



Incoming top EU diplomat: Europeans' unity crucial in keeping JCPOA going

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IRAN DAILY



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Number 6311 • Wednesday October 9, 2019 • Mehr 17, 1398 • Safar 10, 1441 • Price 20,000 Rials • 12 Pages • www.iran-daily.com • newspaper.iran-daily.com

Iran opposes any Turkish military operation in Syria



AFP

Iran's Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Tuesday that the Islamic Republic opposes any Turkish military operation in Syria.

The ministry has been following "worrying news of the possibility of the Turkish military forces entering Syrian soil and believes that the occurrence of such an action will not only not end Turkey's security concerns, but will lead to widespread material and human damage," the statement said.

On this basis Iran "is against any type of possible military operation" of that kind.

The statement came after Turkey's foreign minister assured his Iranian counterpart that Ankara's military operation in northern Syria is temporary.

Mevlut Cavusoglu gave the assurance in a Monday phone conversation with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

In the phone call with Zarif, Cavusoglu emphasized the need to respect Syria's territorial integrity, saying Turkey's operation in that region would be temporary.

The top Iranian diplomat, however, expressed Tehran's opposition to any military action, and urged Turkey to respect the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of the Arab country.

Zarif at the same time stressed the necessity of fighting terrorism in Syria for the ultimate establishment of stability and security at the country. However, he said the Adana Agreement is the best approach for Syria and Turkey to address their concerns.

Turkey said on Tuesday it was all set to launch a military push into northeast Syria after the United States began pulling back troops, opening the way for a Turkish attack on Kurdish-led forces long allied to Washington.

But US President Donald Trump warned he would "obliterate" the NATO ally's economy if it took action in Syria that he considered "off limits" following his decision on Sunday to pull 50 American special forces troops from the border region.

The US move will leave its Kurdish-led partner forces in Syria vulnerable to an incursion by the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK), which brands them terrorists because of their links to Kurdish militants who have waged a long insurgency in Turkey.

Signaling a further potential shift in the region's power balance, the Kurdish-led forces said they might start talks with Damascus and Russia to fill a security vacuum in the event of a full US withdrawal from the Turkish border area.

The Syrian government said it was an opportunity to welcome the country's Kurds back into its fold.

The Kurds have been "tossed aside" by Washington, Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad told the pro-government Al-Watan newspaper.

"We will defend all Syrian territory, and we will not accept any occupation of Syrian land," he added.

The TSK will never tolerate the establishment of a terror corridor on our borders. All preparations for the operation have been completed," the Turkish Defense Ministry said on Twitter early on Tuesday.

"It is essential to establish a safe zone/peace corridor to contribute to our region's peace and stability, and for Syrians to achieve a safe life."

Trump's warning on Turkey's economy appeared aimed at placating critics who accused him of abandoning the Syrian Kurds by pulling out US forces. The decision drew criticism from Democrats and a rebuke from some of Trump's fellow Republicans in Congress, including Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell.

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Zarif signals cooperation after Saudi reaches out for talks



AFP

Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has underscored his ministry's preparedness to engage in collaboration with neighboring countries over regional security following a report on Saudi Arabia's pursuit of mediation between Riyadh and Tehran.

Zarif told Iranian Parliament members on Tuesday that "the Foreign Ministry is always ready for cooperation with its neighbors on the security of the region. We have (already) announced our position officially," he said.

His comments come in the wake of a report published by The New York Times where the paper said Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin

Salman had asked Iraqi and Pakistani top officials to intervene following the September 14 Yemeni aerial attacks on Saudi oil facilities.

Iran's top diplomat also made a reference to the regional peace initiative set forth last month by President Hassan Rouhani at the UN General Assembly and noted that the Islamic Republic's Hormuz Peace Endeavor (HOPE) serves the same purpose.

"Under the conditions and circumstances where the Saudis have expressed readiness to negotiate with Iran, if they pursue regional issues not through killing people but at the negotiating table, then they will definitely find the Islamic Republic on their side,"

added Zarif. The HOPE initiative comes against the backdrop of tensions in the Persian Gulf, where several tankers and commercial vessels recently came under suspicious attacks by unknown parties while attempting to cross the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

Also, last month's air raid on the Saudi state oil giant, Aramco, was claimed by Yemen's Houthis, but the kingdom and the US were quick to blame it on Iran without evidence.

The New York Times report also said that US President Donald Trump's refusal to engage in a military response following the Yemeni attack "raised questions for the Sa-

dis about the American commitment to Saudi security, which has underpinned the strategic layout of the Persian Gulf for decades."

Washington's lack of action "prompted Saudi Arabia to seek its own solution to the conflict," The Times wrote.

The Saudi government told paper that Baghdad and Islamabad had offered to mediate talks, but denied the move was at the request of the Saudi crown prince.

Tehran already indicated it was open to talks with Riyadh in that regard, with Ali Larjani, the speaker of Iranian Parliament telling the Al Jazeera news network that "Iran is open to starting a dialogue with Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region."

Rouhani: US knows its 'maximum pressure' has failed



president.ir

Political Desk

President Hassan Rouhani said on Tuesday America's "maximum pressure" campaign has failed and that the US has accepted its failure.

"Enemies of the Iranian people may not admit it, but have accepted that the strategy of maximum pressure has failed and must put aside such an approach against the Iranian nation," Rouhani said in a meeting with the staff of Iran's Intelligence Ministry.

