Obama Vows to Veto Bill to Restrict Iran Sanctions Relief

January 12, 2016

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The Times of Israel

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President Barack Obama will veto a Republican-sponsored bill which the administration says will prevent the United States from meeting its obligations under the nuclear deal struck between Iran and world powers, the White House warned Monday.

The bill, the Iran Terror Finance Transparency Act, authored by Republican Congressman Steve Russell, passed the House Foreign Affairs Committee last week and was expected to reach the House floor Wednesday.

Lawmakers were to vote on the bill as American sanctions on Iran were set to be lifted in the coming weeks as part of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) reached in July. Under the deal, the United States is required to lift its nuclear-related sanctions against Iran after the International Atomic Energy Agency certifies that Tehran has completed all of its initial obligations.

According to its author, the bill “would not allow the President to remove Iranian individuals and entities from the list maintained by the Office of Foreign Asset Control of the Department of the Treasury unless the Administration can certify the entity is not a terror financier, human rights abuser, or involved in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.” It would also provide Congress with what Russell described as “advanced oversight,” requiring quarterly reports from the administration regarding the sanctions regime.

Russell has been working on the bill since mid-July, when the United States and world powers reached a nuclear deal with Iran that would swap sanctions relief for a suspension of key aspects of Iran’s nuclear program and greater transparency.

Critics of Russell’s bill say that the legislation is designed to hinder the international agreement by placing additional obstacles before Washington’s ability to meet its part of the deal. Iranian officials have already indicated that should the US fail to uphold its commitment to remove sanctions, Iran will consider the deal to be null and void.

In its statement released Monday evening, the White House noted that the administration “strongly opposes” the bill, which, it warned, “would prevent the United States from implementing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) by tying the Administration’s ability to fulfill US commitments under the deal to unrelated, non-nuclear issues.”

The administration said that the bill included provisions “that connect the United States’ JCPOA commitment to provide sanctions relief by delisting certain Iran related individuals and entities, including banks, to non nuclear issues outside of the scope of the JCPOA,” and also provisions that would “effectively preclude delisting of individuals or entities on Implementation Day.”

If the bill passed, the White House warned, the legislation “could result in the collapse of a comprehensive diplomatic arrangement that peacefully and verifiably prevents Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon.

“Such a collapse would remove the unprecedented constraints on Iran’s nuclear program that we achieved in the JCPOA, lead to the unraveling of the international sanctions regime against Iran, and deal a devastating blow to America’s credibility as a leader of international diplomacy,” the statement continued. “This would have ripple effects, jeopardizing the hard work of sustaining a unified coalition to combat Iran’s destabilizing activities in the region, calling into question the effectiveness of our sanctions regime and our ability to lead the world on nuclear non-proliferation.”

The administration reiterated its argument that while nuclear-related sanctions would be lifted on Implementation day, sanctions targeting Iran’s support for terrorism, its ballistic missile activities, its human rights abuses, and its destabilizing activities in the region would remain in effect.