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Exclusive

RIPi chief: Iran can adapt to new condition under sanctions

Domestic Economy Desk

The US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal — also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) — signed between Iran and P5+1, was mainly aimed at bringing Iran's economy to its knees.

On May 8, US President Donald Trump appeared on TV to announce, amid hopes and mostly fears and despite international efforts to persuade him to act otherwise, that Washington will pull out of the JCPOA and will reinstate nuclear sanctions on Iran. As Iran's top economic sector in terms of fetching revenue, the oil industry will again be the main target of US sanctions and most hit by the restrictions.

This comes as the officials of the Iranian Oil Ministry say the US sanctions will fail to significantly impact the oil industry particularly in case Europe remains in the JCPOA and fulfills its commitments to the deal.

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Iran positive on nuclear deal hopes after EU talks



Europe may take retaliatory measures against US sanctions

Rouhani urges EU to stand against US 'illegal' actions

International Desk

Iran's foreign minister said Tuesday that efforts to save the nuclear deal after the abrupt US withdrawal were "on the right track" as he began talks with European powers in Brussels.

Mohammad Javad Zarif met EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini ahead of evening talks with his counterparts from Britain, France and Germany — the three European signatories to the 2015 landmark deal who are scrambling to preserve it.

Tehran has warned it is preparing to resume "industrial-scale" uranium enrichment "without any restrictions" unless Europe can provide solid guarantees that it can maintain the economic benefits it gained from the nuclear agreement despite the United States reimposing sanctions.

Zarif gave an upbeat assessment after a "good and constructive" meeting with Mogherini.

"I believe we're on the right track to move forward in order to ensure that interests of all the JCPOA remaining participants, particularly Iran, will be preserved and guaranteed," he told reporters. The deal's official name is the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA.

"The JCPOA has benefits for all sides and we must make sure that [the US] would not benefit from its illegal exit," he said. "We agreed over the importance of full implementation of the nuclear deal ... and preserving the interests of Iran and all those remaining parties," he said.

Mogherini, who as the EU's top diplomat chaired the final stretch of 12 years of negotiations to clinch the Iran accord in July 2015 in Vienna, said: "We will all save it together."

Warning to US

Speaking ahead of the meeting with Zarif, British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson urged the US to hold off from further destabilizing the agreement.

"The UK and our European partners continue to view the nuclear deal as vital for our shared security, and remain fully committed to upholding it," Johnson said.

"We will look at potential options for supporting continued sanctions relief for Iran to ensure we meet our commitments under the deal, as well as abiding on Iran to continue to abide by the restrictions the deal places upon their nuclear program," he said.

Johnson also called on Washington "to avoid any actions that could prevent the remaining parties to the agreement from meeting their commitments under the deal — including delivering sanctions relief through legitimate trade."

The European Union insists the JCPOA is working, pointing to repeated UN inspections verifying the Islamic Republic's compliance with its side of the bargain, and Mogherini's spokeswoman Maja Kocijancic said ahead of Zarif's arrival that "we must do our utmost to preserve it."

EU may use 'blocking regulation'

EU leaders aim to show a united front on preserving the Iran deal when they meet for a pre-summit dinner in Sofia today, officials said.

Mogherini and European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker will outline to the leaders what measures the bloc could take to shield its now substantial economic interests in Iran.

The EU, which along with Germany, France, Britain, Russia, China and the United States, signed the nuclear accord with Iran, does have some steps it can take to shield European business in Iran.

They include retaliatory sanctions, allowing the European Investment Bank to invest directly in Iran and coordinating euro-denominated credit lines from European governments. In the past, the European Union has also lodged complaints at the World Trade Organization.

Among them is also the possible use of an EU "blocking regulation" which would, in essence, ban European companies from respecting American sanctions where those sanctions might damage EU interests, notably trade and the movement of capital. The regulation, which has been brandished as a threat in the past but never actually used, was drawn up more than 20 years ago and would have to be revised.

The EU's energy commissioner will also travel this week to Iran to discuss strengthening European energy support to the Islamic Republic.

European firms, especially those from France and Germany, rushed to invest in Iran following the 2015 accord, under which Tehran agreed to freeze its nuclear program in return for the repeal of international sanctions.

German exports to Iran totaled nearly three billion euros in 2017, while French exports soared from 562 million euros in 2015 to 1.5 billion in 2017 and oil giant Total has pledged to invest some \$5 billion in the South Pars gas field.

