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Moscow and Tehran Answer America

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American strategists are obsessed with the idea of a cold war with the Kremlin without having any understanding of how it might end. The White House's efforts to make Russia out as the guilty party in what is happening in Ukraine is not receiving support in the international community. Only U.S. satellites are on Washington's side; even in NATO countries there is no unity on the national level. The Americans' references to anti-Russian decisions from the European Commission may be disregarded; there the terms are dictated by around thirty commissioners appointed by the Council of Europe to whose opinions the leading countries of the Old World have never listened. U.S. policy on Ukraine is incompatible with the interests of a large number of states, including one of the leaders of the Middle East – Iran.

Several days ago at the traditional Friday prayers at Tehran University, the Iranian religious leader Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami called American intervention an «act of aggression». «**U.S. intervention in events in Ukraine has put this state on the brink of war**», declared **Ayatollah Khatami**. His assessment reflects the position of Iran's leadership, although the U.S. continually attempts to depict Iran as a country which is supposedly endeavoring to use the disagreements between Russia and America in its own interests. Falsehoods are being spread about Tehran's willingness drop oil prices to the detriment of Russia's interests and replace Russian gas in Europe. Washington is genuinely frightened by the possibility of responsive measures from the Kremlin in the area of Iran and is attempting to prevent Moscow from decisively turning away toward Tehran. Many believe that this could be the most effective

response to U.S. attempts to establish its diktat in the Middle East. **A strategic alliance between Russia and Iran could force Washington to feel the consequences of its Ukrainian scheme far beyond Eastern Europe.** This is not a matter of some kind of «geopolitical revenge» against America; it is more appropriate here to speak of Russia consistently protecting its national interests jointly with a state which has a need to rid itself of the diktat of the U.S.

And probably the first thing which Moscow could do here is to remove the White House's mechanism for putting pressure on Tehran by disrupting the American system of sanctions against Iran. After all, Russia only signed the UN Security Council sanctions; it considers the unilateral restrictions adopted by the U.S. and the European Union to be unlawful. Now the Kremlin has confirmed this constant position with a specific step toward Tehran. Russia and Iran have finished negotiations on shipments of Russian goods in exchange for Iranian oil. The contract could amount to a total of 20 billion dollars. There are plans to buy 500,000 barrels of Iranian oil per day. And the deal struck between Russia and Iran does not violate the international sanctions imposed on Tehran, which in and of itself evoked a near-hysterical reaction from Washington.

After reports of the deal appeared, Press Secretary Jay Carney stated that the White House intends to pursue sanctions against Tehran and Moscow if the deal goes through. «We are very crystal clear that anything like such an agreement between Russia and Iran might have potential sanctionable action and would likely create tremendous rifts within the P5+1 which would make coming to a comprehensive agreement [on Iran's nuclear program] all the more difficult if not impossible,» said a U.S. State Department official. In fact, the opposite is true. Russia and Iran are negotiating the oil deal regardless of the position of the U.S. in order to make it more difficult for the Obama administration to impose the new sanctions against Tehran which are being prepared by Congress. The Kremlin is rejecting calls from the U.S. not to sign the oil-for-goods contract with Iran. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov stated that the expansion of Russian-Iranian trade is «a natural process, and it carries no elements of political or economic challenge to anyone whatsoever.» He described the U.S. approach as the creation of «artificial barriers» to the development of Russian-Iranian cooperation.

The White House says, in reference to Ukraine's potential membership in NATO, that President Putin wants to create a «new world order» denying the principle that «countries are...free to choose their alliances». Returning to the Cold War era, Washington is demanding that NATO countries increase defense spending and transform themselves into a tougher military union with a clear-cut orientation against Russia. **The American scenario has already been written: accepting Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Azerbaijan as NATO members and deploying U.S. troops and aviation in Poland and the Baltic states.** In establishing a military blockade around Russia and creating new footholds on Russia's borders, Washington is defending its «freedom to choose its alliances», while pointing out to Moscow that it must not engage in military and technical cooperation with Iran. For this reason alone, Russia's return to full-scale military and technical cooperation with Iran is absolutely legitimate. The resurrection of the deal for supplying S-300 systems to Iran could be the beginning of this.

After all, in this case, as with the oil-for-goods contract, Russia would not be in violation of Security Council Resolution 1929 dated June 9, 2010, which was the cause for suspending the

execution of Russia's obligations to supply S-300 systems to Iran. The restrictions contained in this resolution do not apply to the shipments of S-300s, as these surface-to-air systems are defensive, and their sale to Iran does not violate any international agreements. At one time Washington expressed its appreciation to Russia for its «restraint» in not implementing the contract for the delivery of S-300s to Iran. State Department representative Philip Crowley noted that the resolution urges all countries to show caution and restraint in the sale of any arms. He agreed, however, that the sale of S-300s is not prohibited by the Security Council decision. It turns out that Moscow broke off its military cooperation with Tehran at that time in exchange for America's appreciation.

Perhaps the time has now come to «work on fixing mistakes» with regard to cooperation with the United States on the Afghan agenda as well. Tehran believes that continued U.S. and NATO military presence in Afghanistan could have negative consequences both for that country and for the region as a whole. It is hard not to agree with the Iranians' arguments that Afghanistan could be used by the U.S. to regulate the threat level to states bordering on Afghanistan to its own advantage. All the more so since the Afghans themselves do not wish to sign a colonial agreement with the Americans, who want to remain in the country for long years to come. **Now, when NATO has declared that it is suspending military cooperation with Russia, it makes sense to abandon interaction with NATO on Afghanistan, as such interaction is not significant to Russia. NATO is in no hurry to abandon its transit hub in Ulyanovsk for deployment of men and cargo to Afghanistan, but Moscow could make a decision on this on its own initiative at any time it sees fit...**

Keep in mind that neither the thaw in relations between Washington and Tehran nor the concessions of the new Iranian diplomacy at negotiations on Iran's nuclear program have changed the position of the U.S. in rejecting Iran's participation in the Syrian peace process. Iran is among the greatest influences on the crisis in Syria. Nevertheless, while it remains in the foreground of Syrian events, Tehran has been pushed out of international efforts to settle the conflict. This was an attempt on Washington's part to provoke Iran and irritate Moscow. In the new conditions, the alliance of Russia and Iran could very well compete with the United States, which depends on cooperation with international terrorism.

This year V. Putin plans to visit Iran. Besides the further development of regional partnership, it is expected that Russia and Iran could come to a «Big Agreement» on cooperation based on a new agenda for bilateral relations. Iran is interested in further cooperation with Russia in the field of atomic energy. Preparations for the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea require a breakthrough on the highest level. Both sides are interested in joint projects in Iran's oil and gas sector, in space exploration and in the development of transportation infrastructure. The main thing now is to stop determining the depth and scale of bilateral collaboration with a backward glance at Washington. As the Persian proverb says, «dogs may bark, but the caravan goes on».