” After Obama made his statement, Friedman gushed, “You’ve just made that commitment right now, that’s a signal to them.”

In asserting his unqualified support for Israel, Obama

pointed out that in the summer of 2014, when Tel Aviv faced condemnations from around the world for its slaughter of more than 2,300 Palestinians in Gaza, his administration had held fast to the shameful mantra that Israel had “a right to defend itself.”

Netanyahu’s campaign against the nuclear agreement has dovetailed with that of the Republican leadership in Congress, which staged a political provocation last month by organizing—behind the back of the White House—a speech to a joint session of Congress in which the Israeli prime minister denounced the Obama administration’s negotiating position.

The Republican denunciations of the framework agreement announced in Switzerland last week seemed somewhat more muted in the face of widespread reports that Iran had made much more far-reaching concessions than anticipated.

Senator Bob Corker, the Republican chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who has spearheaded legislation mandating a vote in Congress on any final deal, told *Fox News* Sunday that he was waiting for more information on the agreement. “I don’t know how someone can ascertain whether this is something good or bad,” he said.

Obama has threatened to veto any bill that requires congressional approval of the agreement. Corker acknowledged Sunday that he did not have the 67 votes needed in the Senate to override a presidential veto, while saying he still believed that “Congress needs to be playing a role.”



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