

Iran Rejects All Negotiations but Signals Domestic Differences: Its Confidence Remains Intact in the Face of Severe Sanctions

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Despite the positive approach by Iran Foreign Minister Jawad Zarif [proposing a humanitarian exchange of prisoners between Washington and Tehran](#) (in an attempt to break the stalemate and ease the current tension), Iranian Speaker Ali Larijani and 'Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps – Quds Brigade' (IRGC) commander Qassem Soleimani both [rejected](#) any rapprochement. It is the radical general mood in Iran and its tendency towards firmness rather than flexibility that is prevailing, as a response to the severe US sanctions on Tehran. In fact, Iran is showing signs of strength, less concerned about the US "strangulation policy", confident it can face the US establishment decision to impose "zero oil exports" and confident also that it will survive, as it has the last four decades whilst under sanctions imposed by all US Presidents since 1979.

The policy of the US establishment under President Donald Trump is to impose its hegemony and flex its muscles, adopting political and financial sanctions on countries rather than sending troops to submit opponents through a military act of war. All countries opposing the US hegemony are under the US's spotter microscope and have been listed on the sanction's agenda. These are Russia, China, North Korea, Cuba Nicaragua, Yemen, Lebanon, Iran, Syria- and many other countries.

These US sanctions aim to burden above all the population, destroy the local economy and, in consequence, trigger a domestic uprising to reach the ultimate goal: changing the regime. The US is not aiming to intervene militarily unless the situation is ripe enough at the minimum possible cost of military effort and expense. George Bush's previous policy of direct military interventionist era now seems out of fashion. Iran is aware of this and, in consequence, is comfortable about its domestic control of the situation. Tehran seems prepared for an economic siege for as long as President Trump is in power (until 2020) and, according to Iranian official sources, until the end of his next term if re-elected.

The White House believes Middle Eastern countries can top-up the difference needed to compensate the 'lost' two million Iranian barrels of oil exported on a daily basis. In a few words, the US objectives are two: preventing Iran's oil exports and compensating for the overall loss of quantity, so as to avoid any market panic and an uncontrolled oil price. In fact, both of these US targets are unachievable.



Tehran controls not only a considerable fleet of oil tankers but also hundreds of trucks capable of transporting oil to neighbouring countries like Pakistan, Turkey and Iraq. According to well-informed sources, “Iran has expressed to its neighbours the intention to sell oil at a price much lower than the market price”, rendering any tight siege impossible. Indeed, even when the “Islamic State” (ISIS) was in control of parts of Syria and Iraq, all neighbouring countries were buying the oil from ISIS due to its low price.

Foreign Minister Zarif said

“Iran had made an offer six months ago to the Trump administration to discuss the status of the prisoners but it went unanswered”.

Iran is retaliating to US sanctions with a total rejection of any negotiation process with the US establishment- unlike what Trump was hoping for.

“There is no point in negotiating with this man (Trump). He is dangerous. Let us not make mistakes proposing to negotiate with him (alluding to Minister Zarif)”, the Iranian Speaker Ali Larijani [said](#).

General Soleimani said

“the enemy wants to drag us to the negotiation table through economic pressure and this type of negotiation is an example of submission... Negotiation with the enemy under current conditions is pure surrender and certainly we will not give in to this humiliation”.

According to Iranian sources,

Sayyed Ali Khamenei “has always been sceptical about US intentions, even during Obama mandate, and refused to negotiate any other issues than the nuclear deal which successfully took place following President’s Hassan Rohani’s insistence on giving him and his diplomats a chance to try. Sayyed Khamenei will certainly not accept to talk to Trump whose approach towards his Middle Eastern partners is blatantly arrogant and who has no respect for any future deal by virtue of the ease with which he revokes and denies the very words he has pronounced himself!”.

Washington is hoping to force Iran to the negotiation table, while Tehran aims to disrupt the US plans. According to US officials, Iran has lost \$10bn due to sanctions. Nevertheless, according to the sources,

“in the last four decades, Iran lost [hundreds of billions](#) of dollars- but without giving in- when its autonomy was at its lowest level on many industrial and basic needs fronts. Iran today is not the Iran of 1979 when the revolution took power, nor like the Iran of 1989, when it agreed to halt the war imposed by Saddam Hussein”.

It is clear that both sides, the US and Iran, are setting out red lines for one another, and both seem unwilling to move from the position they have adopted for now.

Soleimani and Larijani brought to light differences within the leadership. Zarif could not have proposed a swap of prisoners without the agreement of his direct superior, President Rouhani. Soleimani and Larijani are both of the same “house”, and both very close to Sayyed Ali Khamenei who is clearly, from the very beginning, against any rapprochement with the US.

Some analysts believe the different stands of the Iranian officials is nothing more than a distribution of roles, a theory dismissed by the same Iranian official source.

“On the contrary, it is a firm position that Iran shall not negotiate unless the US fulfils its previous commitments”.

Sayyed Ali Khamenei rejected the engagement of the country in re-negotiations with the US over any other issues, except the re-establishment of the nuclear deal, the release of Iranian assets held by the US, and the lifting of all sanctions.

Trump’s attitude in disregarding international law, ignoring the role of the United Nations, his indiscriminate imposition of sanctions on various countries, his revoking of previous deals signed by the US and his total lack of consideration for his own Middle Eastern and European partners and allies- all this will help Iran become more radical than ever. Trump is certainly pushing Iranian radicals and pragmatists towards a future unification of positions, fighting back against total US world hegemony.

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