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China Is Secondary Target of Sanctions on Iran

By John Glaser

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The Obama administration has agreed to let numerous countries be exempt from penalties under a harsh new set of economic sanctions on Iran's oil sector, **but has refused to grant China** – a major importer of Iranian oil – such exemptions.



The new round of sanctions are scheduled for June 28 and the U.S. has given waivers to India, South Korea, Turkey, and four other countries. They can now continue to do business with Iranian oil, so long as they voluntarily reduce their imports by significant margins.

China buys as much as a fifth of Iran's crude exports and remains the one major trading partner who will still face international penalties for continuing to import Iranian oil.

The Obama administration has been ramping up the pressure on China with an increasingly antagonistic foreign policy. The so-called 'Asia pivot' is [an aggressive policy that involves surging American military presence throughout the region](#) – in the Philippines, Japan, Australia, Guam, South Korea, Singapore, etc. – in an unprovoked scheme to contain rising Chinese economic and military influence.

This bellicose posture has increased tensions between the U.S. and China and between China and its weaker neighbors, [like the Philippines](#). A [recent report from the Center for Strategic International Studies](#) predicted that next year “could see a shift in Chinese foreign policy based on the new leadership's judgment that it must respond to a U.S. strategy that seeks to prevent China's reemergence as a great power.”

“Signs of a potential harsh reaction are already detectable,” the report said. “The U.S. Asia pivot has triggered an outpouring of anti-American sentiment in China that will increase pressure on China's incoming leadership to stand up to the United States. Nationalistic voices are calling for military countermeasures to the bolstering of America's military posture in the region and the new U.S. defense strategic guidelines.”

And now, the sanctions policy on Iran is giving the administration an opportunity to target China some more. The sanctions themselves are [a mere power play](#): their supposed justification is to pressure Iran to reassure the West of the peaceful nature of its nuclear program, but the consensus in the U.S. military and intelligence community is that Iran has no nuclear weapons program and has demonstrated no intention of developing one. The sanctions [are really](#) about [authority and domination](#).

And that seems to be the case for the secondary targets of the sanctions regime, like China. In order to get international support for the sanctions, Obama needed to grant exemptions to various allies whose economies depend on Iranian oil. But not China.

“I wouldn't be surprised to see China raked over the coals a little longer before a decision is taken on whether to grant them a waiver,” Bob McNally, head of the Washington-based oil consultancy Rapidan Group, [told Al Jazeera](#).

The administration won't comment on the refusal to grant China the exemptions, but some think it is just to bully someone. “If the administration is willing to exempt all of these countries, who will they make an example out of?” said US Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Republican and chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.