

U.S.-Iran Deal: Imperialist Policy Shift and Rebuff of Israel Lobby

Iran makes concessions for sanctions relief

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In the early morning hours of Nov. 24, the world powers reached a deal with Iran on its nuclear program. The interim agreement is for a duration of six months, during which the signatories hope to reach a more comprehensive and long-term agreement.

Details of the deal are sketchy. Broadly, however, it is known that the agreement imposes significant limitations on Iran's nuclear program in exchange for minor relief in the sanctions imposed on it. It is reported that the deal allows Iran to continue enriching uranium to 5 percent purity, used as fuel for its power generating nuclear reactor. But Iran will no longer be able to enrich uranium to 20 percent purity, used for medical isotopes, and will be required to relinquish its stockpile within six months. Washington and its allies accuse Iran of pursuing a nuclear weapons program and view the 20 percent enriched uranium as dangerously close to nuclear bomb material—even though that requires enrichment levels of 97 percent. Additionally, Iran will permit unrestricted access by UN inspectors to its nuclear sites.



U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry shakes hands with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif

In exchange, while the U.S.-imposed sanctions will remain in place, there will be \$7 billion in sanctions relief and a promise of no new sanctions for six months. The \$7 billion in relief is essentially the unfreezing of Iran's own assets in international financial institutions, part of an estimated \$100-\$120 billion that have been frozen and will continue to be "inaccessible and restricted."

Given the harsh conditions imposed on Iran, it is a testament to the capitalist class media monopoly that the main discussion in Western media is whether Iran has been given too much. Since the agreement, President Barack Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry have been making the case for the deal by emphasizing the huge concessions Iran was forced to make and that the sanctions relief is reversible.

Why did Iran make the deal?

The agreement should not be confused with a fair deal that observes the interests of both sides. Diplomacy in general, and this agreement in particular, occurs within the context of power relations. How could it be called justice when nuclear-armed nations impose sanctions and harsh conditions on a country that has no nuclear weapons, nor any stated or

documented plan to have such weapons? This is not a negotiation between two comparable adversaries working on the terms of future relations and trade. Iran could do nothing to the imperialist alliance that is lined up against it. But the U.S. and its junior partners have imposed extreme hardship on the Iranian people, essentially locking Iran out of international trade. So, in effect, Iran has to negotiate with a gun to its head.

The fact that the Iranian leadership energetically pursued a deal does not indicate that the deal is just. Iran voluntarily agreed to the deal the same way that a robbery victim voluntarily agrees to give up valuable possessions.

For over two years, Iran has been exposed to comprehensive sanctions that amount to an embargo. It is not just that the United States and the European Union refuse trade with Iran, but that the U.S. will impose penalties on other states for trading with Iran. Iran's oil sales, the main source of its currency, have dropped to below half of what they used to be. Iran has been severely hampered in its trade of petrochemicals, automobiles and practically all other products. Similarly, it has been extremely difficult for Iran to purchase many essential goods, including medicine. As with all other sanctions the imperialists have imposed on oppressed countries, sanctions against Iran have caused death and hardship.

Given the damage done to Iran's economy, it is no wonder that the Islamic Republic came into Geneva prepared to make major concessions. A modern economy cannot live indefinitely under sanctions that make trade exceedingly difficult, not to mention living under the constant "all options are on the table" threat of military attack.

Besides, as harsh as the conditions imposed on Iran are, the agreement is not a complete capitulation. Complete cessation of nuclear activities, including uranium enrichment for nuclear power generation, was not a demand made on Iran this time. Explicitly stated or not, the agreement recognizes Iran's right to continue enrichment, albeit under tight inspections. As unjust and unfair the agreement may be, one cannot demand of an oppressed nation to withstand economic strangulation indefinitely.

In the June elections in Iran, in which Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was ineligible to run for a third term, Hassan Rouhani won resoundingly in the first round. Rouhani's main promise was "constructive engagement" with the West and bringing an end to the sanctions. Having suffered two years of harsh sanctions that had caused the Rial, Iran's currency, to lose nearly 2/3 of its value, the Iranian people, particularly the working class, were suffering tremendously. Rouhani's promise of ending the sanctions resonated with the voters hoping for an end to extreme hardship.

But Rouhani's conciliatory tone towards the West and willingness to make concessions cannot be considered the deciding factor in what made the recent agreement possible.

U.S. policy shift

The major change that made the deal possible happened not in Tehran, but in Washington. Up to now, U.S. policy towards Iran has really been regime change since the 1979 revolution. Washington wants the return of a leadership like that of the Shah, installed by a CIA coup in 1953. Washington's promotion of the Iran-Iraq war was in hopes of weakening both independent states. But following the end of the war, Iran began a period of rapid development, resulting in the country emerging as a regional power. From Washington's perspective, a regional power that provides diplomatic and material support to the

Palestinian and Lebanese resistance movements must be overthrown.

