

What's at Stake with the Iran Nuclear Treaty? Intrusive Measures on Iran's Sovereignty

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Global Research, December 07, 2013
[workers.org](#)

Theme: [Military and WMD, US NATO
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The six-month nuclear agreement among Iran and the "5+1" countries has been described as a breakthrough, a departure, a disaster or a betrayal, depending on the speaker. Much of the language of the agreement reached in Geneva on Nov. 24 reeks of imperialist arrogance.

Whatever one's attitude toward the agreement, however, it is essential first and foremost for all progressive forces to unite and make a clear call to end all the criminal sanctions and attacks on the sovereignty of Iran and the imperialists' targeting of the Iranian population.

In examining this interim agreement, we should first look at the reasons why Iran and the U.S. signed it, and who benefits.

The five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council — the U.S., Britain, France, Russia and China — plus Germany are the "5+1." The U.S. and its allies based their approach on the repeated charge that Iran's developing nuclear energy leads to production of nuclear weapons, which they allege is an ominous threat to world peace.

All six nations involved in the talks with Iran have used nuclear energy for more than 50 years. All but Germany have a nuclear weapons arsenal. The U.S. has the largest such arsenal "ready to deliver," is the only one that has ever used nuclear bombs on people, and U.S. imperialism continues to routinely threaten first nuclear strikes against countries that have no such weapons.

There is a clear meaning to the term every U.S. president since Truman has used: "All options are on the table." U.S. nuclear aircraft carriers and Trident nuclear submarines, capable of destroying all life on earth in one launch, prowl the seas, including the waters directly off the coast of Iran.

The Geneva talks were based on the premise that the U.S. and its allies would ease sanctions strangling Iran's economy; in return, Iran would freeze and then roll back its nuclear technology development. This is the imperialists' goal, even though the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which Iran has signed, guarantees each country the right to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

U.S. sanctions legislation has demanded that every country in the world participate in a blockade of Iran or face severe U.S. trade, banking and insurance sanctions. The global blockade resulted in undermining Iran's currency by more than 60 percent and oil production by more than 50 percent.

No demands are made on Israel, the U.S. proxy in the region. Israel possesses 100 to 300

nuclear weapons and has not signed the NPT nor ever submitted to an inspection.

Terms of the agreement

It is worth reading the short, 1,500-word “Joint Plan of Action” signed with Iran. It begins with this outrageous assertion: “Iran reaffirms that under no circumstances will Iran ever seek or develop any nuclear weapons.” Of course, none of the 5 +1 have ever agreed to any similar pledge.

In order to gain access to \$7 billion of the more than \$100 billion of its own funds seized and frozen in accounts around the world, Iran must agree to undergo daily and unannounced inspections of its modest nuclear energy program. This includes its reactors, production workshops, storage facilities, uranium mines and mills, and all records of these facilities.

Developing nuclear weapons requires enriching uranium to more than 90 percent of the fissionable U-235 isotope. Iran must agree to not enrich its uranium to more than 5 percent and to dilute its limited stock of uranium already enriched to 20 percent.

The agreement stipulates that accepting these intrusive measures on Iran’s sovereignty will lead to a six-month pause in efforts to further reduce Iran’s crude oil sales and suspension of U.S. sanctions on Iran’s auto industry and spare parts for Iran’s civil aviation.

The agreement will allow Iran to purchase, with funds the U.S seized, food and agricultural products, medicine, medical devices and pay the tuition of Iranian students studying in universities abroad.

Lifting even a little of the thick, strangling web of sanctions shows just how invasive and targeted the sanctions are.

Sanctions began with 1979 Revolution

In evaluating this agreement, it is essential to know that U.S. hostility and U.S.-imposed sanctions began long before Iran revived its nuclear energy program.

After the revolutionary overturn of the brutal U.S.-imposed monarchy in 1979 fundamentally decreased U.S. influence in the entire region, the first U.S. sanctions on Iran began. The anti-imperialist upheaval — with a radical Muslim religious current playing a leading role — transformed Iranian society. It also liberated Iran’s oil and gas resources from the unequal contracts serving the giant oil corporations of Exxon, Mobil and Shell.

U.S. strategy since 1979 has been to destabilize the Iranian state and sabotage Iran’s economy in order to again dominate the country’s rich resources. Washington has used industrial sabotage, assassinations of political leaders and scientists, and military encirclement.

In 1979, Washington seized \$10 billion of Iran’s own money held in U.S. banks. Over the years, Wall Street has seized billions in other Iranian assets that now total more than \$100 billion in frozen funds. U.S. pressure included economic ruptures through the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Export-Import Bank and cancellation of hundreds of contracts.

Long before Iran revived its nuclear energy development to meet growing energy needs, the

U.S. made every attempt through sanctions to block Iran's ability to build oil refineries to refine its own oil and gas. Iran was a major exporter of crude oil, but was forced to import refined oil products at far higher costs.

