

UN Security Council approves pact on Iranian nuclear programs

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The UN Security Council yesterday voted 15-0 to approve a resolution putting in place key elements of the nuclear agreement reached last week between Iran and the P-6 group—the US, Britain, France, China, Russia and Germany. The resolution paves the way for the lifting of most UN sanctions on Iran once it has implemented severe restrictions on every aspect of its nuclear programs.

Under the 104-page resolution, UN restrictions on the sales of nuclear-related material will remain in place for a decade. Sanctions on ballistic missiles and specific Iranians involved in the country's nuclear programs will continue for eight years. Bans on the import and export of conventional weapons will remain for five years.

The UN resolution also gives force to the extraordinary “snap-back” provisions of the nuclear pact. In the event that the US or any other party to the agreement brings allegations of a breach by Iran and the issues are not resolved, the UN sanctions are automatically re-imposed unless the UN Security Council decides otherwise. Given that the US has a veto in the UN Security Council, it has a ready means to manufacture a pretext and threaten Iran with restored sanctions at any point.

During the UN Security Council session, US ambassador to the UN Samantha Power traded barbs with her Iranian counterpart. “This nuclear deal doesn't change our profound concern about human rights violations committed by the Iranian government,” Power declared, “or about the instability Iran fuels beyond its nuclear program.” She accused Iran's “terrorist proxies” of continuing to threaten Israel.

Leaving aside the hypocritical “human rights” posturing, Power's remarks were directed at counteracting opposition to the nuclear deal both within

the US and in the Middle East. President Obama formally introduced the nuclear agreement on Sunday to Congress, where the Republican majority vowed to oppose the deal.

US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter is currently touring the Middle East in a bid to placate Israel and other critics of the nuclear agreement. Prior to his arrival in Israel yesterday, Carter reasserted the Obama administration's willingness to go to war against Iran if needed. He praised the agreement as “a good one... [as] it does nothing to prevent the military option” and boasted that the US was “preserving and continually improving” to attack Iran.

As Carter himself noted, his visit was “not going to change anyone's mind in Israel.” Israeli Benjamin Netanyahu, who at the invitation of Republican leaders addressed a joint session of the US Congress in March, has been deeply hostile to the negotiations with Iran. Netanyahu denounced last week's agreement as a “historic mistake” and yesterday condemned the UN vote as “hypocritical,” claiming that Iran had violated past UN resolutions.

While he is not expected to announce new military support for Israel, Carter said he would discuss ways to boost Israel's anti-missile and counter-terrorism capacities and to ensure its “qualitative military edge” over regional rivals. The US defence secretary will also fly to Saudi Arabia where the monarchy has been critical of an agreement which it claims will strengthen its long-time regional rival Iran.

The ructions with US allies in the Middle East highlights the scope of the strategic shift being made by American imperialism in reaching a nuclear pact with Iran. If the agreement goes ahead, which is by no means certain, the Obama administration is clearly hoping to enlist the Iranian regime in its efforts to

secure US hegemony in the Middle East and beyond. At the same time, however, such a deal threatens to alienate traditional US allies.

A further complicating factor is that the US faces competition from the European powers which are supporting the agreement to further their own economic and strategic interests in Iran. While the US Congress is likely to take months to debate the nuclear deal, the European Union voted yesterday to approve the agreement, setting in motion mechanisms to end European sanctions on Iran.

German Vice-Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel, who is also minister for energy and economics, arrived in Tehran last weekend for talks aimed at renewing German economic ties and doubling trade once sanctions are lifted. He headed a 60-member delegation that included business executives from top German firms including Mercedes-Benz, Siemens and Volkswagen.

Ramin Rabii, chief executive of the Tehran-based Turquoise Partners Group, which assists foreign investors in Iran, told the *Guardian* that the number of Europeans approaching his firm had risen exponentially. “We have hosted more than a 100 foreign investment delegations in Iran over the past 15 months,” he said, “of those 90 percent were European, many from Scandinavia, UK, German, Italy, but even from the US.”

Concerns have already been voiced in Washington that the European powers, particularly Germany, could steal a march on the US by consolidating their own relations in Tehran. Democrat Senator Robert Menendez, who has been critical of the negotiations, raised questions about whether US allies in Europe could be relied on. “I’d like to be able to trust Europe,” he told the *Washington Post*, “but when they are frothing at the mouth about business interests, especially once those business interests are really entrenched, will it be so easy to call a violation a violation?”

The nuclear pact also faces opposition in Iran where the commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, publicly criticised the agreement yesterday. He declared that the deal was “clearly in contradiction” to some of the country “redlines” focussing in particular on restrictions on “maintaining and upgrading Iran’s defence capabilities.”

At this stage, however, Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the ultimate say over defence and foreign policy, has cautiously indicated his support for the agreement, while emphasising that it did not mean an end to Iran’s hostility to the US and its ally Israel. In a speech on Saturday, Khamenei said that Iran would not negotiate with the US on global or regional issues, but “sometimes, in some exceptional cases, like the nuclear case, and due to expediency, we may negotiate.”

Iranian ambassador to the UN, Gholamali Khoshroo, adopted a similar approach during yesterday’s Security Council session. While supporting the resolution, he declared that sanctions had been “unjustifiably” imposed in the first place, pointing out that no proof had ever been given that Iran had been seeking to build nuclear weapons.

Khoshroo also lashed out at US ambassador Power declaring that it was ironic that the US accused Iran of destabilising the Middle East. Referring to the US-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, he said: “The country that invaded two countries in our region and created favourable ground for the growth of terrorism and extremism is not well-placed to raise such accusations.”

This anti-US posturing is primarily aimed to blunting criticism of the agreement inside Iran, where the country’s parliament and Supreme National Security Council still have to approve the deal.



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