When Will the US and Iranian Leaders Meet?

The key element of the current system of international political, economic and military relations is the ability of the US and Iran to keep the conflict between the two countries from degenerating into direct military confrontation.

Until recently, the Donald Trump Administration had strongly opposed easing sanctions against Iran, instead imposing, somewhat furiously, even more sanctions on that country. In early September alone the US Government introduced economic measures against the country’s space program. The US State Department Special Representative for Iran Brian Hook announced that the US would deal with the so-called Oil for Terror Network, a group of individuals and organizations through which the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is engaged in the illegal, from the American point of view, sale of hydrocarbons.

Iran has recently taken additional steps to cancel the nuclear deal concluded by Tehran with a number of world powers in 2015 by pumping gaseous uranium into more advanced uranium enrichment centrifuges. At the same time, Tehran pointed out that in a situation where both the US and the European participants in the nuclear deal cannot guarantee lifting sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran as per the agreed plan, Iran would be no longer bound by this international agreement on the nuclear energy research restrictions. Moreover Iran emphasized its technical capabilities for enriching uranium to 20% and above. A number of analysts are even confident that Iran will be able to achieve a level of enrichment close to 90% for weapon-grade uranium.

It should be noted that these measures on the part of Iran had been expected for several days. Tehran promised earlier that it would give up parts of its nuclear deal obligations every 60 days until the European powers found a way to compensate Iran for the economic damage from the US sanctions imposed by the US President Donald Trump's Administration as part of its policy of exerting maximum pressure on Tehran. In July, Iran already exceeded the limits on the uranium reserves envisaged by the deal, and it unilaterally raised the limit on fuel enrichment from 3.67 to 4.5%. Nonetheless, the country has not yet officially withdrawn from the nuclear deal, unlike the United States.

However, President Trump’s decision to dismiss his National Security Advisor, John Bolton, because of strong disagreements with him on many issues, undoubtedly gives hope that the US-Iranian conflict can be mitigated in the near future.

The New York Times alleges Bolton believed his primary goal was to prevent the conclusion of agreements with America’s enemies. And, against this backdrop, the conflict with Iran, according to the former national security advisor’s entourage, was largely related to the position of John Bolton, for whom Trump’s withdrawal from the nuclear deal with, and the restoration of the US sanctions against, Tehran were the main achievements of his 18-month-long activity in the White House.

Trump himself once said, half in jest, that “if it was up to John, we’d be in four wars now.” And in this regard, the US President clearly meant the possibility of developments unfavorable for the world not only on the Iranian issue, but also on the possible reconciliation with North Korea due to Bolton’s strong condemnation of North Korean missile tests as a violation of the UN Resolutions and his refusal to join Trump when the US President met with the North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un in the demilitarized zone separating the two Koreas. It was Bolton’s policy as a Washington hawk to influence the US President regarding the White House action against the regime of Nicolas Maduro, providing the US support for the Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó in every way. Bolton’s negative stance on negotiations with the Taliban and his call on President Trump not to make an agreement with the radical
Islamic movement, combating which thousands of US soldiers died in Afghanistan, proved important as well: it resulted in Trump’s refusal to try and reach a peace agreement with them.

The 70-year-old John Bolton is considered one of the heavy-weights of the American conservative foreign policy establishment, adhering to a deep skepticism about international treaties, disbelieving in the effectiveness of international organizations and being confident that military power is an essential component of the US foreign policy. However, these principles of John Bolton often not only contradicted President Trump’s position, but also undermined several of his initiatives to find a peaceful solution to certain conflicts.

It is not surprising therefore that a significant number of the US media responded positively to the removal of the irreconcilable hawk from a key position in the White House, since, as many are emphasizing, he was pushing Trump away from peace and diplomacy.

Amidst these developments, the possibility of personal negotiations between the leaders of the United States and Iran to resolve the conflict and ease the anti-Iranian sanctions regime has become increasingly encouraging over the recent days. The most suitable option is to meet face-to-face on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly at the end of September. Still, Washington is emphasizing that whether negotiations will take place or not will largely depends on the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Anyway, what can be discussed and what mutual agreement may be reached in the event of a personal meeting between the two leaders remains questionable.

We must keep in mind that Iran’s position reads as follows: when will the US return to the Joint Comprehensive Action Plan, or simply put, to the nuclear deal? Only then, according to Tehran, can we talk about something else. It is one thing to agree to limit a nuclear program that has never actually pursued the goal of obtaining nuclear weapons. It is a completely different thing though when it comes to surrendering one’s influence and missile power. Iran will hardly go for it.

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