Finally in 2011, after completion of seven new refineries, Iran ceased being a gas importer. But sanctions blocked Iran's plans to export refined gas.

By developing its economy independent of Wall Street theft and domination and controlling its own resources, Iran was transformed within three decades from an underdeveloped country into a modern state with a highly educated population. While capitalist relations prevail, the population was still able to win guaranteed, comprehensive, free medical care; free education, including university; a modern infrastructure; and housing with full electrification.

Women's education has improved from majority illiteracy to full literacy. More than 60 percent of university students are now female.

The Iranian revolution has enraged Wall Street and all the forces of reaction and feudal power in the region by providing political and material support to the Palestinian liberation struggle, the Lebanese resistance to Israeli occupation and the Syrian government resisting regime change.

Along with failing to destabilize Iran, the U.S. has utterly failed to stabilize its rule in Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan, despite massive destruction. Its plans for a quick overturn in Syria have also met determined resistance, despite billions of dollars in funds, equipment and training of mercenary forces.

As its economic position declines, Washington planners are trying to shift their overextended military power further east to confront China's growing economic position. Overwhelming sentiment in the U.S. against another war has also pressured Washington to try new tactics.

Washington's broken treaties

The U.S. government's record of 200 years of unequal and broken treaties with the Indigenous nations of North America shows that diplomacy and talks have always been used as a form of warfare. For Wall Street, intervals of peace are preparatory periods for the next war.

More recently, in 2003 the U.S. agreed to relax pressure on Libya if that country gave up nuclear ambitions. By 2006, all sanctions on Libya were ended and many economic deals with the West opened up. Yet in 2011, the U.S. and NATO engineered the destruction of Libya.

The outcome of the continuing nuclear talks in Geneva won't change the basis of U.S. corporate power's decades of hostility towards Iran.

That Washington actually did sign this interim agreement with Iran, however, has shown that imperialist plans to totally destroy an oppressed country have fallen short. If the imperialists can't outright steal what they want, it means at least a limited victory for the oppressed.

These treaties have similarities to the class struggle represented in every union contract. Even with a strong union, workers are never paid the full value of their labor under capitalism. Nevertheless, it is a struggle and a victory to win even a minimal, signed union contract.

The Iranian government has years of experience in U.S. duplicity. In 2003, Iran's then President Khatami, with current President Rouhani as the chief negotiator, voluntarily suspended nuclear enrichment and for two years allowed the International Atomic Energy Agency to make intrusive inspections, with the expectation that the imperialists would cut back on sanctions. President George W. Bush nevertheless ratcheted up new sanctions, listed Iran as part of the "Axis of Evil" and one of the three nations targeted for regime change.

Sections of the U.S. ruling class might well look to sign an agreement with some Iranian forces that U.S. strategists believe might make an accommodation with imperialism or that they could utilize to open up a deeper struggle inside Iran. Washington would seize on any internal instability in Iran as an opportunity for a new offensive.

Other powerful U.S. corporate forces that have a far more profitable stake in war and militarism will attempt many ways to sabotage even this short-term agreement. Israel and Saudi Arabia, as dependent U.S. proxies in the region and whose position and billions of dollars in military equipment is based on their role promoting war and instability, are both threatened by any form of agreement with Iran. New U.S. congressional sanctions may put an end to even this minimal thaw.

What does Iran gain?

Immediately following the agreement, France's Peugeot, Citroen and Renault auto manufacturers, along with representatives of German, South Korean and Japanese car makers, announced they were sending executives to an automotive conference in early December in Tehran, considered the starting gun in a race for post-sanctions business.

Before the latest round of U.S.-imposed international sanctions, France shipped semibuilt cars to Iran as "kits" for assembly by Iranian companies such as Iran Khodro and SAIPA.

More than 100,000 autoworkers were laid off as sanctions hit Iran's biggest manufacturing industry, forcing plants to operate at less than half capacity.

The six-month agreement "will have a pretty swift impact in a sector that is a big source of Iranian jobs — so this is more than just symbolic," said Thierry Coville, an Iran specialist at IRIS, a French international relations think tank.

Iran is planning how to get beyond the six-month interim agreement and is looking to expand its contacts beyond Peugeot and Renault to prevent future trade restrictions. There are also contacts at the German-Iranian Chamber of Commerce. India announced plans to accelerate an Indian port project at Chabahar to access Iranian goods coming via Afghanistan. The leading Turkish pharmaceutical company, Abdi Ibrrahim, is looking at sales of medicine and medical devices. (Reuters, Nov. 29)

Iran's long struggle for sovereignty over its resources and its own future will at least gain some breathing space in this round of diplomatic war. If the continued talks are sabotaged, then the people of Iran will again learn by their own experience what imperialism is.

By raising the many difficulties imposed by past sanctions, the anti-war movement here can stay focused on demands to end all the sanctions and war threats against Iran.

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