

John Bolton confirms U.S. will extend Iran sanction waivers



Washington, August 2 (RHC)-- U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton has confirmed reports that his boss, President Donald Trump, is going to authorize a 90-day extension of sanction waivers against Iran, allowing the UK, France, China, Russia and Germany -- the remaining signatories of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal -- to continue their civilian nuclear cooperation with the Islamic Republic.

"I think the idea here is we are watching those nuclear activities very, very closely," Bolton told Fox Business Network. "So this is a short 90-day extension."

Even before taking office as US president in 2017, Trump had threatened to pull support for the nuclear deal -- known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) -- arguing that despite putting limits on Iran's nuclear energy program, it did not address Tehran's ballistic missiles as well as its growing regional influence.

In May 2018, Trump quit the nuclear deal and launched a "zero tolerance" campaign that sought to force Iran into renegotiating the JCPOA through sanctions and economic pressure. In early May 2019, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo extended five of seven sanctions waivers for three months, a significantly shorter period compared to earlier waivers.

The waivers allow other signatories if the JCPOA fulfill their commitments to work at Iran's Bushehr nuclear plant, the Fordow enrichment facility, the Arak nuclear complex and the Tehran Research Reactor.

Bolton's remarks on Wednesday came hours after the Trump administration introduced sanctions against Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, a key figure in the nuclear deal. Wendy Sherman, the lead U.S. negotiator for the JCPOA who also served as undersecretary of state during the Barack Obama administration, said the move against Zarif was connected to the sanctions waivers.

"For a president who says he is ready to talk with Iran without preconditions, sanctioning the foreign minister of Iran clearly undermines that objective and risks dangerous escalation instead," said Sherman, who is director of the Center for Public Leadership at the Harvard Kennedy School.

"One assumes sanctioning Zarif is the price for those waivers. The internal administration battle of war or diplomacy apparently wages on," she said. The Washington Post revealed in a report this week that Trump had sided with Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin to renew the waivers against the objections of Pompeo and Bolton during a White House meeting last week.

Mnuchin reportedly argued that without renewing the waivers, "the United States would have to sanction Russian, Chinese and European firms that are involved in projects inside Iran that were established as part of the 2015 nuclear deal."

The Treasury Department has apparently asked for more time to consider the possible outcome of such sanctions, the Post claimed.

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