US Lawmakers Rail Against ‘Inappropriate’ UN Vote on Iran Deal

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A powerful US senator leading the charge against the nuclear deal with Iran decried the Obama administration’s decision Monday to endorse the deal at the United Nations before Congress had a chance to review the pact.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker said the move was “inappropriate” and “contrary to the spirit” of legislation recently signed into law by President Barack Obama.

As chair of the committee at the center of the 60-day Senate review of the deal, Corker will be leading the review hearings for the Senate, and his committee is expected to be the point of origin for a resolution of approval or disapproval of the Iran deal itself.

“The administration’s decision to endorse this agreement at the UN prior to a vote in Congress on behalf of the American people is contrary to the spirit of the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act, which was supported by overwhelming majorities of the House and Senate and signed by the president,” he said in a statement.

Earlier Monday, Obama welcomed the unanimous acceptance by the UN Security Council of a resolution supporting the deal recently struck between Iran and the P5+1 nations and paving the way for the removal of tough international sanctions against Tehran.

After the Security Council resolution passed by a vote of 15-0, Obama noted that “there is broad international consensus around this issue” and added that his “working assumption is that Congress will pay attention to that broad basic consensus.”

But Corker’s response indicated that it was not just that some members of Congress were skeptical about the deal itself, but were also angered by a perception that Obama was sidestepping the legislature — and the law.

“It is inappropriate to commit the United States to meet certain international obligations without even knowing if Congress and the American people approve or disapprove of the Iran agreement,” Corker wrote in his Monday statement.

“During the review period, members on both sides of the aisle will evaluate the agreement carefully, press the administration for answers and then vote their conscience.”

Corker authored the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act, which allows Congress the option of voting a vote of approval or disapproval of the deal reached last week with Tehran.

Under the law, Congress has 60 days to review the agreement and vote, but the president can veto a vote of disapproval that fails to garner the support of two-thirds of the Senate.

While it is not clear how many Democratic legislators are considering voting against the agreement itself, some have already questioned the president’s quick turn to the UN before the Congressional review period concludes.

In a bipartisan show of concern, Representative Ed Royce, Republican chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and Representative Eliot Engel, a Democrat and the committee’s ranking member, issued a joint bipartisan statement saying that the two were “disappointed” about the passage of the United Nations Security Council resolution.

“We are disappointed that the UN Security Council passed a resolution on Iran this morning before Congress was able to fully review and act on this agreement,” the two wrote. “We are also greatly concerned that the resolution lifts restrictions on Iran’s ballistic missiles in eight years and conventional arms in five years. Regardless of this morning’s outcome, Congress will continue to play its role.”

On Thursday, Democratic Senator Ben Cardin joined Corker in urging Obama to postpone the Security Council vote until Congress had the opportunity to review the agreement.

In a letter to the president, both senators wrote that they were “deeply concerned that your administration plans to enable the United Nations Security Council to vote on the agreement before the United States Congress can do the same,” wrote the senators. “Doing so would be contrary to your statement that ‘it’s important for the American people and Congress to get a full opportunity to review this deal… our national security policies are stronger and more effective when they are subject to the scrutiny and transparency that democracy demands.”

The letter won the support of House Democratic whip Steny Hoyer, who said that he believes “that waiting to go to the United Nations until such time as Congress has acted would be consistent with the intent and substance of the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act.”

Hoyer is Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi’s right-hand man and his concern over the UN process was striking, given Pelosi’s own quick support for the deal itself.