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Congress has 90 days to block deal approved under Bush Obama OKs US nuclear energy deal with UAE



President Obama approves a civilian nuclear deal with the UAE

WASHINGTON (Agencies)

American President Barack Obama on Thursday signed a civilian nuclear deal with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) worth potentially billions of dollars to U.S. energy companies, setting the stage for Congress to decide whether to block it.

"I have determined that the performance of the agreement will promote, and will not constitute an unreasonable risk to, the common defense and security," Obama said in a statement.

Supporters believe those concerns can be addressed. The UAE, by renouncing uranium enrichment and reprocessing of spent fuel, has made clear they have no intention of building a nuclear bomb, Sebright said.

His memorandum did not mention U.S. disquiet over a video of an Afghan merchant allegedly being beaten by a member of the UAE royal family, which raised human rights concerns in Congress.

Congressional decision

The administration of former President George W. Bush signed the pact with the wealthy Gulf state just days before leaving office in January.

The next step in the approval process for the civil nuclear deal is for Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to formally submit it to the U.S. Congress. The pact would go into effect after 90 days unless lawmakers vote to block it.

"I expect now that the president has signed it will go to Congress pretty quickly," said Danny Sebright, president of the U.S.-UAE Business Council, which is planning a big push for approval of the deal. "We

look forward to engaging Congress and answering any of their questions. We believe the agreement is rock solid and will stand on its merits."

Obama's decision to approve the deal comes just weeks before he plans to visit Egypt to fulfill a campaign promise to deliver a major speech to the Muslim world.

The UAE, which was the world's third largest oil exporter in 2007, is planning to build a number of nuclear reactors to meet an expected need for an additional 40,000 megawatts of electricity by 2017.

Big cake

U.S. nuclear reactor builders, GE and Westinghouse Electric Co, a subsidiary of Toshiba Corp, stand to get a big share of the expected \$40 billion market if Congress allows the agreement to go forward.

Representative Howard Berman, who chairs the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, has said Congress would carefully examine the deal to make sure it would not help Iran develop a nuclear bomb.

Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, the top Republican on the foreign affairs panel, is expected to raise concerns about past problems with illegal transshipment from UAE to Iran.