

Iran nuclear talks to go past June 30 deadline

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According to media reports, it is now all but certain that the negotiations between Iran and the P-6—the US, the four other permanent members of the UN Security Council, and Germany—on a final agreement on “normalizing” Iran’s civilian nuclear program will extend past the Tuesday, June 30 deadline.

Iran’s Foreign Minister Javad Zarif returned to Tehran on Sunday evening for a day of consultations with the country’s top leadership. Only on Tuesday morning is he to return to Vienna, the site of the talks.

Over the weekend Zarif held three meetings in Vienna with US Secretary of State John Kerry. Several other P-6 foreign ministers also joined the negotiations, including Germany’s Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Britain’s Philip Hammond.

The first to arrive, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, left Sunday but said that he would soon return. Russia and China currently have deputy foreign ministers in Vienna, but their foreign ministers are expected to join the talks later this week as they approach their climax.

Iran and the US and its European allies—France, Britain and Germany—are from all accounts sharply divided over multiple issues.

These include: when and to what extent the punishing economic sanctions imposed on Iran will be lifted; what would happen were Iran to be found in noncompliance with the nuclear agreement; the extent of the civilian nuclear research Tehran will be allowed to conduct over the agreement’s 15-year life; and if, and under what conditions, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors would have access to Iranian military sites.

These issues are bound up with opposed interpretations of the “framework agreement” that Iran and the P-6 announced on April 2 in Lausanne, Switzerland. “We still have major differences of interpretation in detailing what was agreed in Lausanne,” British Foreign Minister Hammond told reporters in Vienna Sunday. “It feels like we haven’t advanced on the technical issues and even gone back on some,” another Western diplomat told Reuters in off-the-record remarks.

The US is adamant that any lifting of the sanctions should be drawn out over years. Just as importantly, it wants the sanctions to automatically “snap back” should the US and its allies declare that Iran is not adhering to the agreement.

Russia and China have objected to this. They argue that any

re-imposition of sanctions should be subject to a UN Security Council vote.

According to news reports, the US has responded with proposals aimed at denying Moscow and Beijing a Security Council veto over the re-imposition of sanctions. Under one such proposal, the agreement would stipulate that the UN Security Council could adopt a motion suspending the automatic snapback of sanctions for six months. The US and/or Britain or France would thus be able to ensure that sanctions were immediately reapplied by exercising their own Security Council vetoes.

Washington has mounted a decades-long campaign for regime change in Tehran, with the aim of re-imposing the neocolonial-type subjugation of the Iranian people that existed under the bloody rule of the US-backed Shah. Since 2002 it has used the unsubstantiated claim that Tehran is seeking to develop nuclear weapons to bully and threaten Iran.

Under Obama, the US and European Union have imposed economic sanctions on Iran that are the most punishing every imposed on a country outside of war; and the CIA and Pentagon have collaborated with Israel in waging cyber warfare against Tehran. Moreover, the US has routinely threatened Iran with war, including throughout the past 20 months of negotiations on a nuclear deal. Time and again, Obama and Kerry have stated that absent an agreement that substantially rolls back and dismantles Iran’s civilian nuclear program, “all options are on the table.”

The Iranian bourgeoisie, terrified at the prospect that the economic crisis will spark a working-class challenge to its rule, has already made sweeping concessions to Washington. These include submitting to the most intrusive International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspection ever devised, dramatically curtailing Iran’s capacity to enrich uranium and its existing stockpile of enriched uranium, and dismantling much of Iran’s civil nuclear infrastructure.

In a speech broadcast on Iranian state television last Tuesday, Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei insisted that the sanctions that have halved Iran’s oil exports since 2011 and frozen it out of the world banking system must be lifted as soon as the final nuclear agreement comes into force. “Other sanctions,” (those restricting Iran’s access to nuclear technology and armaments), he said, could “be removed gradually by a reasonable timetable.”

