

US Showers Favors on Iran to Expedite the Revival of the JCPOA

News:

- Iraq has been given a sanctions waiver by the US, allowing it to release \$2.76 billion of Iranian funds from gas export payments, according to Yahya Al-e Eshaq, Chairman of the Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce.
- These funds are expected to meet the demands of the Central Bank of Iran and ensure the purchase of necessary goods, which may help stabilize the foreign exchange market.

Comment:

This news is of significance in the context of US-Iran moves on the Iranian nuclear file. The Biden administration had made it a key foreign policy goal to revive the 2015 nuclear deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which the Trump administration had withdrawn from. The latter move was done to discipline the Iranian regime, particularly the IRGC-led Quds Force, which had expanded into various countries in the Arab world after the Obama administration had signed the JCPOA. The Trump administration authorised the drone strike that killed the Quds Force Commander Qassim Soleimani while he left Baghdad International Airport in 2020. This killing significantly weakened the Quds Force in the region, with its new head Esmail Qaani lacking the charisma and influence to keep Iranian-backed militias on the Iranian track. The US signing of the JCPOA at that time was in line with US interests to allow the Iranian regime to move freely in the region, particularly to aid the Syrian regime which was on the verge of collapse. This would have been a political earthquake for the US, with those wanting to implement the Islamic system taking over, which would have thrown all US strategic considerations into a head spin.

Given the Biden administration's new foreign policy considerations, it is working to revive the JCPOA or even offer an interim deal that is satisfying to both parties. There are several evidences to point to US efforts to kick start the nuclear talks after they had stalled in Vienna. The IAEA ending its investigation into enriched uranium found at undeclared Iranian sites, its Board of Governors recently not issuing a censure resolution against Iran despite its continuous enrichment of uranium above the 60% purity rate, Iraq releasing owed debt to Iran, possibility of South Korea also releasing Iranian frozen assets, Biden's Chief National Security Advisor Brett McGurk low-key visit to Oman to discuss the Iranian nuclear file, Omani sultan's visit to Tehran (the meeting included Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Ali-Bagheri Kani), the prisoner swap between Belgium and Iran, Tehran's violations of its March commitments to the IAEA, and talk of a new prisoner exchange between the US and Iran, are all clear evidences of the US track to enter a deal, whether old or new with the Iranian regime. These moves have occurred in a short space of time, indicating the Biden administration's eagerness to get the deal over the line. Why is this the case? Several considerations are at play.

1. The US wants to settle tensions in the Middle East so that it can focus on shifting to tackle the threat posed by China. As a result, we have seen unprecedented settlements and reconciliations taking place, even there is movement on the Egypt-Iran track to break the ice after decades of coldness between the two countries.

2. The Iranian regime works closely on foreign policy issues with the US; this is evident in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. Hence, it is not in the interest of the US for the Iranian regime to collapse but looks to provide it with relief and possibly modify its behaviour when it comes to certain regional files such as Syria and Yemen. In addition, the threat of Iran, further shuffled Gulf and Zionist cards into US hands, as all these actors look to the US for a security umbrella and guarantees, thus ensuring its influence and leadership in the region.

3. The US presidential elections are set for 2024, with the primaries under way. It seems like the Biden administration wants to settle the Iranian nuclear file before the presidential contest starts; otherwise, it will face attacks from the Republicans and Zionist lobbies that will capitalise on this loose thread to undermine the Democratic candidate. If Biden gets a deal signed, the Democrats will be able to showcase a promise that they had made in the last race; to settle the Iranian nuclear file using soft diplomacy.

However, the Iranians are a stumbling block, with the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei needing to keep the powerful hardliners happy. However, his recent address to Iranian ambassadors and diplomats reflected flexibility on his part and he called on others to show flexibility in foreign policy, with compromise not indicative of failure or losses. It seems like he was setting the ground for signing a deal with the US. However, he must tread careful ground, as he hopes to create the conditions for his son to succeed him; this can only happen if the powerful IRGC and hardliners support him.

US-Iran will continue to play their hidden hand despite their overt dislike of one another to pull the wool over peoples' eyes. To end these games, and ensure real hope for the region, there is a need to re-establish the Khilafah (Caliphate) that will kick-out US interference in the region and not accept deals that compromises its security in favour of colonial interests and agenda.

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