



US intelligence service closely cooperating with MKO terrorists: Iran UN envoy

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Rouhani: Iran leaves door open for diplomacy

US: 'Full normalization' of ties with Iran possible

Iran: Reduction of JCPOA commitments 'unchangeable'

Zarif: Talks with US under duress 'never possible'

Russia: US cannot both reject deal and call for Iran's full compliance



president.ir

President Hassan Rouhani has told France's presidential envoy that Iran has left the door open for diplomacy on the 2015 nuclear deal.

"Iran has fully left the path open for diplomacy and negotiation," Rouhani said in his meeting with Emmanuel Bonne, a diplomatic advisor to French President Emmanuel Macron in Tehran.

Rouhani said Iran seeks "full implementation" of commitments by all sides of the deal.

"If signatories to the deal implement their commitments, Iran also will take new steps."

France and other countries have called on Iran to go back to complying with the nuclear deal after Tehran increased uranium enrichment beyond the limits set by the deal.

During the meeting, Bonne submitted Macron's written message to Rouhani.

Bonne traveled to Tehran for a second time after a daylong visit last month in an effort to save the nuclear deal and easing tensions between Iran and the United States.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said Bonne's mission is "to try and open the discussion space to avoid an uncontrolled escalation, or even an accident."

'Unchangeable strategy'

Earlier in the day, Bonne met

Ali Shamkhani, the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

Shamkhani told Bonne that Iran's decision to gradually scale back its commitments to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) will not be reversed until the country achieves its "full rights" under the deal, which US President Donald Trump abandoned last year.

Shamkhani said the move is an "unchangeable strategy" and that Iran regards it as within the terms of the JCPOA because the country is entitled to downgrade its commitments if the other sides failed to meet their own.

"In the view of Europe's failure to use the one-year-long opportunity, during which Iran unilaterally fulfilled its commitments, [it is now] our country's firm decision to carry out its obligations in proportion to the other parties' reciprocal measures. Time is over for unilateral measures," Shamkhani added.

The accord between Iran and world powers promised sanctions relief, economic benefits and in return for curbs on the Islamic Republic's nuclear program.

But Iran says it has lost patience with perceived inaction by European countries more than a year after Trump unilaterally pulled the United States out of the agreement.

Shamkhani described the US practice of "maximum pressure"

against Iran as a failed strategy, noting that Tehran has proved that it enjoys economic, political and defense capabilities to deal with various tensions and challenges.

"Iran has in practice proved that in economic, political and defense dimensions it has the ability and capacity to manage and deal with various tensions and challenges. You cannot speak with the language of force," Shamkhani criticized European countries for their "lack of will" in providing relief from US sanctions.

He said Europe should not have allowed the US to take it hostage, and instead should have shown its independence from the US.

The French diplomat said he was not carrying a message from the US to Iran as a mediator.

"I have not come to Iran as a mediator and do not carry any message from the US to Tehran. Given Iran's undeniable role and influence in the region, Paris is interested in continuing dialogue and cooperation with Iran to manage current crises in Syria, Yemen, Iraq and Lebanon," Bonne said.

He said Macron is seeking joint initiatives to stop the US economic war against Iran, which will lead to de-escalation of tensions in the region.

The European parties to the deal along with the EU's diplomatic chief on Tuesday called on

Iran to go back to the agreement.

Iran "must act accordingly by... returning to full JCPOA compliance without delay," said a statement from the European Union and foreign ministers of France, Germany and Britain.

Iran until recently consistently lived up to its commitments under the deal, but is now in breach of two aspects, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which is tasked with inspections.

On Monday Iran surpassed 4.5% uranium enrichment above the 3.67% limit under the accord.

The IAEA said on Monday that Iran has exceeded the purification cap, having earlier this month confirmed it had surpassed 300 kilograms of enriched uranium reserves, another limit that was set by the deal.

But in an apparent effort to boost France's diplomatic efforts, Le Drian described Iran's nuclear actions as "slight excesses."

A source at the French presidency said "we are in a very critical phase. The Iranians are taking measures that are in violation of the agreement) but (they) are very calibrated."

'Full normalization of relations'

Iran's nuclear actions prompt-

ed an emergency meeting of the IAEA's Board of Governors on Wednesday.

Jackie Wolcott, the US ambassador to international organizations in Vienna, told the gathering Iran's recent moves amounted to "nuclear extortion."

