

OPINION

Iran sanctions divide Trump administration

By Hormoz Baradaran*

Washington's reimposed sanctions on Iran exacerbated deep divisions in the Trump administration, putting US top officials at loggerheads over how to minimize the damage to American allies that are thirsty for Iranian oil.

White House national security adviser, John Bolton, tricked Trump into trouble by emboldening him to withdraw from the JCPOA without having a back-up plan. When the US president terminated the deal unilaterally on May 8, the Trump cabinet was divided into two opposite camps: Trump-Bolton axis vs. the Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin and State Secretary Mike Pompeo. The two groups clashed over the consequences of breaking an international deal.

As a ringleader of Iran hawks, Bolton pushed for a tougher stance and stringent sanctions on Iran. But the Mnuchin-Pompeo axis sided with Europeans and chose not to instantly cut off Iran's access to the financial service SWIFT and not cutting Iranian oil flow to world markets because they saw these ideas as missions impossible.

Last Friday, internal fissures within the Trump administration deepened when the Trump-Bolton axis finally bowed the other camp, with Bolton not participating in the rollout of the White House plan to reimpose sanctions on Iran, lifted under the 2015 nuclear deal.

In an interview with the Washington Examiner, a senior Republican congressional aide called it a "fiasco" for Bolton and other hawks who were hoping to organize an international campaign against Iran.

Frustrated desires and dashed hopes compelled Bolton to stay out of the picture.

Sanctions have come back but overblown claims of their impacts have primarily taken a toll on Americans, not Iranians. For the first time since the end of Cold War, the US is haplessly struggling to make an international consensus on Tehran.

The invasion of Iraq in 2003 revealed the first signs of global opposition to US bullying but this time foreign countries are openly voicing their frustration and proactively forging a different path on Iran.

Tehran has remained committed to the nuclear deal and morally has the upper hand. So, there are no grounds to punish it.

On the contrary, it is the Trump administration that has broken internationally established norms and laws.

While Asian buyers of Iran oil succeeded in securing US waivers, Europeans are setting up a special mechanism to continue trade with Iran, free from US sanctions. Embroiled in disputes with the United States, Asia and the EU have come to the conclusion that it is time to start telling America: Enough is enough!

Opposition from other parts of the world have put Trump in an embarrassing position on how to engineer a political and moral comeback on the international arena.

By issuing waivers to eight countries to continue purchasing Iranian oil, it seems that the Trump administration has kicked the can down the road until it could find a way to fix its tarnished image and heal the divisions in the White House.

*Hormoz Baradaran is an Iranian journalist.



Zarif: Talks with US require mutual respect

Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said that any future negotiations with the United States require a new approach by Washington as well as mutual respect.

"Mutual trust is not a requirement to start negotiations - mutual respect is a requirement," Zarif said in a wide-ranging, 45-minute interview with USA TODAY.

The Trump "administration does not believe in diplomacy. It believes in imposition," Zarif said in the interview, just before the White House on Monday reimposed economic sanctions on Iran's energy and banking sectors.

While the US government insists the sanctions do not target humanitarian goods, amid a currency crash and international companies pulling out of Iran, basic goods have become more expensive and some life-saving medicines unavailable.

"Mutual respect starts with respecting yourself, with respecting your signature, respecting your own word," Zarif said, a reference to various international agreements Trump has abandoned or renegotiated since taking office.

Iran's foreign minister spoke to USA TODAY in Antalya, a resort town on Turkey's southwestern Mediterranean coast, where he was attending an economic conference. He addressed how Iran's already-crippled economy will cope with the sanctions and attempts by European leaders to salvage the accord without Washington.

"The current US administration is essentially asking all members of the international community to violate international law" by forcing them to break a deal that was enshrined in a United Nations Security Council resolution,



USA TODAY

"Mutual respect starts with respecting yourself, with respecting your signature, respecting your own word," Zarif said.

tion, Zarif said, later adding: "Iran is used to US sanctions. We've had them for almost 39 years."

Zarif also spoke about Iran's role in the Middle East region and Tehran's ties with Riyadh.

The Saudis have come under intense scrutiny in recent weeks following the murder of the Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the hands of Saudi state operatives in Istanbul, Turkey.

"Unfortunately, a person has been murdered in a very brutal way," Zarif said, referring to Khashoggi's killing inside the Saudi Consulate. "Who created the Taliban? Whose citizens were involved in the September 11 attacks? Who supported the Islamic State group [Daesh] in Syria? Who is bombing Yemeni civilians? Who abducted [Lebanon's prime minister] and kept him in captivity for three weeks? ... Look at all these realities," he added, saying Saudi involve-

tee that they won't do that again in the next agreement?" Zarif said in the interview.

"It doesn't have to be a different administration, but it does require a different approach," Zarif stressed, referring to what it would take for Iran to join US talks.

