

Obama promotes “historic” nuclear deal with Iran

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15 July 2015

After 18 days of intensive negotiations, Iran and the P-6—the US, Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and China—have reached a final agreement to “normalize” Iran’s civil nuclear program over the next 15 years.

Yesterday’s Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) enshrines the sweeping concessions Iran made under the “framework” agreement reached in Lausanne, Switzerland on April 2, as well as introducing further conditions and stipulations highly advantageous to Washington.

Iran must either dismantle or roll back and freeze the key elements of its nuclear program and must submit to the most intrusive nuclear inspections regime ever devised.

The JCPOA stipulates, for example, that Tehran has to mothball, for the next decade, two-thirds of its centrifuges, including all its more advanced ones, and eliminate more than 95 percent of its stockpile of low-grade enriched uranium. It also must remove the core of the reactor at its Arak heavy-water nuclear plant, so that the revamped unit will produce negligible amounts of plutonium.

Tehran must also satisfy the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that it has answered any and all questions regarding the “possible military dimensions” of its nuclear program. Based on forged documents and unsubstantiated claims, Washington and Israel have long asserted that Tehran carried out nuclear-weapons related research at the beginning of this century—allegations Iran has vigorously denied.

Only after all these steps are concluded, a process that will take six months or more, does the agreement’s “implementation” period begin. And only then are the US and EU obligated to lift the punishing economic sanctions they have imposed on Iran, which are widely recognized to be the harshest ever imposed outside of a wartime blockade. They have halved Iran’s oil exports since 2011, frozen more than \$100 billion in Iranian central bank reserves and oil sale proceeds held in foreign banks, hobbled Iran’s foreign trade, and denied its people access to life-saving drugs and other medical supplies.

The JCPOA provides for the “snap-back” or automatic reimposition of these US and EU sanctions—as well as those of the UN Security Council, which provide their legal underpinning—if two conditions are met. These conditions are rigged in favor of the US and its European allies, and thus provide Washington with a ready instrument to threaten and bully Iran. A majority of the agreement’s signatories (e.g., the US and its EU partners, which make up four of the seven) must vote in favor of a finding that

Tehran has violated the agreement. Sanctions resume unless the Security Council adopts a resolution reaffirming the suspension within 35 days. Since the US can veto such a resolution, Washington can dictate the reimposition of sanctions almost at will.

Under the JCPOA, a UN ban on Iran’s import and export of weapons and weapon systems will remain in effect for a further five years after “implementation day,” and a ban on the import-export of technology, useful in the construction of ballistic missiles, for eight years.

Even as news of yesterday’s agreement was emerging, US President Barack Obama gave a lengthy early morning White House speech, insisting that the deal with Tehran served US “national-security interests,” that is, it advanced the strategic interests of US imperialism.

Obama touted numerous ways in which the agreement will limit and shrink Iran’s nuclear program, while subjecting it to unprecedented international scrutiny. Otherwise, his Tuesday morning speech was chock full of lies. Even as he boasted that he had authorized military action numerous times, Obama presented the US as the guarantor of international law and a force for peace, committed to diplomacy and the pacific resolution of disputes.

In reality the US, under Democratic and Republican administrations alike, has waged a relentless campaign against Iran ever since the 1979 Iranian revolution toppled the despotic regime of the US-backed Shah. Under Obama and his predecessor, George W. Bush, the US has waged economic and cyber warfare against Iran and repeatedly threatened it with outright attack. While negotiations were underway in Vienna during the past two-and-a-half weeks, US officials, including the outgoing chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, were boasting about the Pentagon’s advanced preparations for war with Iran.

That said, if Obama made haste to promote the deal with Tehran, it is because it represents a major tactical shift on the part of US imperialism—one that is being opposed by significant sections of the US political and military-intelligence establishments, as well as by longstanding US client states in the Middle East, first and foremost Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Behind this shift lies a series of strategic calculations, bound up with the aggressive actions of the Obama administration around the world to assert US global hegemony.

The most important of these calculations are, (1) that US imperialism’s conflict with Tehran must be subordinated to its

drive to strategically isolate Russia and China and prepare for war against one or both states, which the US ruling elite views as the main obstacles to its global domination, and (2) that Iran's crisis-ridden bourgeois regime can be harnessed to serve US strategic interests.

