

Bipartisan deal in US Senate for new sanctions against Russia, Iran

Our reporter
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Top leaders in the US Senate reached agreement late Monday night on legislation that would impose new sanctions on Russia. The deal was a major concession by Senate Republicans to the Democratic campaign to charge Russia with intervening in the 2016 US presidential election.

The new provisions against Russia are being added to a sanctions bill directed against Iran that was introduced with widespread bipartisan support and scheduled for final Senate passage today. The anti-Iran bill is being amended to include new sanctions against Russia and restrictions on the ability of the Trump administration to waive those sanctions, or those imposed earlier under the Obama administration at the time of the US-backed ultra-right coup in Ukraine, which overthrew a pro-Russian government there.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell filed the amendment Monday night after protracted negotiations between Bob Corker, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; Mike Crapo, chairman of the Senate Banking Committee; and the ranking Democrats on the two committees, Ben Cardin and Sherrod Brown. Leading Republican war hawks like Senator John McCain and Senator Lindsey Graham joined with the Democrats in pushing for tough anti-Russian provisions.

Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer declared his support for the anti-Russian amendment, calling the new sanctions “a powerful and bipartisan statement to Russia.”

A statement issued by Schumer’s office said the anti-Russian amendment satisfied the conditions laid down for Democratic support: “Throughout these negotiations, Democrats have insisted that a Russia sanctions amendment accomplishes three things: codify the existing sanctions in law, impose tough new

sanctions in response to Russian meddling in our elections, and give Congress a process to review whether they should be lifted.”

The provision for congressional review of any waiver of sanctions by the Trump administration was the most contentious issue, since it tacitly accepts the charges by the Democrats and sections of the military-intelligence apparatus that the Trump administration has adopted an unduly favorable attitude towards Russia.

This underscores the real purpose of the campaign waged by the Democrats and the media over alleged Russian intervention into the US presidential election in support of Trump, which has been to force the Trump White House to abandon efforts to reduce the level of conflict between the US and Russia in the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

The congressional review provision is reportedly similar to that incorporated into legislation that allowed the Obama administration to reach agreement with Iran over its nuclear program, along with Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China, which took effect after the Senate failed to override the deal by a two-thirds vote.

Both Republican and Democratic senators warned President Trump against issuing any veto threat, in advance of an appearance Tuesday by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Senator Corker, chairman of the committee, suggested that a veto was pointless because the legislation targeting Iran and Russia was likely to pass by a wide majority, far more than the two-thirds vote required to override a veto.

The scope of the anti-Russian sanctions was detailed in a written statement by Cardin, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who noted that it would affect “key sectors of Russia’s economy, including mining, metals, shipping and railways.” It

would also include “robust assistance to strengthen democratic institutions and counter disinformation across Central and Eastern European countries that are vulnerable to Russian aggression and interference.”

House Republican leaders, including both Speaker Paul Ryan and Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ed Royce, indicated general support for the Senate plan to sanction both Iran and Russia in the same bill, while suggesting that talks with the Trump White House might be required to finalize the legislation.



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