The right-wing, pro-West Green Movement that arose following the 2009 presidential elections gave rise to Washington's hopes of regime change from within. But by 2010, hopes for a Green overthrow faded. The crippling U.S. sanctions, implemented in 2011, were another attempt at bringing about regime change. Washington hoped that the sanctions would paralyze the economy and cause so much hardship that the Islamic Republic would be destabilized. But as devastating as the sanctions have been, they have not pushed the state to the verge of collapse. The June 2013 elections resulted in the election of the more conciliatory faction of the Islamic Republic, but regime change remained a distant dream for Washington.

The U.S. goal of overthrowing all independent states in the Middle East has suffered another blow in Syria. Facing domestic and international opposition, the Obama administration was forced to relinquish its plans for bombing Syria. While not stable, the Syrian state has gained strength and is far from collapsing. Not only has the strength of the armed opposition faded, the Syrian National Council/Free Syrian Army imperialist-supported alternative have lost relative strength among the Syrian opposition, with the Al-Qaeda allied forces emerging as the strongest opposition force.

With Iraq not having emerged from the eight years of occupation as a dependable client state, Syria surviving and Iran still standing, Washington's goal of a Middle East comprised exclusively of client states is now no more than a fantasy.

So, as many foreign policy "realists" had long advocated, the Obama administration had to part ways with the immediate goals of regime change in Iran and embark upon a path of dealing with Iran as an adversary. Taking this diplomatic path should not be confused with a humane foreign policy. In the absence of a realistic military alternative for the U.S., diplomacy, not military invasion and hostility, is now a more effective tool for promoting imperialist interests.

Does Israel call the shots?

Despite the fact that all major imperialist powers have signed on to the deal, some factions of the U.S. ruling class are opposed to the agreement, having not given up on the goal of regime change. The most vocal opposition has come from the state of Israel. After weeks of going all out in a campaign against the negotiations, Israel's lobbying campaign failed. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has called the agreement a "historic mistake" and stated that Israel will not abide by it.

For years, there has existed this false notion that Israel controls U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. Using the extraordinary influence of the pro-Israel lobby such as AIPAC, and the special relationship between the U.S. and Israeli governments, proponents of this view conclude that Tel Aviv controls Washington. Whether consciously or not, this false notion absolves the U.S. from responsibility for U.S./Israeli crimes against the Palestinian people and the rest of the Arab world.

On the face it, the notion that Israel controls U.S. policy is based on a failure to recognize that the foreign and domestic policies of any country are based on the interests of that country's ruling class. The U.S. economy is approximately 60 times the size that of Israel's. Why would the U.S. capitalist class subjugate its own interests to that of Israel's? AIPAC, and

any lobbying campaign, can only be successful to the extent that they can convince capitalist politicians that their agenda serves the interests of the U.S. ruling class.

Iran provides a crystal clear example of the falsity of the “Israel controls the U.S.” assumption. Even during the years of the Bush administration, Israel feverishly lobbied the U.S. to bomb Iran. On more than one occasion, both the Bush and Obama administrations have told Israel that it would not be permitted to bomb Iran, dashing Israel’s hopes of starting a provocation that would drag the U.S. into a war.

Israel’s vociferous opposition to the nuclear agreement is common knowledge. This setback comes on the heels of another major setback when the U.S. pulled back from plans to bomb Syria and signed on to the Russia-brokered agreement. On both counts, Washington went directly against the well-known, and heavily lobbied, wishes of Israel and its powerful U.S. lobbyists.

But Israel’s position on the Iran nuclear agreement is no surprise. Israel’s rise as a powerful, highly militarized state has only been possible thanks to decades of U.S. aid, and military and diplomatic support. Israel earns this support by providing services to U.S. imperialism, by attacking and weakening states and national liberation movements in the region. It is in an atmosphere of war and instability, not one of agreements and understandings, that Israel can maximize its worth to its U.S. sponsors. The U.S., on the other hand, while more than willing to engage in criminal wars and occupations, does not have an intrinsic interest in maintaining a war-like relationship with its adversaries at all times.

The fact that the U.S. and its imperialist partners have been willing to reach any agreement at all with Iran is recognition of the limits of imperialist power and the power of independent development. Over the following months, we will witness the extent to which Western powers will attempt to impose ever harsher conditions on Iran; and the extent to which the Iranian leadership is willing to make concessions.

But amid the give and take of the negotiations, the conflicts and agreements, we must not lose sight of the fact that this diplomacy is not taking place in the context of an “equality of nations.” Instead, the imperialists use diplomacy the same way they do war: to entrench their domination of the region, incapacitate potential sources of resistance, and subjugate the world’s historically oppressed nations.

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