
Iran Rejects Trump Offer Of Talks As A Dream, Without Value

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LONDON: Senior Iranian officials and military commanders on Tuesday rejected U.S. President Donald Trump's offer of talks without preconditions as worthless and "a dream", saying his words contradicted his action of reimposing sanctions on Tehran.

Separately, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said Trump's repudiation of an international nuclear deal reached in 2015 was "illegal" and Iran would not easily yield to Washington's renewed campaign to strangle Iran's vital oil exports.

In May, Trump pulled the United States out of the multilateral deal concluded before he took office, denouncing it as one-sided in Iran's favour. On Monday, he said that he would be willing to meet Rouhani without preconditions to discuss how to improve relations.

Iran's foreign minister said that Washington should blame itself for ending talks with Tehran when it withdrew from the nuclear deal.

"U.S. can only blame itself for pulling out and leaving the table...Threats, sanctions and PR stunts won't work," Mohammad Javad Zarif said in a tweet.

The foreign ministry spokesman said Trump's offer to negotiate with Tehran

contradicted his actions as Washington has imposed sanctions on Iran and put pressure on other countries to avoid business with the Islamic Republic.

"Sanctions and pressures are the exact opposite of dialogue," Bahram Qasemi was quoted as saying by Fars news agency on Tuesday.

The head of the powerful Revolutionary Guards equally dismissed Trump's tentative offer, saying the Islamic Republic was not North Korea.

"Mr Trump! Iran is not North Korea to accept your offer for a meeting," Guards commander Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari was quoted as saying by Fars News agency.

"Even U.S. presidents after you will not see that day," he added.

The head of Iran's Strategic Council on Foreign Relations said Tehran saw no value in Trump's offer, made only a week after he warned Iran it risked dire consequences if it made threats against Washington.

"Based on our bad experiences in negotiations with America and based on U.S. officials' violation of their commitments, it is natural that we see no value in his proposal," Kamal Kharrazi was quoted as saying by the semi-official Fars news agency.

The Strategic Council on Foreign Relations was set up by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to help formulate long-term policies for Iran.

NO MEETING PLANNED

Trump's move to force Iran into new negotiations has for now reunited Iranian hardliners who opposed the nuclear deal and pragmatists like Rouhani who championed it to Iran's economically crippling stand-off with Western powers.

Ali Motahari, the deputy speaker of parliament who is seen as part of the moderate camp, said that to negotiate with Trump now "would be a humiliation".

"If Trump had not withdrawn from the nuclear deal and not imposed sanctions on Iran, there would be no problem with negotiations with America," he told state news agency IRNA.

A senior State Department official said on Tuesday U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will not meet with his Iranian counterpart during a meeting of Southeast Asian nations in Singapore this weekend.

Israel, which opposed the nuclear deal and encouraged Trump to withdraw from it, seems not concerned with the U.S. offer to meet Iranian leaders.

A senior Israeli official told Reuters on Tuesday: "Israel is in continuous contact with the American administration. Senior American officials have stated that there is no change in America's firm policy on Iran."

Under the 2015 deal, the fruit of Rouhani's efforts to ease Iran's international isolation to help revive its economy, Iran curbed its nuclear programme and won relief from U.N. and Western sanctions in return.

NUCLEAR PACT IN JEOPARDY

Trump condemned the deal in part because it did not cover Iran's ballistic missile programme and involvement in Middle East conflicts. He reactivated U.S. sanctions, the most all-encompassing measures against Iran, and warned countries to stop importing Iranian oil from Nov. 4 or risk U.S. penalties.

European signatories to the deal have been searching for ways to salvage it but cautioned Tehran that they may not be able to persuade many investors not to bolt from business with Iran to avoid U.S. punishment.

Rouhani said during a meeting with Britain's ambassador on Tuesday that after what he called the "illegal" U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal, "the ball is in Europe's court now".

He added, "The Islamic Republic has never sought tension in the region and does not want any trouble in global waterways, but it will not easily give up on its rights to export oil."

Rouhani and some senior military commanders have said Iran could disrupt oil shipments from Gulf states through the Strait of Hormuz if Washington tries to choke off Iranian oil exports.

Reiterating Tehran's official stance, Iranian Navy Commander Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi was quoted as saying by Tasnim news agency that the strait would remain open "if Iran's national interests are preserved".

Iran's OPEC governor, Hossein Kazempour Ardebili, told Reuters on Tuesday that Trump was mistaken if he expected Saudi Arabia and other oil producers to compensate for losses of Iranian oil caused by U.S. sanctions.

"It seems President Trump has been taken hostage by Saudi Arabia and a few producers when they claimed they can replace 2.5 million barrels per day of Iranian exports, encouraging him to take action against Iran," Ardebili said.

"Now they and Russia sell more oil and more expensively. Not even from their incremental production but their stocks."

He said oil prices, which Trump has been pressuring the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries to bring down by raising output, will instead rise unless the United States grants waivers to buyers of Iranian crude.

Iran's currency plumbed new depths on Monday, dropping past 120,000 rials to the dollar, but Trump's expressed willingness to negotiate with Tehran sparked a minor recovery on Tuesday to 110,000 rials on the unofficial market.

Videos on social media showed hundreds of people rallying in Isfahan in central Iran, and Karaj near Tehran, in protest at high prices caused in part by the rial's devaluation under heightened U.S. pressure.