"There is no credible reason for Iran to expand its nuclear program, and there is no way to read this as anything other than a bribe and transparent attempt to extort payments from the international community," Wolcott said.

She urged "to reverse its recent nuclear steps and cease any plans for further advancements in the future."

Wolcott said the US is "open to negotiation without preconditions" and offers "Iran the possibility of a full normalization of relations."

Russian delegate Mikhail Ulyanov fired back at the meeting that the US could not both reject the deal and call for Iran's full implementation of it.

"Although for some reason they only refer to Tehran, in fact the United States, who are refusing to fulfill its own obligations under the nuclear deal, lost any right to demand this from others," he said.

Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's representative, stressed Iran's nuclear program is for "peaceful purposes" and said his country

is prepared to resume full implementation of the JCPOA, "commensurate with the implementation of the commitments by all participants."

At the same time he slammed the US decision to withdraw from the deal and reinstate sanctions, saying it was "neither legitimate nor legal" and should not be accepted by the international community.

"Due to costly and predictable consequences of sanctions, they should be seen as weapons of warfare and means of aggression," he said. "Economic sanctions are, in fact, collective punishment of the ordinary people, contrary to the objectives and purposes of human rights, and should be considered as crimes against humanity."

Trump on Wednesday threatened to ratchet up sanctions on Iran and again denounced the JCPOA.

"Iran has long been secretly 'enriching' in total violation of the terrible 150 Billion Dollar deal made by John Kerry and the Obama Administration. Remember, that deal was to expire in a short number of years. Sanctions will soon be increased, substantially!" Trump said on Twitter.

No talks under pressure

After Washington withdrew

from the JCPOA in May 2018, it reimposed stinging sanctions on Tehran, hitting the banking and oil sectors hard in an effort to renegotiate "a better deal."

But Zarif said on Wednesday the US needs to stop its "economic terrorism" against his nation as it won't agree to hold talks under pressure.

"Negotiations are never possible under duress," Zarif said. "Pressure and economic terrorism against Iran must stop and then we can talk" about implementing the nuclear deal, he said.

Iran demanded that the other parties to the deal - especially France, Germany and Britain - deliver promised economic benefits and help it bypass the US sanctions.

However, it became clear that this was no simple task, and Iran - whose economy depends heavily on oil exports - changed tack and indicated it would reshape its policy of "strategic patience."

In May, a year after Trump's withdrawal, Rouhani said that Iran would roll back its commitments under the deal in stages every 60 days in an effort to force the other parties to deliver on their side of the bargain.

AFP, AP, Reuters Bloomberg and Press TV contributed to this report.

Parliament speaker: Anti-Hezbollah sanctions 'aggression' on Lebanon



AFP

Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri condemned Wednesday sanctions imposed the day before by the United States against three Hezbollah officials, including two lawmakers, calling them an "aggression" against Lebanon.

The new sanctions announced Tuesday mark the first time the US has placed elected officials from the powerful Shia movement on its sanctions blacklist.

Lawmakers Amin Sherri and Muhammad Hassan Raad were accused of "exploiting Lebanon's political and financial system" to benefit Hezbollah, according to a statement from the US Treasury.

Berri said the sanctions against

the officials from Hezbollah constitute "an aggression against Parliament and certainly an aggression against Lebanon", according to a statement from his office.

Berri's Amal Movement is allied with Hezbollah, a major political player that took 13 seats in the country's May 2018 parliamentary elections and secured three cabinet posts.

Also placed on the blacklist was Wafiq Safa, a top Hezbollah security official close to the resistance movement's Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah.

"Lebanon and its banks are

committed to all the legislation and there is no justification at all for escalating these sanctions," he said.

Hezbollah has not issued a formal statement in response to the latest sanctions. Hezbollah MP Ali Ammar told Lebanese broadcaster LBC on Wednesday the sanctions were a "medal of honor."

"The American action is an attack on national sovereignty and it is a government duty to defend this sovereignty and protect it," he said.

Another Hezbollah lawmaker Ali Fayyad slammed the sanctions on Tuesday, calling them

"a humiliation for the Lebanese people."

The sanctions brought to 50 the number of Hezbollah individuals and entities blacklisted by the US Treasury since 2017.

Finance Minister Ali Hassan Khalil, a senior Berri aide, said late on Tuesday the sanctions against Hezbollah were "unwarranted and do not serve financial stability."

"Lebanon and its banks are committed to all the legislation and there is no justification at all for escalating these sanctions," he said.

AFP and Reuters contributed to this story.