Trump has said in recent weeks that he is open to the idea of holding talks with Iran's leadership, without preconditions, about the prospect of a new nuclear deal - an offer that Iran has rejected.

"We reached an agreement with the United States, not a two-page agreement, but a 150-page agreement. And the United States decided to walk away from it," Zarif said.

He then rattled off a litany of agreements the Trump administration has either withdrawn from or demanded that they be renegotiated, from the Paris climate accord to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to a landmark arms control agreement with Russia dating to the Reagan administration in the 1980s.

"It wasn't our fault that the United States is not a reliable negotiating partner," Zarif said in the interview. "It's a problem that the international community is facing."

Iran holds air defense drill

Iran's Armed Forces launched an annual air defense drill to test their capabilities in defending the Islamic Republic's airspace against a wide range of threats, using an array of advanced weapon systems.

Dubbed the Defenders of Velayat Skies 2018, the two-day drills kicked off on Monday and featured joint operations by the Khatam al-Anbiya Air Defense Base, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Aerospace Force and the Iranian Air Force, which is the aviation branch of Iran's Army, Press TV reported.

Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari, the deputy commander of the Iranian Army for coordination who also presides over



MEHR NEWS AGENCY

the drill's board of commanders, told a media briefing that the military exercises cover an area of around 500,000 square kilometers in the country's northern, western, eastern and central regions.

Sayyari said all of the air defense systems and equipment used in the exercises were designed and developed by Iranian experts.

"All of our weapons, training

and coordination fit the nature of the threats that we face because we know these threats very well and build our strategies around them" and then test those strategies by simulating various scenarios in military drills of this kind, he said.

Detection, identification, interception and destruction of threats using advanced equipment, including electronic warfare, were the key objectives of the Velayat drills, Sayyari said.

Commenting on the drill's coincidence with the US reimposition of sanctions against the Islamic Republic, Sayyari said the economic pressure is never going to affect Iran's ability to defend itself.

Israeli cyberattack on Iranian communications infrastructure foiled

Iranian officials announced that an Israeli cyberattack on the country's communications infrastructure has been successfully thwarted.

"The Zionist regime [Israel], with its record of using cyber weapons such as the Stuxnet computer virus, launched a cyberattack on Iran on Monday to harm Iran's communications infrastructure," Telecommunications Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi said, according to Reuters.

"Thanks to the vigilance of the technical teams, they returned empty-handed. We will follow up this hostile action through international forums," Jahromi said. His deputy,

Hamid Fattahi, said technical teams had intercepted multiple attempts to infiltrate their systems early on Monday and had been "strongly warned off."

Stuxnet, which is widely believed to have been developed by the United States and Israel, was discovered in 2010 after it was used to attack a uranium enrichment facility at Iran's Natanz underground nuclear site.

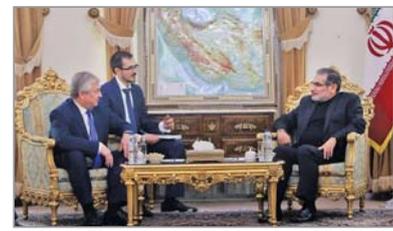
It was the first publicly known example of a virus being used to attack industrial machinery. Last week, Gholamreza Jalali, head of Iran's Civil Defense Agency, said Iran had neutralized a version of Stuxnet.

Iran, Russia to keep supporting Syrian forces

National Desk

Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council said on Monday that Tehran and Moscow will continue their support for Syrian forces and described the Russian deployment of S-300 missile system in Syria as "an appropriate action."

"Iran and Russia will continue to support Syrian armed forces in fight against terrorism and will actively pursue political trends within the framework of the existing coalition," Ali Shamkhani said, ISNA reported.



IRNA

He made the remarks in a meeting with Russian President's Special Envoy for Syrian Affairs Alexander Lavrentiev in Tehran.

The Russian envoy said he has traveled to Iran on President Vladimir Putin's orders for a twin mission: to give a report on a recent four-party meeting of Russia, Turkey, Germany and France on the situation in Syria that was recently held in Istanbul, and to voice Moscow's unequivocal support for Iran against the fresh round of US sanctions.

Shamkhani praised the interaction between Tehran and Moscow in Syria, saying the two sides' cooperation has been based on "three strategic and unchangeable principles"

"Supporting the legal Syrian government and cooperation with it in its fight against terrorism, preserving the Syrian territorial integrity, and preparing the ground for political mechanisms that will help the Syrian people decide their future are the goals of Iran and Russia in Syria," Shamkhani said. Shamkhani also hailed Russia's decision to supply Syria with S-300, an advanced air defense missile system, calling it "an appropriate action that shows the negative actions of the Israeli regime has no impact on (Iran-Russia) cooperation in Syria."

Moscow said last month that it would bolster Syria's air defense following the downing of a Russian plane. For his part, Lavrentiev hailed Iran's constructive role in contributing to the political settlement of crisis in Syria.