

SEIZE THE OPENING

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

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On September 7, the spokesperson for Iran's nuclear agency announced that the country had the ability to enrich uranium up to 20 per cent and it had launched advanced centrifuge machines, further violating its commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) or the Iran nuclear deal between Tehran and the US, France, Germany, Britain, Russia and the European Union. The move was an escalation of the brinkmanship underway since US President Donald Trump withdrew from the JCPOA in May 2018. This week, President Hassan Rouhani has indicated Tehran is amenable to the plan for talks proposed by French President Emmanuel Macron, with the US. It is a diplomatic opening.

The 2015 JCPOA came into being after arduous negotiations and placed restrictions on Iran's nuclear programme while removing the harsh economic sanctions on the country. Since the US's withdrawal from the deal, the Trump administration has ramped up the sanctions, and its anti-Iran rhetoric, while Tehran has flouted the limits placed on its nuclear programme. The logic behind Washington's plan appears to be that the sanctions would increase disaffection in Iran to such a degree that the government and the Ayatollah would be overthrown. It is, however, more likely that the moderate, democratically-elected Rouhani government has suffered due to the sanctions. Rouhani staked considerable political capital in pushing through the nuclear deal, particularly with the recalcitrant sections of the Islamic state opposed to any accord with the US.

Rouhani has said in a publicly-broadcast cabinet meeting that the deal proposed by Macron entails that Tehran will not pursue nuclear weapons and that sanctions would be lifted, allowing Iran to resume oil sales. The Iranian president has, however, expressed concern over Donald Trump's alleged doublespeak: "The American president on two occasions... said explicitly that we want to intensify sanctions... Should we accept your (European leaders') word that America is ready (for talks)?" The ball is now in Washington's court. New Delhi has thus far managed to walk the diplomatic tightrope between the US and Iran. Given the goodwill that PM [Narendra Modi](#) enjoys with President Trump, as well as India's close historical and trade ties with Iran, Delhi could join Paris and other world powers in nudging both countries towards talks. The alternative — the path of calibrated escalation — a slippery slope.

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