**Proxy War Over Iran Nuclear Deal Divides U.S., Europe at UN**

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As President Donald Trump prepares to announce whether he’ll certify Iran’s compliance with the deal to curb its nuclear program, U.S. and European negotiators at the United Nations are on another collision course -- this time over the Islamic Republic’s human rights record.

The U.S. is pushing for tougher language condemning Iran for human rights violations in the draft of a UN resolution that’s typically taken up every year, but allies -- including some in Europe -- are pushing back, just as they are in defending the nuclear accord that Trump has called “the worst deal ever.”

While both sides want to criticize Iran on human rights, they disagree over how far to go and whether to give President Hassan Rouhani some credit, according to notes on the draft shared with Bloomberg News.

Maneuvering over the resolution comes ahead of an Oct. 15 deadline Trump faces under U.S. law to tell Congress if he can confirm Iran is complying with the 2015 accord he’s called an “embarrassment to the United States.” The president may decertify Iran and push for new constraints on its behavior but keep the U.S. in the multinational agreement, which lifted a range of economic sanctions in exchange for curbs on the nuclear program.

Nikki Haley, the U.S. ambassador to the UN, and other Trump advisers have argued that the accord’s inspections regime, led by the International Atomic Energy Agency, has loopholes. They also say the agreement negotiated under President Barack Obama falls short because it fails to address Iran’s continuing ballistic missile program, its involvement in conflicts across the Middle East and its human rights record.

Some leading Republican critics of the Iran deal in Congress are on board with a strategy of demanding changes in the accord but holding off on new sanctions that would breach it. “As flawed as the deal is, I believe we must now enforce the hell out of it,” House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ed Royce said at a hearing of the panel Wednesday.

But Senator Ben Cardin, the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said on MSNBC Thursday that “we don’t know what Congress will do” because “the pressure may build” to take action quickly.

Giving Trump a Win

The world “must also continue to hold Iran responsible for its missile launches, support for terrorism, disregard for human rights, and violations of UN Security Council resolutions,” Haley said in August after Rouhani threatened to abandon the nuclear deal if Iran faced more sanctions.

European allies, including the U.K. and Germany, have stood behind the nuclear accord, saying inspections by the IAEA show Iran is abiding by it. Behind the scenes, some diplomats are trying to find a way to “give Trump a win” by endorsing some of his criticism of Iran while containing any threat to scuttle the agreement, according to a diplomat from a Security Council nation who asked not to be identified describing internal discussions.

In the UN discussions over the human-rights resolution, U.S. allies don’t want to undercut Rouhani, who they see as a relative moderate besieged by hard-liners in Tehran. But they don’t want to be seen as defending Iran’s human rights record.

“The EU remains concerned with the human rights situation in Iran, in particular the high number of executions and issues such as freedom of expression and rights of minorities,” said Catherine Ray, European Union spokeswoman for foreign affairs. “The EU aims at discussing these issues in a constructive manner.”

‘Double Standards’

For 14 years, the UN has condemned Iran’s human rights performance in a resolution introduced by Canada. It’s one of three country-specific resolutions regularly offered, with the other two aimed at Syria and North Korea.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran condemns such resolutions, which are endorsed against the Islamic Republic of Iran in an unrealistic manner and based on the double standards of Western governments as well as spiteful and political approaches,” Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Bahram Ghasemi said after last year’s vote, according to PressTV.

Critics of Rouhani, including the U.S., say he hasn’t delivered on promises of greater respect for civil and political rights since his May re-election. Last year, Iran conducted at least 567 executions, many for drug-related offenses, according to Amnesty International. An additional 247 people were executed in the first six months of 2017, according to a UN report.

The nuclear deal has had little positive impact on human rights in the country, said Shirin Ebadi, the exiled Iranian human rights lawyer and Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

“Even if he wanted to” improve human rights, “the structure and constitution of the Islamic Republic is against him, but I don’t think Rouhani wants to,” Ebadi said in a phone interview from London. Although the annual human rights resolution isn’t legally binding, it “was highly damaging to the reputation of the Islamic Republic because it showed that a majority of condemn their behavior.”

Foreign, Dual Nationals

The UN resolution is an important reminder to the people of Iran that the international community stands with them, according to a spokesman at the U.S. Mission to the UN. The U.S. has included new language in the resolution emphasizing Iran’s targeting of foreign and dual nationals, the official said.

Haley can point to Iranian-Americans Siamak Namazi and his octogenarian father Baquer, a former UNICEF official, who are both serving 10-year prison sentences on espionage. Another detainee is Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, an Iranian-British woman, arrested while traveling with her toddler daughter and sentenced to a five-year prison sentence for plotting to topple the government.

The draft UN resolution calls on Iran to end the house arrest of leading opposition figures from the 2009 presidential election. Mir Hossein Mousavi, his wife Zahra Rahnavard, and Mehdi Karroubi have been under house arrest in Tehran for almost six years for supporting the Green Movement, which grew out of peaceful protests against the disputed results of that election.

The resolution faces a committee vote next month before going to the General Assembly in December. Last year, 85 countries voted to condemn Iran’s human rights violations while 35 countries, including Russia and Syria, voted against doing so. An additional 63 countries abstained.