Khamenei also said that Iran would not permit the US-dominated IAEA, an organization he called “neither independent nor fair,” from inspecting Iranian military sites. Earlier Tuesday, Iran’s parliament passed a law that would ban IAEA inspectors from military sites.

Khamenei has strongly supported Iranian President Hassan Rouhani in his pursuit of a rapprochement with the US and EU powers. He has repeatedly ordered all factions of the regime, including the Revolutionary Guards, to support the government and its attempt to reach an accommodation with the US. However, he has also been careful to keep some distance from the talks, warning that the US would carry out regime change in Iran if it could and rejecting claims that Tehran might enter into a strategic negotiation with the US over Iraq, Syria and the broader Middle East.

On several occasions, Khamenei has made “hardline” anti-US speeches as negotiation deadlines approach, only to subsequently endorse further Iranian concessions.

For his part, US Secretary of State Kerry dismissed Khamenei’s comments, saying that they were made for “domestic political consumption.”

Media reports suggest that the talks in Vienna could drag on for as much as a week past the June 30 deadline. However, both Tehran and Washington will be anxious to avoid prolonging the talks beyond that. This is because, under a recently adopted US law, if the Obama administration does not submit a nuclear agreement to Congress for its approval prior to July 9, the period allotted to Congress for scrutinizing and voting on a final Iran-P-6 agreement doubles from 30 to 60 days.

The US political and national security establishments have been bitterly divided over Obama’s Iran policy, with much of the Republican and Democratic Party leaderships arguing that the US could gain even greater strategic advantage, whether in the form of further concessions or regime change in Tehran, were it to ratchet up the sanctions and intervene more aggressively in Syria to overthrow Iran’s ally, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

This faction is also critical of Obama’s policy in Iraq. It argues that while Washington and Tehran are currently in a tacit alliance in opposing ISIS in Iraq, it is Tehran that, thanks to its role in organizing Shia militia to fight ISIS, is filling the power vacuum.

In March, the Republicans gave Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a Congressional platform from which to rail against any deal with Tehran that allows it to keep a civilian nuclear program, as its legal right under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Obama for his part is determined to explore to the fullest the possibility of exploiting the crisis of the Iranian regime to pursue a more expeditious means of advancing the US drive for global hegemony.

While the sanctions have roiled the Iranian regime, Obama is concerned about the viability of maintaining or reinforcing

them, both of which would require Moscow and Beijing’s continued support, under conditions where the US is pursuing confrontation with Russia and China.

He calculates that if the US can extort a deal largely on its terms with Tehran now, it will pay multiple dividends. It would prevent Tehran from aligning more closely with Moscow and Beijing and would open the door for greater western investment and leverage in Iran. This would advance the long-term prospects of “turning” Tehran and tying it to the US strategic agenda in the Middle East.

Moreover, if Washington can bully Tehran into accepting a US-designed “snapback” sanctions regime and into giving a commitment that it will satisfy western governments in their call for full disclosure of any and all past military ties to its nuclear program, the US will have the means to continue to use the nuclear issue to pressure and threaten Iran for years to come.

According to a June 24 *New York Times* report, there has been “vigorous debate” in the White House in recent weeks as to whether the US should walk away from a nuclear deal with Iran whose current “specifics” some officials believe do not sufficiently weaken Tehran.

Last week, *Politico*’s Michael Crowley published a report based on information supplied from the Obama administration and Pentagon officials that gave details of the US military’s tests of a “Massive Ordnance Penetrator” (MOP) bomb specifically designed to target Iran’s nuclear facilities.

According to Crowley, deployment of the MOP is the Obama administration’s “Plan B for Iran.” In fact, it is only a small part of it. Any US military strike against Iran would raise the prospect of a regional, even world war. For that reason, the war planning carried out by the Pentagon, on the instructions of the George W. Bush and now the Obama administration, has always begun with a “shock and awe” blitzkrieg targeting Iran’s military and critical infrastructure.



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