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Statements

Minister of Foreign Affairs

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Excerpts from the Foreign Minister's interview with "Iran"

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Since taking office in August, the new Iranian administration has, in the process of developing its foreign policy approach, placed a special emphasis on pursuing a balanced policy in regional and international relations. What components have led to the formulation of the concept of ‘balance’ in this approach?

To create the administration’s foreign policy indices, we selected a number of keywords, namely balanced foreign policy as well as active, dynamic and smart diplomacy.

What adoption of a balanced foreign policy means is that the administration’s prioritization of certain countries, such as the neighbors, in its diplomatic efforts will not imply turning a blind eye to expansion of relations with other states. We will follow a balanced diplomacy in our relations with all countries; meaning that concurrent with prioritizing ties with neighbors and Asian states, we will pursue an active, dynamic and smart diplomacy in our relations with Europe. In addition, we will not forget about the Latin American and African countries.

Do the existing capacities allow the administration to make a balanced use of the countries’ foreign relations, of which some are challenging?

The answer is positive. One of the projects we are currently implementing is the formation of expert and specialized teams in the Foreign Ministry. We seek to determine the county’s main priorities in each continent and parts of the world. For instance, our priority may be cultural in an area. Thus, a cultural approach will prevail in our relations in that area. Likewise, an economic approach may be more important for us in another area or in another part of the relations, security and political issues may be prioritized. This comes as we will not overlook our work with international organizations and pay special attention to their functions and of course, the deficiency, particularly, in international relations’ theoretical issues.

When the 13th government took office, a number of developments had already unfolded in the Islamic Republic’s relations with Western countries regarding the negotiations over Iran’s peaceful nuclear program and the conclusion of an agreement on the issue. Those developments have eventually sparked a new wave of mistrust toward European states and improving relations with them due to US withdrawal from the JCPOA. This has given rise to speculations that the inclination toward East will become stronger in the new administration, efforts will be intensified to strengthen relations with major Eastern countries, such as China and Russia, and the trust gap between Iran and Europe will widen. What is your

take?

I have to stress that adoption of an Asia-oriented approach does not imply that Iran would tie its entire foreign policy to China and Russia. We will use the capacity of China as an economic power in our relations and, likewise, will benefit from Russia as a neighbor as part of our neighbor- and Asia-oriented approach. We will continue our relations with these two states. However, as we have announced explicitly, we will tie the country's fate neither to that of the JCPOA nor to that of any other single state. Common interests are the basis for our relations. We will work with these two countries in line with our common interests. The more our national interests are safeguarded in interactions with China and Russia, the more expanded will become the fields we will define in cooperation with them.

We, nevertheless, are required to take a good look at the country's foreign policy developments. For instance, we should not adopt a single view toward the entire Europe. As former foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif had come close to this conclusion that Europe is more than three countries negotiating with us within the framework of the JCPOA, I, in my recent visit to New York realized during the meetings with a number of European states' foreign ministers, including those of Germany, France and the UK, that if, for instance, Britain is reserved about certain issues, foreign ministers of the other European countries, particularly those that are not JCPOA parties, have different attitudes. This means that these countries are willing to, within certain defined frameworks, work with the Islamic Republic in the fields of trade, technology and medicine.

In addition, we also have considerable capacities regarding Iranian nationals in other countries. The majority of the Iranian expatriates live in the US or Europe and a lower percentage in other states. They basically have good reputation and, those who are educated, have had a significant share in, particularly, the West's technological and scientific advances.

To what extent the intensifying competition between the US and China, which en route to creating new blocs of power, seek to increase the number of their allies in their surrounding areas, impacts Iran's Asia-oriented approach? Some maintain that the greenlight by Russia and China to Iran's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which was gained after years of efforts, can be analyzed within the same framework. To what extent do you see this competition influential in closer relations between Iran and these countries?

Temporary competitions and coalitions impact countries' approaches and policies. Likewise, hostilities among certain states have their own impacts. However, to safeguard the country's national interests, it is important for us to, in the light of the ongoing developments that unfold swiftly in the regional and international arenas, be able to update our policies promptly and step toward safeguarding maximum national interests. What is important for us is our national and common interests.

At present, relations with China and Russia are in line with our national interests. This comes as there is a spectrum of people in the country who are inclined toward the West and against China and Russia and when we visit Moscow or negotiate with Beijing, criticize us severely, saying the Islamic Republic's policy of 'Neither East nor West' is collapsing.

What I intend to say is that when the country's sovereignty is concerned, we are committed to the policy of 'Neither East nor West' and have borne heavy costs to stick to this key slogan of the Islamic Republic, which has been stipulated in the Constitution. Nevertheless, in the field of bilateral relations and national interests, we are required to have relations with the East and the West.

The failure to implement the JCPOA is what has widened the gap between those who are inclined toward the East and those who favor a Western-oriented approach. It is believed that the European's failure to honor their commitments will have negative impacts on Iran's political relations with these countries, thus, leading to a new era of mistrust between the Islamic Republic and Europe as the accord's failure is expected to have consequences such as the reopening of Iran's nuclear case in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)? Would you please elaborate?

About this issue, I have a personal attitude and an organizational duty, which is needed to be fulfilled. I personally believe that thanks to my colleagues' efforts in the past, six UN resolutions on Iran were revoked, being turned into a document titled the JCPOA. The accord was expected to resolve our economic problems, enabling us to reap its economic dividends. If this had taken place, the JCPOA could have worked well, we have benefited economically from it and it could have been said that a good thing had happened. But the JCPOA failed to work well even at its own time and the then US president Barack Obama was the first one to violate the deal. During Trump's term in office, he withdrew the US from the agreement and the three European states did nothing but giving promises.