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Palestinians mark Nakba Day after Gaza massacre

Palestinians held Tuesday fresh protests along the Gaza fence, a day after Israeli forces killed dozens there as the US Embassy opened in Al-Quds on what was the conflict's bloodiest day in years.

Palestinians on Tuesday marked the Nakba, or "catastrophe", commemorating the more than 700,000 Palestinians who fled or were expelled in the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation.

In the West Bank, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas declared a general strike on Tuesday after Israel's "massacres".

On Monday, tens of thousands gathered near the Gaza fence in protest while smaller numbers of stone-throwing Palestinians approached it and sought to break through, with Israeli snipers positioned on the other side.

The death toll led to strong condemnation from rights

defend its borders" but also said "the large volume of live fire is extremely concerning".

"We continue to implore Israel to show greater restraint," he said.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan accused Israel of "state terror" and "genocide".

Turkey also said it was recalling its ambassadors to the United States and Israel "for consultations", while South Af-



It came a day after the United States transferred its Israel embassy from Tel Aviv to the holy city of Al-Quds in a move that infuriated the Palestinians and was widely condemned, AFP reported.

Most of the 60 Gazans killed Monday were shot by Israeli snipers, Gaza's Health Ministry said.

The toll included a baby who died from tear gas inhalation along with eight children under the age of 16, the ministry said. At least 2,400 others were wounded in the bloodiest day since the 2014 Gaza war.

Some funerals were held on Monday, while others took place Tuesday.

groups and concern from a range of countries.

But the United States, which blamed Hamas, blocked the adoption of a UN Security Council statement that would have called for an independent probe into the violence, diplomats said.

But French President Emmanuel Macron condemned the "violence of the Israeli armed forces against the protesters" while EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said "we expect all to act with utmost restraint to avoid further loss of life".

Britain's Minister for the Middle East Alistair Burt acknowledged "Israel's right to

recall its ambassador to Israel "until further notice".

In Dublin, Ireland summoned Israel's ambassador to protest.

The UN rights office said it seemed any Palestinian protesting in Gaza, regardless of whether they pose an imminent threat, is "liable" to be killed by Israeli forces.

China called for restraint, "especially" from Israel.

Israel occupied the West Bank and Al-Quds in 1967 and later annexed East Al-Quds in a move never recognized by the international community.

Israel considers the entire city its capital, while the Palestinians see East Al-Quds as the capital of their future state.

Afghanistan launches airstrikes as Taliban attack western city

Afghan and US aircraft Tuesday bombed Taliban positions in the western city of Farah after the militants launched a major attempt to capture the provincial capital, with fearful residents seeking shelter from explosions and gunfire.

The attack — the first major assault targeting a city since the Taliban launched their annual spring offensive — began around midnight, with the militants capturing one urban district and parts of another, said local provincial council member Jamila Anini.

"Heavy fighting continues inside the city and aircraft have just started bombarding Taliban positions," she told AFP earlier Tuesday from inside Farah.

NATO's Resolute Support mission in Kabul tweeted that the Afghan Army, supported by US airpower including A-10 Thunderbolts, was "on the offensive" and the city "remains under government control".

Interior Ministry spokesman Najib Danish said the Afghan Air Force was also taking part in the fighting. "The Taliban will fail," he vowed.

Defense Ministry spokesman Mohammad Radmanish said at least 10 militants and two Afghan security force members had been killed.

Inside the city residents reported clashes were continuing.

At least some militants have been hiding in private houses, making it difficult for Afghan forces to use heavy weapons, Farah Governor Abdul Basir Salangi told Ariana News, adding: "But still we are taking back positions one by one."

Many radio and television channels in the province have stopped broadcasting, fearing for their employees' lives, according to media watchdog Nai.

The Taliban are stepping up their spring offensive, in an apparent rejection of a peace talks overture from the government.

Farah is a poppy-growing province in an isolated region of Afghanistan. There are plans for a section of the multi-billion-dollar TAPI (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India) gas pipeline to traverse it, a project with which the Taliban have pledged to cooperate.

But it has been the scene of intense fighting in recent years. In 2017 militants tried three times to overrun the capital, according to the Afghanistan Analysts Network.

As such, Tuesday's offensive "should not have taken government forces off guard", said military analyst and retired general Atiqullah Amarkhail.