

Iranian factory follows Khamenei's orders, increases uranium enrichment capacity



Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (C) sits between President Hassan Rouhani (R) and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif (L) during a meeting in Tehran, in a photo released by Khamenei's office on July 15, 2018 **HO (KHAMENEI.IR/AFP)**

Under the 2015 agreement, Iran can only enrich uranium to 3.67 percent.

An Iranian factory is now producing rotors for up to 60 centrifuges a day, sending a clear message to the United States about the Islamic Republic's willingness to decrease its nuclear capabilities.

The announcement came from the head of Iran's atomic agency Wednesday just a day after a top Iranian official said Iran was ready to boost its uranium enrichment to higher levels if talks to salvage the nuclear deal with Europe fail.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said last month that he had instructed atomic agencies to prepare factories for increased uranium enrichment following US withdrawal from the nuclear deal.



View of nuclear centrifuges at Iran's Nantanz nuclear facility **(Press TV/AFP/File)**

“We have of course adopted some measures in order to prepare the ground for eventually increasing the level of enrichment if it is needed and if the negotiations with the Europeans fail,” Behrouz Kamalvandi, spokesman and vice-president of Iran’s Atomic Energy Organisation, told a news conference in Tehran.

“We are of course continuing to carry out and implement our obligations based on the JCPOA,” he said, referring to the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers that put strict limits on its atomic program in return for sanctions relief.

“But at the same time, taking every scenario into consideration, we are preparing ourselves,” he added.

The US announced in May that it was abandoning the 2015 agreement and reimposing nuclear-related sanctions, threatening global companies with heavy penalties if they continue to operate in Iran.

In a bid to save the accord, the EU and European parties to the deal — Britain, France and Germany — presented a series of economic “guarantees” to Iran this month, but these were judged “insufficient” by Tehran.

Negotiations are continuing, and foreign ministry spokesman Bahram Ghasemi said Monday they could last several “weeks”, according to state television.

In June, in a bid to mount pressure on the Europeans, Iran announced a plan to increase its uranium enrichment capacity with new centrifuges in the event that the agreement collapses, while still denying any desire to build a nuclear weapon.

Under the 2015 agreement, Iran can only enrich uranium to 3.67 percent — far below the roughly 90-percent level needed for nuclear weapons.

-Iran takes US to court-

Meanwhile, Iran has called on the UN’s top court to order the US to immediately lift the re-imposed sanctions, claiming they are causing “irreparable prejudice,” the tribunal said Tuesday.

Tehran filed its case with the International Court of Justice on Monday arguing that the renewed sanctions, which had been lifted under a 2015 nuclear deal, violate a decades-old treaty between the two old foes.

“Iran maintains that its application relates to the decision of the United States of 8 May 2018 ‘to re-impose in full effect and enforce’ sanctions and restrictive measures targeting, directly or indirectly, Iran and Iranian companies and/or nationals,” the ICJ said in a statement.

Through the sanctions the US “has violated and continues to violate multiple provisions” of a 1955 Treaty of Amity and Economic Relations, which was concluded before the Islamic revolution under the regime of the shah.

The goal of turning to the ICJ is “to hold (the) US accountable for its unlawful re-imposition of unilateral sanctions,” Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif wrote earlier in the day on Twitter.

“Iran is committed to the rule of law in the face of US contempt for diplomacy and legal obligations. It’s imperative to counter its habit of violating (international) law,” he added.

Iran and the US have not had diplomatic relations since 1980, when American embassy officials were held hostage in Tehran.

Nuclear-related sanctions will be reimposed by Washington in two phases in August and November, seeking to bar European and other foreign companies from doing business with Iran and blocking its oil sales abroad.

- 'Billions in lost trade' -

Iran and the other signatories to the 2015 agreement have been scrambling to preserve the limited trade deals they were able to secure since it was signed.

Zarif addressed world diplomats and Iranian businessmen at a lavish Tehran hotel on Monday night, in a meeting designed as a show of continued mutual support in the face of the US move.

"This administration in the United States doesn't know how to behave towards the world... it breaks international treaties as a tool. It is necessary to put a stop to this behavior," Zarif said.

Austrian ambassador Stefan Scholz, whose country currently holds the presidency of the European Union, said "unorthodox and innovative measures" were being considered to allow banking transactions to continue after US sanctions return.

"We are all in this together, since the EU is facing a net loss of 10 billion euros (\$11.7 billion) in lost trade with Iran next year," Scholz said.

The ICJ was set up in 1946 to rule in disputes between countries. It is unclear whether Iran's latest case will be taken up by the judges in The Hague.

Four days of hearings into an earlier complaint lodged by Iran in October 2016 against the US for freezing around \$2 billion of its assets abroad are due to start on October 8 when the United States will argue the court has no authority to hear the case.

Source: <https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/international/middle-east/179720-180718-iranian-factory-follows-khamenei-s-orders-increases-uranium-enrichment-capacity>

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