

US political infighting begins over Iran nuclear deal

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The Obama administration has begun its campaign to forestall congressional action blocking its nuclear agreement with Iran, with the president holding an hour-long press conference Wednesday afternoon as well as a 45-minute interview with the *New York Times*.

Vice President Joseph Biden was also deployed to Capitol Hill for a meeting with House Democrats, aiming to shore up Democratic Party support for the deal.

Under the procedure laid out in a bill passed by Congress in May, the White House must submit the text of the Iran agreement, including all classified appendixes, by Sunday, July 19, five days after the agreement was signed by representatives of the US, Britain, France, Germany, China, Russia and Iran.

Congress then has 60 days to review the Iran deal, and 12 more days to take action forbidding Obama to lift US economic sanctions on Iran. If a resolution passes both houses of Congress—which means attracting at least six Democratic votes in the Senate to meet a 60-vote threshold—Obama has promised to veto it.

Congress then has 10 days to override the veto, which would require a two-thirds vote of the House of Representatives and the Senate, both under Republican control. If the White House delivers the final treaty language by July 19, the latest possible date for such a congressional action to block the treaty would be October 9.

In the House, where 146 votes would be enough to sustain a veto, 150 Democrats signed a statement last month generally endorsing the Obama administration's approach to the Iran talks. It is unclear whether the final agreement has greater or less support from this group.

In the Senate, 34 Democrats could sustain a veto. If no Republican backs the Iran deal—a likely outcome—the Republican majority would need the

support of 13 Democrats to overturn an Obama veto.

Such a result is not impossible, but it is highly unlikely, given the blow that would be dealt to the influence of American imperialism, not only in the Middle East but worldwide.

As Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, one of the most ruthless strategists for the US foreign policy establishment, wrote in a blog posting Wednesday, “[I]f the deal fails to pass Congress, outside nations will also take advantage of America’s divisions. Russia and China will exploit the US ‘failure’ for their different reasons. The EU countries are likely to see this as an example of US internal weakness and inability to lead. Our regional allies will have to confront both a more active Iran and a United States whose leadership and unity has proven to be all too uncertain.”

The EU countries are already rushing to capitalize on the potential profits to be gained from the exploitation of Iran’s vast oil and gas resources and 80-million-strong consumer market. German Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel has scheduled a visit to Tehran to promote the commercial and strategic interests of German imperialism in the region.

Obama touched on this question in his press conference Wednesday, after pointing out that the \$100 billion to \$150 billion in funds which Iran will supposedly be able to access once the International Atomic Energy Agency certifies its compliance with the agreement is not the “windfall” denounced by congressional Republicans and Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, but Iran’s own money. These funds have been frozen (that is, effectively stolen) as part of the sanctions regime.

If Congress were to block the expiration of the sanctions, this would impact all those countries (mainly

in Asia) that need to buy Iranian oil, as well as any countries which hope to do business with Iran in the future. “The imposition of sanctions, their cooperation with us has cost them billions of dollars, made it harder for them,” Obama said.

He warned: “If they saw the US Congress effectively vetoing the judgment of 99 percent of the world community, that this is a deal that resolves the Iranian weapons program, nuclear weapons program, in an equitable way, the sanctions system unravels.”

As of Wednesday, only one Democratic senator, Robert Menendez of New Jersey, who is under indictment by the Department of Justice for influence-peddling and corruption, has publicly declared his opposition to the Iran deal. Most Democrats issued perfunctory statements that they were withholding judgment until after reviewing the documents.

The key role in the Senate may be played by Senator Charles Schumer of New York, the all-but-certain successor to Harry Reid as Democratic Minority Leader after Reid retires next year. Schumer is one of the most reliable mouthpieces for Wall Street, where there is widespread support for the Iran deal as the best means of gaining access to Iran’s oil wealth and the vast financial flows stemming from it. He made a noncommittal statement about studying the agreement before issuing an opinion.

Congressional Republican leaders issued denunciations of the agreement, as did all the Republican presidential candidates who commented on the issue. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell denounced the White House for failing to achieve “our national goal of ending Iran’s nuclear program,” although he did not indicate how this was to be accomplished short of invading and occupying a country three times the size of Iraq.

Democratic presidential frontrunner Hillary Clinton, who participated in the early stages of the nuclear talks with Iran as Obama’s secretary of state, took some credit for the deal and called for Congress to approve it. She called the agreement “an important step in putting the lid on Iran’s nuclear program.”

There has been little or no discussion in the US media of the real motivations for the deal with Iran. The major goal of the Obama administration is to shift the main focus of US military-diplomatic activity toward the mounting confrontations with Russia and China, which

Washington regards as the principal obstacles to its global domination.

Russia and China have participated in the six-country diplomacy with Iran, albeit in secondary roles, and stand to profit commercially from the lifting of sanctions, but these gains would be short lived if US imperialism succeeds in bringing the Iranian regime within its orbit.

The expectation in Washington, reflected in the White House, Pentagon and intelligence services, is that increasing imperialist penetration of Iran’s economic and political life offers the prospect of bringing forward elements within the regime that want an orientation to the Western powers and more distance from China and Russia.

This hope was touched on by Cordesman in his blog post, where he observed, “It was also always clear that any agreement would—at least in the short term—be the source of ongoing political struggles with Iran and an extension of war by other means.”

In other words, the Iran nuclear deal, far from opening up the prospects of peace in the Middle East, as Obama claimed at his press conference, is another means for Washington to pursue its predatory interests in the region, fomenting regime-change by diplomatic-commercial means, while still reserving the possibility of military intervention in the future.



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