

Ynet-News, February 21, 2021 – Sunday

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Letter to new US; all faction PLO decree two-state; lift all sanctions, ban all police

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Soviet-era documentary footage shows spy Eli Cohen in Damascus Syria in 1961

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Iran insists US lift sanctions for violating limits & we will respond in the future

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Iran plans to restrict & expel UN inspectors if US does not lift sanctions

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Letter to new US; all faction PLO decree two-state; lift all sanctions, ban all police

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In letter to Biden, PA and Hamas commit to two-state solution on 1967 lines

Ahead of May and July votes, factions commit to respect results and to peaceful transfer of power afterward if necessary; memorandum also asserts PLO as the sole legitimate representative for the Palestinian people

Elior Levy | Published: 02.21.21 , 18:00

The Palestinian Authority (PA) sent an official letter to the White House claiming that all factions, including Hamas, were committed to the establishment of a Palestinian state along the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The letter was delivered by Hussein Al-Sheikh, the PA's Head of the General Authority of Civil Affairs, to U.S. President Joe Biden's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Israeli and Palestinian Affairs Hady Amr.

The provisions listed in the memorandum were all agreed upon during a meeting of the various Palestinian factions in September.

The letter also stated that all the factions, including Hamas and Islamic Jihad, were committed to international law standards, that the PLO is the political umbrella and the legitimate sole representative for the Palestinian people and that the results of the Palestinian elections will be respected and that a peaceful transfer of power will take place afterward if it may occur.

The memo also asserted the factions' continued commitment to "popular peaceful resistance" until a Palestinian state is founded.

With parliamentary and presidential elections set to take place on May 22 and July 31 respectively, more than 2.6 million Palestinians registered last week on the electoral rolls - over 93% of eligible voters.

The memorandum reinforces the assessment that the elections within the PA are meant to rebuild relations between Ramallah and the new U.S. administration. On Saturday, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas issued a decree ordering to lift all sanctions on freedom of expression ahead of the elections, banning all police pursuits and detentions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip for "reasons related to freedom of expression and political affiliation," with prisoners held on such justifications to be freed. Hamas welcomed the order, allowing their movement to campaign in the West Bank.

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Soviet-era documentary footage shows spy Eli Cohen in Damascus Syria in 1961

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Newly surfaced Soviet-era footage shows spy Eli Cohen in Damascus

New Russian documentary series opens with video filmed by a Soviet officer of man believed to be Cohen, dubbed 'greatest Israeli spy who has ever operated in an Arab country'

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Russian news agency RT released last week never-before-seen footage of Israeli spy Eli Cohen walking down the streets of Damascus as part of a new documentary series about Syria.

The documentary starts with a film bought from an antique shop in Saint Petersburg. The film shows images of a man, believed to be Cohen, walking along March 29 street in Damascus.

The creators of the series reveal that the video was shot by Boris Lukin, a graduate of the Soviet military academy and specialist in signals and communication, whom Soviet records showed was awarded three "red star" medals.

Lukin and Cohen both arrived in Damascus at the same time. One of Cohen's coded messages back to Israel had spoken of the arrival of 150 Soviet military experts in Damascus after the Soviet-western clash over Syria swayed towards Moscow when the Baath swept to power. The Mossad also knew that Lukin had arrived in Damascus. Both Lukin and Cohen would crack down on fugitive Nazis during their time in Damascus. Working under the alias Kamel Amin Thabet, Cohen began his clandestine activities in Syria in 1961. He managed to foster close relationships with the Syrian political and military hierarchy and became the chief adviser to the minister of defense.

He provided Israel with valuable intelligence regarding the Syrian army's deployment in the Golan Heights and reported on military and political moves until his cover was blown by Syrian counterintelligence in January 1965.

Cohen was arrested and despite public and clandestine efforts on behalf of Israel, he was prosecuted and sentenced to death.

Eli Cohen was described by the Syrians as "the greatest Israeli spy who has ever operated in an Arab country."

To this day, Cohen's remains have not been returned to Israel despite much efforts to recover them.

02.21.21

Iran insists US lift sanctions for violating limits & we will respond in the future

02.21.21

Iran says studying EU-proposed informal meeting with U.S.

Zarif suggests European Union foreign policy chief could coordinate next move; Tehran insists United States must first lift Trump's sanctions while Washington says Iran must return to compliance with 2015 deal as initial step

Reuters| Published: 02.21.21 , 07:38

Iran is studying a European Union proposal for an informal meeting between current members of Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal and the United States, but has yet to respond to it, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said on Saturday.

Iran and the United States have been at odds over who should take the first step to revive the 2015 accord. Iran insists the United States must first lift former President Donald Trump's sanctions while Washington says Tehran must first return to compliance with the deal.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif suggested earlier this month a way to overcome the U.S.-Iranian impasse over who goes first in returning to the nuclear deal, saying EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell could "synchronize" or "choreograph" the moves.

"We are studying Josep Borrell's proposal to hold an informal meeting of the 4 + 1 (nuclear deal members) with the United States and Iran, and we are consulting with our partners, including Russia and China, and we will respond to this proposal in the future," Araqchi said in an interview with state TV.

