

With Washington's blessing, Boeing signs mega-deal with Iran

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With strong backing from the Obama administration, US aircraft manufacturer Boeing has reached an agreement in principle with Iran on a mega-deal, worth in excess of \$20 billion, to supply the country with 109 commercial aircraft.

Announced last month, the aircraft deal is far and away the largest business transaction between a US company and Tehran since the 1979 revolution that toppled the US-backed Shah and his blood-soaked regime.

Its implementation will require that Washington waive sanctions on US-dollar trade with Iran—unilateral US sanctions that remain despite the coming into force last January of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCOPA) between Iran and the P-6 (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, plus Germany).

Under the JCOPA, Iran agreed to dismantle much of its civilian nuclear program and to the most intrusive International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections regime ever-devised. In return, the P-6 lifted punishing economic sanctions that had more than halved Iran's oil exports and otherwise roiled its economy.

The deal calls for Boeing to sell at least 80 commercial aircraft to Iran Air for an estimated \$17.6 billion and to lease the Iranian government-owned airline a further 29. Delivery of the planes is to commence in 2017.

Without the support and encouragement of the Obama administration, Boeing would never have moved forward with the deal with Iran. It could nonetheless still collapse, due to strong opposition within the US Congress from those who opposed the Iran nuclear deal and want Washington to resume an overt campaign for regime change in Tehran.

With a view to concluding a sale along the lines of that now reached, Washington agreed under the JCPOA to remove all its sanctions on the sale of commercial aircraft and parts. Recently the Obama administration repealed its designation of Iran Air as a “supporter of terrorism.” It

had made this designation in 2011 as it was ratcheting up sanctions against Tehran, based on the claim that Iran Air planes had been used to transport weaponry and fighters to support the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad regime and Hezbollah.

Speaking at the recently concluded Aspen Ideas Festival in Colorado, US Secretary of State John Kerry strongly supported the Boeing sale for both economic and strategic reasons.

Pointing to the \$27 billion deal Iran Air has already sealed with European aircraft producer Airbus, Kerry voiced concern that the US could lose out to its European rivals in the race to take advantage of the profit-making opportunities offered by Iran's newly-opened economy. He argued it “doesn't make a lot of sense” to allow sanctions to be lifted, then sit by while “other countries like France are rushing in to sell Airbus to the cost of Washington State and Boeing and our workers in the United States.”

He also pitched the Boeing sale, much as he and Obama previously promoted the nuclear deal, as a means of promoting “transformation” in Iran—that is in harnessing Iran's bourgeois regime to the strategic interests of US imperialism. “Doing business,” said Kerry, “is one of the best ways to create interests and vested purpose, if you will, in furthering transformation.”

Such comments reflect the calculation in US ruling circles that through a combination of continuing military pressure and inducements, including expanding commercial ties, the current regime in Tehran can be remolded into a US client. Or, failing that, “engagement” with Iran will enable Washington to leverage the longstanding fissures within Iran's ruling elite so as to bring about regime change. President Hassan Rouhani is part of a faction of the Islamic Republic's ruling elite that has been pressing for a rapprochement with US imperialism since the late 1980s.

The Obama administration's "opening" to Iran has been bitterly contested within the US political and military-security establishments. But under conditions where the US is pursuing confrontation with more substantial rivals, nuclear-armed China and Russia, and its wars have caused havoc and chaos across the Mideast, the most powerful sections of the US elite favor, at least for the moment, "exploring" if they can do "business" with Tehran.

Iran has long been considered a "strategic prize" by US imperialist strategists. Not only does it have massive oil and natural gas reserves and bestraddle the Middle East and Central Asia, two of the world's most important oil-exporting regions. Its location at the intersection of three continents makes it pivotal to US imperialism's plans to consolidate American domination of the Eurasia.

The Obama administration also hopes that it can secure Iranian support in resolving the ongoing conflicts in the region, above all in Syria and Iraq. Significantly, Kerry held discussions with his Iranian counterpart Mohammed Zarif in Oslo on the Syrian civil war a day after the official announcement of the Boeing deal. At the Aspen festival two weeks later, Kerry acknowledged the two countries are tacitly allied in Iraq, with Tehran offering military assistance to the US-sponsored, Shia-dominated regime in Baghdad. "Iran in Iraq has been in certain ways helpful, and they clearly are focused on ISIL-Daesh, and so we have a common interest, actually," said the US Secretary of State.

None of this means that the Boeing sale is a done deal or that the current thaw in US-Iranian relations will continue in the months and years ahead.

Obama and other government officials repeatedly noted in the wake of last year's nuclear deal that the only alternative for US imperialism to the diplomatic rapprochement with Tehran would be war. This possibility remains, with the sanctions that Washington lifted under the JCPOA capable of being immediately snapped back into force if it deems Tehran is not in compliance.

Syria could well prove a flash point, as there is a growing clamor within the US military-security establishment and among both the Republican and Democratic Party leaderships for the US to intervene still more aggressively against Assad, Tehran's only governmental ally in the region.

Efforts are being made, predominantly by Republican politicians, to scuttle the Boeing deal. On July 7, the House of Representatives amended a spending bill to

block Boeing's sale of aircraft to Tehran. "To give these types of planes to the Iranian regime, which still is the world's largest state sponsor of terror, is to give them a product that can be used for a military purpose," Illinois Republican Peter Roskam, who sponsored the legislation, hypocritically claimed.

The Obama administration has indicated it will veto any legislation which undermines the nuclear agreement with Iran, including legislation that would torpedo the Boeing deal.

Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has also attacked his Democratic rival, Hillary Clinton, over the Boeing sale. "Clinton's disastrous Iran Nuclear Deal" is helping Iran, the "world's largest state sponsor of terror," claimed the presumptive Republican nominee. Previously Trump had attacked the Iran deal for failing to secure enough business for US companies, while opening the door to their European competitors.

Meanwhile, the US and its allies continue to attack Tehran over its ballistic missile program, accusing Iran of "aggressive" intentions, although it is the US that has invaded and occupied its neighbours, Afghanistan and Iraq, is supporting Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen, and continues to arm Israel to the teeth. German Chancellor Angela Merkel and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon last week charged that Iran's ballistic missile program is inconsistent with UN Security Council resolutions. In response, the head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization Ali Akbar Salehi suggested a new campaign of bullying and threats against Iran may be under preparation. "A conspiracy is underway," Salehi told the semi-official Fars news agency. "Otherwise there is no reason for Mr. Ban and Ms. Merkel to make such an outcry. I sense that they are in the process of laying groundwork and concocting."



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