

IRAN MUST COMPLY OR ELSE...: Obama gives Green Light for Punishing Economic Sanctions on Iran

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President Barack Obama has issued the green light for punishing new US economic sanctions directed at forcing the Iranian government to submit to Western pressure over its nuclear program by starving the country of oil revenues.

These new sanctions, which go into effect on June 28, aim to impose a warlike blockade of the Iranian economy by penalizing any government or private entity that carries out financial transactions with the country's central bank.

Western Europe is preparing its own new sanctions, which are to include a European embargo on Iranian oil purchases, beginning in July.

The official memorandum authorizing the US sanctions affirmed, as required by the legislation creating them, that given existing oil supplies internationally, "the market can continue to accommodate" the cutting off of petroleum from Iran.

The theory is that Saudi Arabia can make up the difference in reduced oil supplies from Iran, and that in an emergency, the US and other oil consuming countries could tap into their strategic reserves. However, such safeguards may well prove ineffective in the face of a speculative bidding up of oil prices under conditions in which the margin of excess supply has been significantly reduced. The effect could prove a dizzying rise in gasoline prices, spelling sharp reductions in living standards internationally and the threat of an intensified economic downturn.

The ratcheting up of US sanctions came together with confirmation that the so-called P5+1 talks on Iran's nuclear program are to be renewed in the middle of this month. The talks include the Iranian government together with the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council—the US, Britain, China, France and Russia—plus Germany.

Washington and its allies have charged that the Iranian government is developing a nuclear weapons program, while Iran has insisted that its nuclear program is solely for peaceful purposes. Unlike nuclear-armed Israel, which together with Washington has continuously threatened military strikes against it, Iran is a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Pact and has submitted to an inspection regime by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Speaking in Saudi Arabia, where she was coordinating an anti-Iranian military alliance with the reactionary Persian Gulf monarchies, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made it clear that the sole purpose of the scheduled talks would be to achieve full Iranian compliance with US demands, or to pave the way to war.

"It will soon be clear whether Iran's leaders are prepared to have a serious, credible discussion . . . to start building the trust we need to move forward," Clinton said.

The US secretary of state told reporters that Iran should cease all production of 20 percent enriched uranium and open up all its facilities to continuous inspection. Neither of these steps is required under international treaties and law.

"So far," she added, "they have given little reason for confidence. What is certain is that Iran's window to do so will not remain open forever."

This reference to the "window" closing represents yet another US threat of war against Iran.

In her talks with the Gulf oil potentates, Clinton unveiled US plans to build a regional missile defense system. The *Washington Post* reported that Vice Adm. Michael Fox, the commander of the US 5th Fleet based in Bahrain, presented the dictatorial regimes with the plans for the missile shield, which will provide lucrative new contracts for the US arms manufacturers, Raytheon and Lockheed Martin.

Clinton and the ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council regimes also reportedly discussed means of securing the shipment of their oil supplies through the Strait of Hormuz, which passes through Iranian territorial waters, even as Iran is faced with the choking off of its own oil exports and the threat of military attack.

Clinton praised the Saudi monarchy for pledging to increase its oil supply to make up for the supplies from Iran that Washington is attempting to keep off the international markets. "Both the United States and Saudi Arabia share an interest in ensuring that energy markets foster economic growth," she said. "We recognize and appreciate the kingdom's actions to respond to market demand."

While Iran had earlier announced that its talks with the P5+1 would resume on April 13, it had not fixed a locale for the meeting. In her remarks, Clinton indicated that it would be held in Istanbul, Turkey.

It is not clear, however, whether Tehran will accept convening the negotiations in the Turkish capital. Mohsen Rezaee, the former Iranian presidential candidate and secretary of the country's Expediency Discernment Council, said that the talks should take place in an "Iranian-friendly" country, and that Turkey was not suitable given its "failure to fulfill relevant commitments."

Rezaee did not elaborate on his statement, but tensions between Iran and Turkey have increased following Turkey's announcement that it will at least partially comply with US sanctions, reducing its oil imports from Iran by 20 percent. Istanbul's hosting Sunday of the "Friends of Syria" conference, which produced a plan for issuing paychecks to elements carrying out terrorist attacks inside Syria, Iran's principal ally in the region, as well as Turkey's threats of military intervention inside Syria, have further soured relations.

China, which imports 20 percent of its oil from Iran, has firmly rejected the US sanctions as an extra-legal interference in international trade.

"The Chinese side always opposes one country unilaterally imposing sanctions against another according to domestic law," a statement from China's Foreign Ministry affirmed Saturday. "Furthermore it does not accept the unilateral imposition of those sanctions on a

third country.”

India, which imports some 12 percent of its oil from Iran, has also evaded US sanctions, paying for Iranian oil in rupees and with the barter of its own manufactured goods. Washington has exerted significant pressure on the Indian government to cut its trade ties with Tehran.

The BRICS summit—Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa—in New Delhi last week issued a declaration recognizing “Iran’s right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy” and warning against the “disastrous consequences” of a military attack.

Meanwhile, the US, Israel and Greece are conducting war games involving at least 10 warships and combat aircraft in the eastern Mediterranean. The operation, dubbed “Noble Dina,” is led by the US Sixth Fleet and the Israeli navy. It began on March 26 and continues until April 5.

The exercise, which includes simulated defense against submarine attacks and securing offshore oil platforms as well as air combat, is, according to Israeli sources, a rehearsal for war against Iran.

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