

MEK PURCHASES 27 US SENATE VOTES FOR WAR WITH IRAN

On Tuesday, I posited that the threat of new sanctions kicking in if a final agreement on nuclear technology is not reached could serve as a strong incentive for Iran to bargain in good faith with the P5+1 group of nations. But then, on Thursday, an actual sanctions bill was introduced. Ali Gharib took the time to read it (he got an advance copy and posted about it Wednesday) and what he found is profoundly disturbing (emphasis added):

The legislation would broaden the scope of the sanctions already imposed against Iran, expanding the restrictions on Iran's energy sector to include all aspects of its petroleum trade and putting in place measures targeting Iran's shipping and mining sectors. The bill allows Obama to waive the new sanctions during the current talks by certifying every 30 days that Iran is complying with the Geneva deal and negotiating in good faith on a final agreement, as well as meeting other conditions such as not sponsoring or carrying out acts of terrorism against U.S. targets.

In accordance with goals laid out frequently by hard-liners in Congress and the influential lobbying group the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the bill sets tough conditions for a final deal, should one be reached with Iranian negotiators. Among those conditions is a provision that only allows Obama to waive new sanctions, even after a final deal has been struck, if that deal bars Iran from enriching any new uranium whatsoever. The bill states Obama may not waive

sanctions unless the United States and its allies “reached a final and verifiable agreement or arrangement with Iran that will ... dismantle Iran’s illicit nuclear infrastructure, including enrichment and reprocessing capabilities and facilities.” (Congress could also block Obama’s waivers by passing a “joint resolution of disapproval” against a final deal.)

Although Gharib ascribes the war mongering aspects of this bill to positions advocated by AIPAC, the work (and funding money) of MEK, which advocates for (in my opinion, violent) regime change in Iran, seems to be just as likely, if not more likely, to be behind this hideous piece of legislation. The chief architect of the bill is Robert Menendez (D-NJ). He lists his cosponsors (Menendez’s original release claimed 26 cosponsors and the news stories linked below also cite 26, but Corey Booker was added to the list this morning while this post was being written. The press release was changed to add Booker to the list without changing the 26 to 27. The press release at the old URL was wiped out so that an empty page is returned. The date of December 19 for the release was also retained.):

The legislation was co-sponsored by twenty-six senators [sic], including: Senators Menendez, Kirk, Schumer, Graham, Cardin, McCain, Casey, Rubio, Coons, Cornyn, Blumenthal, Ayotte, Begich, Corker, Pryor, Collins, Landrieu, Moran, Gillibrand, Roberts, Warner, Johanns, Hagan, Cruz, Donnelly, Blunt and Booker.

Perhaps the only encouraging aspect of this long list of bipartisan backers of war is that back in June of 2012 this group got 44 signatures on a Senate letter calling for all negotiations with Iran to cease unless three conditions were met:

The senators wrote that the “absolute minimum” Iran must do immediately to justify further talks is to shut down the Fordo uranium enrichment facility near Qom, freeze all uranium enrichment above 5 percent, and ship all uranium enriched above 5 percent out of the country.

Note that the current agreement does stop enrichment above 5%. It also calls for half of the 20% uranium to be diluted back down to 5% while the other half is converted to a chemical form for fuel that can't easily be further enriched. Qom is not shut down, but the agreement does spell out specific numbers of centrifuges that can be used at the two enrichment sites.

But consider this for a moment. Most of what these war mongers were lobbying for last year actually appears in the interim agreement, and so they have been forced to move the goalposts in order to reach a point that they think won't be part of the final agreement. What they want is a war to change the regime in Iran, not a diplomatic solution that prevents nuclear weapons being developed by Iran.

It became obvious during the final discussions that led to this interim agreement that Iran insists on its right to low level enrichment to produce fuel for nuclear power plants. Since that is seen as a deal-breaker for Iran, it is precisely what the MEK now sets as the determinant of whether sanctions that will certainly lead to war are enacted.

The intellectual dishonesty surrounding this move by MEK skills in the Senate is stunning. They claim, as stated in Menendez's press release that their goal is “the complete and verifiable termination of Iran's illicit nuclear weapons program”. Low level enrichment is not part of a weapons program and yet this group insists that Iran also must abandon low level enrichment along with any aspects of a weapons

program.

Even more disturbing is that stories today by both the New York Times and CNN mention the introduction of the bill but don't get around to explaining that the bill calls for the extreme sanctions if all enrichment is not abandoned and that that condition is almost certainly a deal-breaker for Iran.

There is at least some push-back within the Senate. A letter signed by ten Democratic committee heads has been sent to Harry Reid strongly advocating against bringing the bill up for a vote. Sadly, the letter fails to point out the manner in which Menendez's bill undercuts the ongoing negotiations by setting terms that almost certainly are not going to be a part of any final agreement with Iran. There also is an op-ed (in Politico!) by Carl Levin and Barbara Boxer lobbying against the bill. Significantly, Levin was one of the 44 signatories on the June, 2012 letter but now seems to have come around to favoring diplomacy over war. Failing all this, the White House has promised to veto any bills calling for new sanctions since they clearly violate the interim P5+1 agreement.