Rouhani said the Iranian nation "made a great sacrifice" in the face of US sanctions and managed to offset "the ill-wishers' maximum pressure."

He said all governmental entities, branches of power, and the armed forces acted with great coordination and effort since the US withdrew from a multilateral nuclear deal with Iran last year in May and reimposed tough sanctions on the Islamic Republic that were lifted under the agreement.

"This path must continue to the point where enemies are completely disappointed with their maximum pressure," the president said. "The Iranian nation has shown that it is vigilant and well aware of the root causes of pressures and difficulties," he said.

In return, the authorities could thank the nation by working to safeguard Iran, its Islamic establishment and the country's national

interests and by offering efficient services to people, he added.

Rouhani said Iran's major economic indicators have improved in recent months despite America's "unprecedented hostility".

"Despite the unprecedented difficulties and hostilities towards the Iranian nation, there has been a rise in major economic indexes in recent months," Rouhani said.

He also hailed the Intelligence Ministry for its "prominent role" in maintaining safety and security for investment and businesses.

Tension has risen between longtime foes Tehran and Washington since last year when US President Donald Trump quit the 2015 nuclear pact.

The US, as part of President Donald Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign, has been seeking to cripple Iran's economy through what Washington refers to as "toughest ever" sanctions.

The campaign, which began in May 2018 after Trump abandoned the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, has witnessed several rounds of sanctions that specifically targeted Tehran's oil exports and sought, unsuccessfully, to bring them to zero.

In retaliation for the US "maximum pressure" policy, Iran has gradually reduced its commitments to the pact and plans to go further if the European parties to the deal fail to keep their promises to shield Iran's economy from US sanctions.

Britain's Brexit talks with EU appear on verge of collapse



AP

Brexit talks between Britain and the European Union appeared to be on the verge of collapse on Tuesday, with Brussels accusing London of intransigence and threatening the bloc's future.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke to German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who said a deal was "overwhelmingly unlikely" without compromise by the UK, according to a Downing Street source, AFP reported.

She warned that any deal was "essentially impossible" if London failed to give ground on the thorny Irish border question and keep British-run Northern Ireland in the EU customs union, the source added.

Britain is due to leave the EU on October 31, more than three years after the country narrowly voted in a referendum to end its almost five-decade membership of the bloc.

Johnson, who once said he would rather be "dead in a ditch" than seek a Brexit extension - submitted new plans last week in place of an agreement his predecessor Theresa May struck with Brussels in late 2018.

The UK Parliament, which is

deeply divided over Brexit, rejected that plan three times.

According to the BBC, Downing Street believes talks between the two sides are now "close to breaking down".

In Berlin, Merkel's office confirmed the chancellor spoke by telephone to Johnson but said it would not comment "on such confidential discussions".

Johnson's official spokes-

man told reporters the pair had a "frank exchange" and that discussions were at a "critical point".

But he rejected an accusation from EU Council president Donald Tusk that Johnson was playing "some stupid blame game".

Tusk tweeted: "At stake is the future of Europe and the UK as well as the security and interest

of our people.

"You don't want a deal, you don't want an extension, you don't want to revoke, quo vadis?" Tusk asked, using the Latin expression for "where are you headed?"

Much of the focus in both London and Brussels is shifting to what happens next, as a crunch EU summit approaches next week - and who would be to blame for a potentially chaotic no-deal Brexit.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies think-tank meanwhile warned that "even a relatively benign no-deal Brexit" would see Britain's debt burden surge to 50-year highs.

On the markets, the pound lost around 0.5 percent of its value against the dollar within moments of Downing Street's comments.

Johnson's proposals outline a new way to avoid a hard border between EU member the Republic of Ireland and Northern

Ireland after Brexit.

It would take Northern Ireland out of the EU's customs union but keep it largely aligned with the bloc's "single market" standards and regulations.

EU officials said this would not remove the need for customs checks - a deal-breaker because it jeopardizes the 1998 Good Friday Agreement that ended three decades of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland.

The agreement effectively created an invisible border between north and south, satisfying republicans who want a united Ireland and unionists who want to keep the status quo.

Keeping the border open and free-flowing has become a key sticking point in the Brexit talks.

Downing Street officials say Brussels is making a big mistake because failure in the coming days to reach a deal would result in Britain's position only hardening down the line.

One source in Johnson's office told The Spectator magazine the government will try to "do all sorts of things" to prevent another Brexit delay should negotiations really collapse.

Johnson has said Britain

will leave the EU on October 31 "deal or no deal - but no delay", despite legislation that requires him to request another postponement if no agreement is struck.

Scotland's top civil court was expected to rule Tuesday whether it could force someone else - possibly a judge - to sign the extension request if Johnson does not.

But should a delay still be granted at the EU summit, Johnson will campaign for a "no-deal" in a snap general election, the Downing Street source told The Spectator, which supports the ruling Conservative party.

"If this deal dies in the next few days, then it won't be revived," the source added in what was said to be a series of lengthy text messages.

Downing Street did not comment on the story.

The same source also warned that EU countries which were against further delays to Brexit would "go to the front of the queue for future cooperation".

Those who support further delays would "go to the bottom of the queue", including on security issues, the source added.