"However, we believe a U.S. return to the nuclear accord does not require a meeting and the only way for it is to lift the sanctions," Araqchi said.

The White House said on Friday the United States plans to take no additional actions in response to pressure from Iran before potential talks with Tehran and major powers about returning to the deal.

White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said the EU had floated the idea of a conversation among Iran and the six major powers that struck the nuclear accord. "The Europeans have invited us and ... it is simply an invitation to have a conversation, a diplomatic conversation."

The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Rafael Grossi, arrived in Tehran on Saturday, weeks after Iran's hardline parliament set a deadline of Feb. 23 for Washington to lift the sanctions, or Tehran would halt snap IAEA inspections.

"Grossi's trip has nothing to do with Iran's decision and Iran's decision shall be implemented," Araqchi said. "About 20 to 30% of the IAEA's oversight capacity will be reduced as a result of the implementation of the parliament's decision."

Cabinet spokesman Ali Rabiei said earlier that Iran believed sanctions would soon be lifted despite continued "diplomatic wrangling" over reviving the nuclear deal, signaling Tehran's desire to end the impasse while not offering a new position.

"We predict with confidence that diplomatic initiatives will result in a favorable outcome despite the diplomatic wrangling, which are a natural prelude to the return of the parties to their commitments, including the lifting of all sanctions in the near future," Rabiei was quoted as saying by state media.

Under the deal with major powers, Iran accepted curbs to its nuclear program in return for the lifting of international sanctions. Washington re-imposed sanctions after Trump quit the deal in 2018, and Iran responded by violating some of the deal's nuclear limits

02.18.21

Iran plans to restrict & expel UN inspectors if US does not lift sanctions

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Europe to meet U.S. on Iran as nuclear deadline looms

While Islamic Republic announces plans to restrict UN inspections if Washington does not lift sanctions by February 21, Biden administration reaffirms it would only rejoin talks if Tehran returns to full compliance with nuclear deal

AFP| Published: 02.18.21 , 09:53

Top diplomats from European powers and the United States will hold talks on Thursday to see how to revive the 2015 deal on Iran's nuclear drive, days ahead of a deadline set by Tehran that could hinder the efforts by limiting inspections.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian will host his German and British counterparts in Paris, with America's new top diplomat Antony Blinken joining via videoconference, the French foreign ministry said Wednesday.

Analysts say only a small window of opportunity remains to save the landmark deal, which was dealt a near-fatal blow when former U.S. President Donald Trump walked out of the accord in 2018.

The administration of Joe Biden has said it is prepared to rejoin the deal and start lifting sanctions if Tehran returns to full compliance, a precondition disputed by Tehran.

Adding to the tension, Iran plans to restrict some UN nuclear agency inspections if the U.S. does not lift its sanctions imposed since 2018 by February 21, under the terms of a bill adopted by its parliament in December.

'On the cards'

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Rafael Grossi is to travel to Tehran on Saturday for talks with the Iranian authorities to find a solution for continuing inspections in the country, the agency said.

It warned that the step threatened by Tehran would have "a serious impact on the IAEA's verification and monitoring activities in the country."

Ellie Geranmayeh, a senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, said it was "unlikely" the E3/U.S. meeting on Thursday would produce a significant political or economic gesture to prevent Iran from going ahead with the restrictions.

"This deadline has been on the cards for months, and in absence of economic relief Iran's leaders feel compelled to move ahead," she told AFP.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), signed in Vienna in 2015, was based on Iran providing safeguards that it would not make an atomic bomb, in exchange for a gradual easing of international sanctions.

But Iran has stepped up its nuclear work in violation of the accord after U.S. sanctions were reimposed as part of Trump's "maximum pressure" policy to weaken the Iranian regime.

The UN nuclear watchdog said last week that Iran had started producing uranium metal in a new violation of the accord, prompting the European powers to warn that Tehran was "undermining the opportunity for renewed diplomacy."

'Only action'

While Iran's policy is ultimately determined by supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iranian presidential elections in June add another time pressure factor.

President Hassan Rouhani -- a key advocate of nuclear diplomacy with global powers -- is set to step down after serving the maximum two consecutive terms, and a more hardline figure is possibly in line to replace him.

"There is a short window of time to limit the damage that could ensue from Iran's next steps, for example by reducing the impact of such moves on the quality of inspections by international monitors," Geranmayeh said.

She said Washington should move in political and practical terms to show Iran that the Biden administration "is distancing itself from Trump-era maximum pressure."

Rouhani said Wednesday that Iran was ready to hold talks with Grossi and vehemently denied that the move would entail the expulsion of inspectors.

"Foreign propaganda has started, saying that you are expelling IAEA inspectors. Why are you lying?" Rouhani said in televised remarks to his cabinet.

"If he wants to negotiate, he can negotiate," Rouhani said, emphasizing that the new measure approved by parliament "is not about our nuclear activity being left uninspected".

Khamenei emphasized Wednesday that Iran wanted to see action from the U.S. administration that would help its economy.

"The Islamic republic will not be satisfied this time with words and promises," he said in a televised speech. "This time, only action, action. **If we see action from the opposite side, we will act too.**"