Iran: U.S. to Lift Sanctions in a ‘Few Days’

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As Republican lawmakers on Capitol Hill focus on a last-ditch effort to prevent the Obama administration from awarding Iran $100 billion, the Islamic Republic’s leaders have stated that economic sanctions on the country will be fully lifted in the coming days.

President Hassan Rouhani, in a recent address, [promised](http://mehrnews.com/news/3022208/%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B4%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%85%D9%84%D8%AA-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%DB%B9%DB%B5-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%DB%8C) “good news” in the next few days, hinting that the Obama administration will make good on its promise to fully lift economic sanctions and provide Iran with up to $100 billion in unfrozen cash assets as part of the nuclear deal finalized last year.

Rouhani’s comments comport with recent remarks by Secretary of State John Kerry, who claimed last week that Iran is just “[days away](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/07/john-kerry-iran-nuclear-deal-update)” from upholding its own end of the deal, which required it to ship certain nuclear materials to Russia.

As Iran prepares to receive the cash influx, which experts say will revive the country’s long-stalled economy, Republican lawmakers in Congress are focusing on last-minute efforts to block the Obama administration from releasing these cash assets and unraveling sanctions on individuals who have aided Tehran’s nuclear weapons program.

Sen. Kelly Ayotte (R., N.H.) along with a growing coalition of colleagues in both the House and Senate, has put forward [legislation](https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/114/hr4344/text) that would stop sanctions relief until the Obama administration can officially verify that Iran has ceased all work on a nuclear weapon.

The bill would require the director of national intelligence to launch an investigation into this activity and submit a report to Congress. All sanctions relief agreed to by the Obama administration would be blocked until this report is complete, according to the bill.

The lawmakers maintain that an ongoing United Nations investigation into this activity remains incomplete due to stalling efforts by Iranian hardliners who seek to keep the country’s military work a secret.

“Given the glaring deficiencies of the International Atomic Energy Agency’s (IAEA) PMD report and Iran’s continued brazen missile tests and rocket launches, Congress must take serious action to protect the American people,” Rep. Mike Pompeo (R., Kansas), a key sponsor of the House version of the bill and member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, said in a statement.

“With the impending implementation of the president’s dangerous nuclear agreement with Iran, the world’s largest state sponsor of terror, it is absolutely unacceptable that we still do not have a thorough understanding of this regime’s past weaponization efforts,” he said. “This information is critical to our ability to detect and thwart future efforts by Iran to restart its nuclear program.”

Congressional critics of the nuclear deal have repeatedly warned that Iran—designated by the United States as one of the world’s leading sponsors of terrorism—will use the newly unfrozen cash assets to fund its military operations and pursuit of ballistic missiles.

The White House still has not disclosed why it abandoned recent efforts to impose new sanctions on Iran as a result of its multiple ballistic missile tests, which violate U.N. Security Council resolutions.

Some in Congress have speculated that the administration was forced to abandon the new sanctions after Iran threatened to walk away from the deal.

Experts predict that much of the sanctions relief will help fund Iran’s military campaigns in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and elsewhere.

“The lion’s [share of the inflow](http://www.defenddemocracy.org/iran-press-review/) of capital and technology in Iran in the post-implementation day era will go to the” Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, Iran’s leading military organization, according to Saeed Ghasseminejad, an expert at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

That money, Ghasseminejad said, “will be used to oppose the U.S. in the Middle East and around the world.” Implementation of the deal will enrich the Revolutionary Guard Corps and give it the tools necessary to push Iran’s extremist ideology across the region, he said.

“The administration should stop acting as Rouhani’s campaign manager and instead has to focus on fighting back against the IRGC’s growing influence in the region by punishing the IRGC for its bad behavior,” Ghasseminejad said.

The State Department maintains that it is prepared to uphold up its end of the deal and lift U.S. sanctions on the day the deal is implemented.

“‎None of the sanctions specified in the [nuclear deal] will be lifted prior to Implementation Day, which will occur when the [International Atomic Energy Agency] verifies that Iran has completed its relevant nuclear steps,” said a State Department official who was not authorized to speak on record.

“All of the details of the specific actions to be taken by the U.S. and the [European Union] as it relates to the lifting of sanctions under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), as well as the timing of those actions, are spelled out in the text of the deal,” the official said.

Mark Dubowitz, Foundation for Defense of Democracies executive director and a leading expert on the deal, told the Free Beacon that “Implementation Day is no cause for celebration.”

Iran, he said, “get a patient pathway to a nuclear weapon, intercontinental ballistic missiles and an economy increasingly fortified against future sanctions pressure.”

The United States, on the other hand, gets “a brief pause in their nuclear expansion” due to the shipment on some enriched material to Russia. However, Iran “can easily regenerate” this material and expand it by turning on advanced centrifuges, which more quickly enrich nuclear materials.

“Unless a new president digs us out from under this flawed agreement, the Obama Iran deal will severely erode American deterrence and greatly expand Iranian regime power,” Dubowitz said.

Under the parameters of the deal, the United States is set to suspend most of the sanctions enacted by Congress over the past several years.

This includes the suspension of nearly all sanctions related to Iran’s banking system, its insurance industry, energy and petrochemical sectors, shipping industry, gold trade, and automotive sector, according to the deal.

The major Iranian banks and companies included in the list have long been believed to be supporting the country’s nuclear program and military.

“Other nuclear proliferation-related sanctions will also be lifted,” according to information in Annex II of the nuclear agreement.

Sanctions pertaining to Iran’s commercial airline industry also will be suspended, paving the way for U.S.-owned entities to resume legal trade with Tehran.

Sanctions on those accused of aiding Iran’s nuclear efforts also will be removed from U.S. government lists. This includes certain individuals and companies on the specially designated persons list as well as its list of foreign sanctions evaders .

Additionally, the United States has agreed to eventually remove sanctions on two individuals, Fereidoun Abbasi-Davani and Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, both accused of providing critical support to Iran’s weaponization and nuclear activities.

Experts tracking the deal estimate that after eight years only 25 percent of nearly 650 entities designated by Treasury over the past decade for their role in Iran’s nuclear and ballistic missile program will remain sanctioned.