

Prospects of US-Iran talks now more remote than ever

The US on Tuesday reimposed the first segment of economic sanctions on Iran after President Donald Trump gave carte blanche for America to exercise more pressure on the Iranian government. This is in order to get it to return to the negotiating table and reconsider new articles and amendments to the 2015 nuclear agreement that was signed by Tehran and the five permanent states of the UN Security Council plus Germany.

These sanctions include halting all US financial transactions with Iran, which affects the deals signed between Tehran and American auto and aircraft producers. The second batch of sanctions will come into effect in November and these will be the most dangerous as they will apply to Iranian oil and gas exports.

To what extent will Trump's threats affect countries trading with Iran, such as the EU, China, India and Russia? Will they counter the American measures even though Trump has warned that any nation that does business with Iran will be violating US sanctions and, as a result, would lose their business deals with the US?

"Anyone doing business with Iran will not be doing business with the United States," the president tweeted. He had earlier called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action agreement "one-sided," "disastrous" and the "worst I've ever seen." Trump believes renewed economic pressure will force Tehran to agree to sit and talk about a new deal. Trump's statements against Iran are deemed a humiliation to the countries which approved the nuclear deal, including the EU, which is still committed to the pact in order to protect European firms that have projects and ventures in Iran, such as Germany's Siemens, France's Total and Renault, and the British-Dutch oil company Shell.

It sounds like the American administration is divided into two: Those who seek to exercise more pressure on Iran to gain more benefits from the Iranians and their allies China, India, Russia and Turkey on the one hand, and those who seek a peaceful settlement for the issue by opening dialogue with Iran through

backdoor channels on the other.

For Iran, this is a soap opera, as many believe Trump wants to have all these economic and trade deals given to American companies. Iranian president Hassan Rouhani said: "They want to launch psychological warfare against the Iranian nation. Negotiations with sanctions doesn't make sense. We are always in favor of diplomacy and talks... but talks need honesty."

For Russia, the sanctions aim to push the Iranians to complete surrender. In other words, to denuclearize, announce a permanent cessation of atomic enrichment, and to stop producing ballistic missiles that are a threat to other countries.

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Trump believes that Iranian allies such as Russia would dissuade Tehran from normalizing ties with other countries in the Middle East and the US as they would face an inevitable collapse similar to the 1990s demise of the Soviet Union, which led to the implosion of the USSR into the Russian Federation and other independent republics.

Would the implosion of Iran be safe for the region? Would it be safe for Russia, India, Pakistan and China? Only Trump knows the real answer as he is the one who initiated the idea of imposing an embargo on Iran and its military arms, which include the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. It also remains to be seen if the sanctions will be conducive to the cessation of Iranian logistical support to Hezbollah in Lebanon and Al-Hashd Al-Sha'abi and other factions that Iran supports in Iraq, Yemen and Syria.

Russians believe that the US always wants to take the whole pie for itself without sharing with others. This justifies why Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had a meeting in Muscat with Omani Foreign Minister Yusuf bin Alawi. Isn't this the same scenario as a few years ago, when the US was talking to the Iranians secretly in Oman to reach a nuclear deal?

It is possible that the US is playing both parties in the Gulf region, seeking the

utmost benefit from both before announcing remarkable progress has been achieved vis-a-vis the nuclear deal and Iranian commitment to the peace and stability of its neighbors on the basis of non-interference in their internal affairs.

Will such unilateral actions by the US help disband the IRGC? Iran's recent maneuvers with speedboats in the Arabian Sea and the Strait of Hormuz reveal that it would act if cornered.

What prompted Trump to offer "unconditional" dialogue with Iran, in the time and place that the latter sets? The initiative of unconditional dialogue was launched by the president, but the Iranians do not trust him. Thus, any dialogue will not take place before the next segment of sanctions is imposed, meaning the Iranian government will be weakened.

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