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U.S.-UAE nuclear pact edges toward implementation

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By [Doug Palmer](#)

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - A U.S. nuclear cooperation agreement with the United Arab Emirates is expected to go into force within the next month, despite concerns raised by some members of Congress about the moderate Gulf state's ties with Iran, congressional and industry sources said on Tuesday.

The pact, which President Barack Obama approved in May and sent to Congress for a 90-day review period, is potentially worth billions of dollars to General Electric and Westinghouse Electric, a subsidiary of Toshiba Corp.

The UAE was the third-largest oil exporter in 2007. But it is planning to build a number of nuclear reactors to meet an expected need for an additional 40,000 megawatts of electricity and is expected to award the primary contract soon.

Some U.S. lawmakers question whether the UAE is taking effective steps to prevent U.S. nuclear technology from falling into the hands of Iran, which the United States and other Western powers suspect of wanting to build a nuclear bomb.

Concerns about Iran's nuclear program have grown within the past week after Tehran disclosed it was building a second uranium enrichment plant.

"The State Department has failed to adequately respond to congressional inquiries regarding the proposed U.S.-UAE nuclear cooperation agreement, especially the status of the UAE's export control laws and ties to the Iranian regime," Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen said earlier this month.

"Without written assurances on these critical issues, this agreement will be a 'leap in the dark' with unpredictable consequences for U.S. security and will set a troubling precedent for all future agreements in the region," she said.

Ros-Lehtinen, the top Republican on the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, has crafted a bill that would prevent the pact from going into effect until Obama certifies the UAE has met certain conditions on its export controls program and has blocked assistance to Iran's nuclear weapons and advanced conventional weapons program.

But as yet, there is no sign of a congressional uproar over the civilian nuclear deal like the one that erupted when state-owned Dubai Ports World acquired U.S. port facilities as part of its purchase of P&O in 2006.

STATE DEPARTMENT HAILS 'UNPRECEDENTED COMMITMENTS'

Obama underscored his support for the pact this month during a White House meeting with Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahayan, the crown prince of Abu Dhabi, one of the seven emirates that comprise the UAE.

Obama also congratulated the UAE for being chosen to host the new International Renewable Energy Agency.

U.S. Undersecretary of State Ellen Tauscher has told lawmakers the UAE

made a number of "unprecedented commitments" to ensure it would not use American technology to develop a nuclear weapon or help others in the region do so.

"The UAE's expressed commitment not to pursue enrichment and reprocessing capabilities is a marked contrast to Iran, which continues to defy its international obligations," Tauscher said in July.

The earliest the pact could go into effect is October 17, depending on the number of days Congress is formally in session, a congressional aide said.

Danny Sebright, president of the U.S.-UAE Business Council, said he was optimistic the pact would take force soon and a consortium including U.S. companies had a good chance of winning the primary contract.

"I don't know of any last-moment efforts by folks to derail this," Sebright said.

A congressional aide, who asked not to be identified, also said there did not appear now to be enough opposition in Congress to stop the pact. "It looks like it would be too much of a hurdle," the aide said.

(Reporting by Doug Palmer; Editing by Chris Wilson)

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