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Iran nuclear deal: US prepares for new wars

Peter Symonds

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The framework nuclear agreement struck last Thursday by the US and its negotiating partners with Iran, while still facing obstacles, marks a significant strategic shift in American foreign policy.

For the entire period since the 1979 Iranian revolution overthrew the US-backed Shah—that is, for 36 years—Washington has maintained a stance of unremitting hostility to the Iranian regime. This has been a constant in US policy in the region and internationally. Now the US has reached a deal that holds out the possibility of a broader rapprochement between Washington and Tehran.

Confronting opposition in the political/military establishment at home and from US allies in the region, President Obama has touted the agreement as the only alternative to “another war in the Middle East.” But the diplomatic efforts to secure a deal with Iran have nothing to do with a turn towards peace. Rather, they are aimed at buttressing US imperialism’s position in the Middle East and Central Asia as it prepares for war with more powerful rivals, Russia and China.

As part of its plans to secure US hegemony in the Middle East, the Bush administration targeted Iran, declaring it in 2002 to be part of an “axis of evil” along with Iraq and North Korea. Flush with apparent victory after the 2003 invasion of Iraq, a senior administration official let the cat

out of the bag, declaring in a widely reported remark: “Anyone can go to Baghdad. Real men go to Tehran.”

Even as the US military occupation of Iraq descended into a quagmire, the Bush administration seized on Iran’s nuclear programs as the pretext for pressure and provocations against Tehran, culminating in advanced preparations for American military attacks in 2007.

Bush pulled back from an all-out war with Iran amid rising criticism within the US political establishment of the military disasters he had overseen in Afghanistan and Iraq. In the course of the 2008 election campaign, Barack Obama declared that in bogging the US military down in the Middle East, Bush had failed to counter China’s rising influence, especially in Asia.

In what became known as the US “pivot” or “rebalance” to Asia, the Obama administration has since mid-2009 mounted an aggressive diplomatic, economic and military strategy aimed at subordinating China and the broader Indo-Pacific region to the US, if necessary through war.

At the same time, Obama initiated a “carrot and stick” approach to Iran—holding out the possibility of a negotiated end to the nuclear standoff, while dramatically escalating economic sanctions on Tehran and maintaining the threat of military strikes.

Significantly, one of Obama’s chief foreign policy mentors was former national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, a long-time advocate of a Washington-Tehran axis in line with his insistence that American global hegemony depended on securing US dominance of the vast Eurasian landmass stretching from Eastern Europe through Russia to China. Iran is strategically situated at the crossroads of Central Asia, the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent.

The deepening breakdown of world capitalism since 2008 and rising geo-political tensions have imparted a new urgency and recklessness to Washington’s plans. In August–September 2013, the US came to the very brink of war with Syria, only to pull back at the last minute amid divisions in the American ruling elite over the war aims, the failure of the British government to secure parliamentary backing, and vigorous opposition from Russia and Iran. Tehran had warned Washington that military intervention in Syria could lead to war with Iran.

The Obama administration responded to the debacle by adopting an aggressive two-prong strategy. While moving toward a confrontation with Moscow, which became evident with Washington’s open intervention in Ukraine in late 2013, Obama accelerated nuclear talks with Iran that had already been secretly underway.

He spoke via phone with newly-elected Iranian President Hassan Rouhani during the annual UN meeting in September 2013—the first publicly acknowledged contact between American and Iranian government heads in more than three decades. An interim nuclear agreement was reached in November 2013 and finally implemented in late January 2014, even as Washington’s intrigues in Ukraine intensified, culminating in the fascist-led coup in Kiev in February 2014.

From the outset of negotiations with Iran, the Obama administration made clear that any agreement would be on Washington’s terms. The result has been a drawn-out process extending

well beyond the original deadlines, in which Iran's bourgeois-clerical regime has made sweeping concessions on every issue.

While the US has conceded that Tehran can retain a nominal nuclear program as a face-saving measure, Iranian negotiators have agreed to dramatically reduce the country's uranium enrichment capacity, wind back existing stockpiles of enriched uranium, and allow the most intrusive inspection regime ever devised.

The US, on the other hand, is bound by nothing—offering only a “suspension” of international sanctions once Iran has fulfilled its many tasks. Moreover, the entire framework of sanctions will be kept at the ready, to be “snapped back” in the event Iran is said to be in “non-compliance.” As a result, the US has free rein to re-impose crippling sanctions without having to secure the support of China and Russia in the UN Security Council.

The agreement has provoked divisions in Iranian ruling circles, but the predominant faction represented by Rouhani insists that a deal is necessary not only to end the immediate sanctions, but also the longstanding US economic blockade. Rouhani was a leading figure in the so-called reform governments of presidents Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami, who pressed for a deal with Washington along with a sweeping pro-market restructuring to open up Iran as a cheap labour platform. As the Iranian bourgeoisie aligns itself more and more closely with Washington, it will intensify the attacks on the Iranian working class.

Whether the agreement will be finalised in the next three months is far from certain. The Obama administration is facing bitter opposition from the Republicans in Congress as well as sections of the military/intelligence apparatus, as well as from American allies in the Middle East, particularly Israel and, less publicly, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States and Egypt.

While Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continues to warn of the imminent danger of an Iranian nuclear bomb, as he has done for at least a decade, the underlying concern of Israel and other US partners is that a turn by Washington to Tehran could diminish their own importance, and thus their bargaining power with the US. Far from stabilising the Middle East, the finalisation of an agreement could well inflame tensions as Iran's rivals seek to shore up their own positions.

In a broader historical sense, the deal is not worth the paper it is written on. If and when it is expedient, the US will shred the agreement, as has happened many times in the past. The Libyan regime of Muammar Gaddafi cut a deal in 2003 to give up its WMD programs only to find itself the target of a NATO-led war for regime-change in 2011. Amid its own economic decline, US imperialism will stop at nothing in its reckless drive for global domination at the expense of its major rivals.