

Obama secures votes to override congressional opposition to Iran deal

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7 September 2015

The Obama administration claimed last week to have secured the 34 Senate votes it would need to sustain a presidential veto of a congressional resolution repudiating US support for the Iran nuclear deal.

White House officials said that they now hope to rally the support of 41 senators needed to prevent such a resolution from even coming to a vote. That objective appears in doubt, however, after the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Ben Cardin, announced Friday that he will vote against the Iran deal.

To date, three of the 46 senators who caucus as Democrats—including Charles Schumer of New York, the favorite to become the Senate Democratic leader after the 2016 elections—have come out publicly against the Iran deal. Five others remain uncommitted. Every Senate Republican is expected to vote against the agreement.

Under legislation passed earlier this year with Obama's support, Congress has until September 17 to pass a resolution rejecting the Iran deal and a further short window to attempt to override a promised presidential veto.

The Obama administration and the House and Senate Democratic leaders, Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid, have mounted an intense lobbying campaign to surmount vituperative opposition to the Iran deal from much of the US ruling elite, as well as Israel and sections of the Gulf Arab ruling elite.

Virtually the entire Republican Party, a minority faction of Democrats, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, and some sections of the US national security apparatus are opposing the nuclear accord. Many Republican congressional leaders and presidential candidates have done so in the most hysterical terms, casting Obama as an “appeaser” who

has all but placed nuclear weapons in the hands of the Iranian regime, if not opened the “oven doors” to a new Holocaust.

The outcome of a years-long negotiation involving all five permanent UN Security Council states, Germany, and the European Union as a whole, the nuclear accord compels Iran to dismantle much of its civil nuclear infrastructure, limit its production of enriched uranium to token low-grade amounts for the next decade, and submit to the most intrusive International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections regime ever devised.

In return, the US and its EU allies will suspend the economic sanctions that have crippled Iran's economy, halving its oil exports since 2011 and blocking its access to the world banking system.

In arguing for their Iran deal, President Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry have repeatedly stated that the only alternative is for the US to wage war on Iran.

Both have boasted that they have not flinched from using lethal force when necessary in upholding the “US national interest,” but argue that in this instance it is more prudent to exploit Tehran's anxiety for sanctions relief and fear of US military action than risk a war that could rapidly engulf the entire Middle East.

They have further argued that their diplomatic gambit in no way precludes US military action should Washington deem Tehran has violated the nuclear deal.

Indeed, among the arguments administration officials have been making is that the agreement would facilitate a future US attack. This was spelled out in an op-ed piece penned by Defense Secretary Ashton Carter and published in last Friday's *USA Today*.

“The reality,” said Carter, “is that any prospective military option, if called for, will be more effective

under this deal—not less. Iran will have a smaller and more concentrated civil nuclear program, and the deal’s verification provisions will give us more information with which to plan.”

Defense Secretary Carter further observed that the nuclear accord places “no limits whatsoever on the United States military.” Its resources can be deployed at will to check Iran’s “malign” and “destabilizing activities” in the region and bolster US imperialism’s Mideast allies.

In an action that was timed to coincide with the White House’s announcement that it has the votes to ensure the nuclear deal proceeds, Kerry sent an e-mail to all members of Congress Wednesday pointing to the measures the Obama administration is taking to bolster Israel as well as the monarchies of the Persian Gulf.

Kerry said the administration shares “the concern expressed by many in Congress regarding Iran’s continued support for terrorist and proxy groups” and “the Assad regime.” He then detailed plans to bolster Israel “through unprecedented levels of military assistance.” This includes providing next generation F-35 stealth fighter jets, \$3 billion in new missile-defense aid, a \$1.89 billion munitions-resupply package, and increased strategic cooperation.

Multiple calculations lie behind the Obama administration’s tactical shift on Iran, a country Washington has made the target of an unrelenting campaign of bullying, war-threats and sanctions since the 1979 revolution that toppled the despotic regime of the US-backed Shah.

The administration seeks to harness the Iranian bourgeoisie to US strategic aims in the Middle East. Already Tehran and Washington are tacit, albeit uneasy, allies in propping up Iraq’s US-installed government against ISIS.

Under President Hassan Rouhani, Iran’s government is dominated by the faction of the Islamic Republic’s bourgeois-clerical establishment that has long championed rapprochement with Washington.

At the very least, Obama and his supporters in the military-security establishment believe that diplomatic rapprochement and western investment will enable US imperialism to better probe and exploit fissures within Iran’s ruling elite. They expect that Washington will either be able to prevail on the rulers of the Islamic Republic to forego any challenge to US domination of

the Middle East or lay the groundwork for a “regime change” operation that will bring to power a more pliant government in Tehran.

A second crucial consideration is that under conditions of deepening conflict between all the great powers the punishing US-led sanctions regime cannot long hold. Obama has repeatedly warned that in the event the US refused to accept the manifold concessions made by Iran, not just China and Russia, but even the European powers would begin to defy the sanctions.

This would leave the US with little economic leverage and a recourse to war as the only means of asserting “US leadership.”

According to the *New York Times*, the Obama administration conscripted the US ambassadors of the other “P-6” states to bluntly tell congressmen that their governments would not support any attempt to renegotiate the Iran deal and that the sanctions would collapse instead.

Eager to gain access to Iran’s plentiful oil and gas resources, educated workforce, and large market, European government officials and businessmen have paraded to Tehran in the less than two months since the Iran nuclear deal was struck and subsequently endorsed by a unanimous UN Security Council vote.

US and Iranian officials have stressed that the nuclear agreement is not tied to any “grand bargain” concerning the political map of the Middle East. But there is no doubt that as the agreement goes forward, Washington intends to step up pressure on Tehran to abandon its support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.



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