In their remarks yesterday, both Obama and US Secretary of State John Kerry argued that if the US spurned so favorable a deal with Tehran, the sanctions regime would likely unravel. "The world," said Obama, "would not support an effort to permanently sanction Iran into submission."

The reality is that the ability of the US and its European allies to undermine the Iranian economy has been, to a large degree, dependent on Russian and Chinese complicity. With the US openly courting confrontation with Russia over Ukraine and with China in the South China Sea, it was becoming increasingly problematic for Washington to rely on these two countries to sustain the sanctions against Tehran.

The proponents of a "diplomatic turn" in relation to Iran are also concerned that Tehran is not drawn into a closer partnership with China and Russia, all the more so as Moscow and Beijing have responded to Washington's aggressive moves against them by expanding their strategic and economic ties with the regime headed by Ayatollah Khamenei.

China is already Iran's biggest economic partner, while Russia and Iran have developed increasing military-strategic ties, including as a result of their joint support for Syria's embattled Baathist regime.

In his Tuesday speech, Obama argued, in effect, that it would be more expedient—less costly and risky—for the US to pocket the concessions it has extorted from Iran and explore Tehran's readiness to seek an accommodation with Washington, than to ratchet up economic sanctions and threats of war.

In making this argument, he insisted, "We give nothing up by testing whether or not this problem can be solved peacefully," that is, by exploring whether Tehran can be harnessed to US strategic interests. Obama emphasized that the "same options," including waging war on Iran, would remain available "in the future."

In reality, the rulers of the Islamic Republic have long sought an accommodation with US imperialism. With the economic crisis caused by the sanctions fanning working class discontent, borne of chronic poverty and deep social inequality, Tehran has made increasingly frantic overtures to Washington. Hassan Rouhani, Iran's president since August 2013, is a protégé of Hashemi Rafsanjani, Iran's president from 1989 to 1997, and for decades the leader of the faction within Iran's clerical-bourgeois political elite most eager to reconcile with Washington.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei has, himself, repeatedly authorized overtures to Washington. In 2001, Tehran assisted the US in installing Hamid Karzai as Afghanistan's puppet president. And in 2003, shortly after the US's illegal invasion of Iraq, Khamenei authorized a secret offer to the US, in which Tehran agreed to recognize Israel, and withdraw military support for Hezbollah and Hamas, in exchange for a US disavowal of regime change.

Khamenei has publicly claimed that Iran's negotiations with Washington over the past 20 months have been exclusively

concerned with the nuclear dispute, and have not involved discussions about the various US-provoked wars and crises in the Middle East. However, Iran and the US are already, at least tacitly, aligned in propping up Iraq's government against ISIS. Moreover, Rouhani and his foreign minister, Javad Zarif, have repeatedly signaled Tehran's readiness to cooperate with the US in stabilizing the Middle East. Yesterday morning Rouhani tweeted, "With this unnecessary crisis resolved, new horizons emerge with a focus on shared challenges."

One can anticipate that Washington and its allies will now start pressuring Tehran to reduce its support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and assist their efforts to bring about a "political settlement," that is, regime change, in Damascus.

French President François Hollande, in his first public remarks following the announcement of the nuclear deal, said: "Iran must show ... on Syria that it is ready to help us to end this conflict."

It is widely anticipated that the US Congress, with both houses under Republican control, will hold votes in an attempt to block the nuclear deal with Iran. Yesterday, numerous Republican congressional leaders and presidential candidates, including Jeb Bush, sharply criticized the agreement, as did Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who termed it "a bad mistake of historic proportions." Democratic congressional leaders were generally far more circumspect, although, until recently, many were publicly on record as favoring a still more aggressive anti-Iran policy.

Under legislation adopted in the spring, with the Obama administration's support, Congress will have 60 days to review and vote on a resolution barring the president from lifting sanctions on Iran. Obama would veto the resolution, and Congress would have another 22 days to seek to overturn his veto by a two-thirds vote of both houses of Congress. This would require not only unanimous Republican opposition, but the defection of a substantial section of Senate and House Democrats.

In his Tuesday speech, Obama vowed to veto any congressional resolution repudiating the agreement, while reaffirming his administration's staunch support for nuclear-armed Israel and the reactionary Gulf State monarchies.



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