

Biden reverses Trump-era measures against Iran and offers to re-join JCPOA talks

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U.S. President Joe Biden leaves the White House to spend the weekend at Camp David. (Photo: AP)

Washington, February 19 (RHC)-- The administration of U.S. President Joe Biden has reversed two measures adopted by his predecessor Donald Trump against Iran and offered to rejoin negotiations with the Islamic Republic and other parties to a nuclear agreement Washington left over two years ago, in the first apparent break with the previous administration's stance against the deal.

In a letter to the UN Security Council on behalf of Biden, acting U.S. Ambassador Richard Mills said the United States "hereby withdraws" three letters from the Trump administration culminating in its announcement on September 19 that the U.S. had reimposed UN sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

In the letter obtained by The Associated Press, Mills said that sanctions measures terminated in the 2015 council resolution endorsing the nuclear deal - known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) - with six major powers, but restored by Trump in September, "remain terminated."

In May 2018, Trump unilaterally pulled his country out of the JCPOA and re-imposed the sanctions that had been lifted under the UN-endorsed deal. A year after the US's withdrawal, the Islamic Republic began a set of countermeasures that saw it suspending its commitment to the JCPOA gradually and through many steps as the allies would sustain their non-commitment to the deal.

The decision by the Trump administration to invoke a provision in the 2015 council resolution allowing the "snapback" of sanctions because Iran was in "significant non-performance" with its obligations under the accord was ignored by the rest of the Security Council and the world.

The overwhelming majority of members in the 15-nation council described Trump's action illegal, arguing the US was no longer a member of the JCPOA. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the United Nations would not back re-imposing sanctions on Iran as Washington was demanding until he got a green light from the Security Council.

A new report says 13 countries of the 15-member UN Security Council have expressed their opposition to the US push to trigger the so-called snapback provision in the 2015 nuclear deal aimed at reinstating UN sanctions against Iran.

Meanwhile, Ned Price, a spokesman for the State Department, said Thursday the Biden administration was willing to meet with Iranian officials and other world powers involved in negotiating the nuclear deal.

Price said Washington "would accept an invitation" from the European Union's top diplomat to attend a meeting aimed "to discuss a diplomatic way forward on Iran's nuclear program." So far, no meeting has been arranged yet, but the EU's high commissioner, Josep Borrell, has expressed willingness to invite the parties to engage in talks.

A State Department official, briefing reporters on the condition of anonymity, said on Thursday Washington would be represented at the meeting by Biden's special envoy for Iran, Rob Malley.

Meanwhile, Republicans, who have pressed the Biden administration to keep the US sanctions on Iran, were quick to criticize Thursday's announcement. "It is concerning the Biden administration is already making concessions in an apparent attempt to re-enter the flawed Iran deal," said Rep. Michael McCaul, the top Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Shortly before Price's statement, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif called on European leaders to push the U.S. to lift its sanctions.

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