What has been the accord's benefit for Iran in practice? Theoretically and legally speaking, it may be said that prior to the signing of the JCPOA, we had a special situation and were under sanctions under the UNSC's Chapter VII. But at present, nothing has happened in Iran's interests in practice and the JCPOA has failed to have any economic benefits for us. Despite all the ups and downs, the deal has so far failed to lead to the removal of the sanctions.

Are you prepared for resuming the Vienna negotiations in a way that they safeguard Iran's interests?

In New York, I received requests for Iran's return to the Vienna negotiations. They want us to return to Vienna and resume the talks from the point they were stopped.

Do you accept it?

In my primary talks with the representatives of the three European states, the European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell and UN's Secretary-General António Guterres, I said that we have to discuss the way to hold and the point to restart the negotiations and that we are drawing our conclusions. But taking a glance at what can be the rational procedure of the negotiations, we can infer that there is a simpler way to resume the talks and that is to return to the point where Trump pulled the US out of the deal. I maintain that if the US is seriously determined to return to the JCPOA, there is no need for all the

negotiations. An executive directive by US President Joe Biden and a declaration that Washington would want to return to the point where Trump withdrew from the agreement would be sufficient. However, the problem is that we see this will and intention solely in the Americans’ messages and not their behavior.

You mean you receive these messages by US officials through different channels?

That is true. We receive such messages through different diplomatic channels. They say they are seriously intent on returning to the JCPOA and that Mr. Biden is serious about returning to the deal. They tried hard to receive a precise date or a time span for our return to the Vienna talks from me. In reaction to these requests, however, I asked if Mr. Biden was seriously determined to return to the JCPOA. They said yes. Then I asked how he wanted to show his serious will to us and they said he would show it if he came to the negotiating table.

They made offers on behalf of the US government. I told them that there must be a sign proving that they were determined and serious and that they had to make a move to demonstrate their goodwill; for instance, by releasing \$10 billion of Iran’s frozen assets. We, nevertheless, are distrustful of the other side.

Another point is that regarding the nuclear negotiations, we have explicitly told the other side that, despite the existing distrust, we are required to witness efforts by the three European signatories to the deal to pressure the US to fulfill its commitments. They are required to make efforts and rebuild the lost trust. I told Borrell that we would return to the negotiating table, but that he also had to pressure the US to honor its pledges.

Will Iran return to the negotiating table even if the US does not take a step to demonstrate its goodwill?

Our decision is to return to the talks, but we are assessing the way we are going to negotiate and if we plan to return to the point where we stopped the negotiations or want to adopt another method. We have to see how we can safeguard maximum rights and interests for our people and if there is a guarantee for the continuation of that.

It appears the other sides’ pressures for the resumption of the talks have been intensified. Have they set a deadline?

When I was in New York and in answer to the question when we will resume talks, I would say “soon”, they asked what I meant by the word. I said the word’s meaning was different in our culture from what it denoted in theirs. I told them when they said they would soon set up the EU-Iran Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX), nothing had happened after several years at the important level of Iran’s large economy and thus, from their point of view the word “soon” meant five and a half years or more. But the truth is that we will resume the negotiations as soon as we come to the conclusion.

Have you come to any conclusion on how and when to resume the talks? Do you have any new stance?

The EU insists that we resume the talks from the point it was stopped at the end of the sixth round. We are assessing the progress of the negotiations and arriving at conclusions regarding the contextual issues. We want to hold negotiations that have a tangible outcome. We are currently holding separate talks with each side.

Why did you choose Brussels as the new venue for the negotiations?

Two weeks ago, Iran’s Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Ali Baqeri-Kani hosted EU deputy foreign policy chief Enrique Mora. We discussed that the negotiations must not face a dead-end. We want to hold the preliminary negotiations with the EU’s coordinator before entering talks with the remaining parties to the JCPOA.

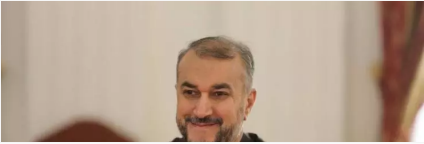
It is heard that some JCPOA parties have expressed dissatisfaction with the resumption of the talks in Brussels.

That is not my understanding. I spoke with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov about the issue and he was happy that the negotiations had kicked off in Tehran and would continue in Brussels.


In recent months, the US officials have focused on regional dialogues and seek to tie them to Iran’s nuclear issue. This comes as the American officials move to put forward the request of holding regional negotiations is an echo of demands by some regional Arab states. This is while, in recent years, Iran has also proposed the idea of intraregional cooperation. Why such ideas have not been put into action yet?

We approve of regional dialogues within the framework of the region and maintain that there is no relation between the JCPOA talks and regional negotiations. We have already started negotiations with Saudi Arabia, and a few rounds have been held. We seriously welcome and back any regional dialogue and cooperation. The first reason why such an idea has not been implemented yet, is the presence and interference of transregional forces and efforts to promote Iranophobia in the region. The other reason is the dominant culture in the region. The nature of interactions with regional countries is different from that of the relations with Western states. If we understand well the sociological situation of the region as well as the characteristics of regional rulers and people, we will realize that it is not difficult to bring regional cooperation into fruition.

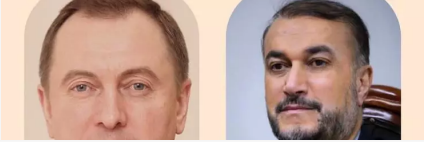
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Add.: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Imam Khomeini St., Imam Khomeini Sq., Tehran, IRAN **Call Center :** 61151 **Email :** info@mfa.gov.ir

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