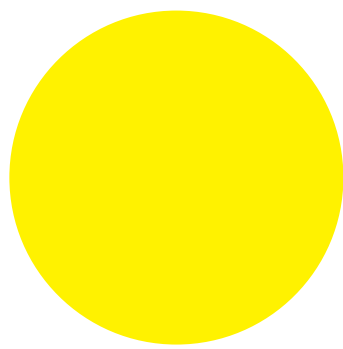


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Qatar pursuing preventive diplomacy to avert a wider crisis

By **Delaram Ahmadi**
Staff writer

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

As the confrontation between Iran and the US remains deadlocked, regional diplomatic and mediation efforts are continuing. In the latest development, Qatar's prime minister traveled to Tehran and held talks with senior Iranian officials. In an interview with Iran Daily, international affairs analyst **Abed Akbari** described



Abed Akbari

Doha's efforts to engage in the matter at this stage as a form of "preventive diplomacy" aimed at preventing the crisis from spiraling out of control. He said the strategic importance of active mediation by Qatar, Oman and Pakistan lies not in laying the groundwork for a compre-

hensive agreement, but in creating a "minimum understanding to prevent a maximum crisis."

IRAN DAILY: Does the Qatari prime minister's visit to Tehran and his meetings with the president, parliament speaker and secretary of the Supreme National Security Council indicate that Qatar is once again seeking to mediate between Iran and the US and reopen the diplomatic channel?

AKBARI: The Qatari prime minister and foreign minister's visit to Tehran and his meetings should be seen as an important sign of the renewed activation of regional diplomacy. The level of these meetings indicates that Doha is not merely carrying a ceremonial message, but is seeking to engage with all the key centers of decision-making in Iran and gain a clear picture of Tehran's capacity and conditions for reducing tensions.

In my view, Qatar is once again seeking to play the role of a "fa-

cilitator of dialogue" between Tehran and Washington. However, this activity should not be interpreted as a sign that direct Iran-US negotiations are about to begin.

Under the current circumstances, mediation is aimed less at quickly reaching a comprehensive agreement than at preventing an escalation of the crisis and establishing a minimum level of trust to reopen the diplomatic channel. The simultaneous or successive visits by Qatari, Omani and Pakistani officials to Tehran also indicate that the region has reached the conclusion that allowing the current situation to continue without a political initiative could lead to a larger crisis.

Given that Qatar has also sought in recent months to bring the views of Tehran and Washington closer together, what has prompted Doha to take the initiative again at this point?

Qatar's main motivation is cer-

tainly its concern over the economic and security consequences of the continuation of the crisis. However, the issue is not limited to the Strait of Hormuz. For Qatar, stability in the Persian Gulf is directly linked to its national security and economy. Disruptions to maritime security, rising regional risks and the continuation of a wartime environment could affect energy markets, investment and regional trade. The Strait of Hormuz is particularly important in this regard because restoring security to this waterway is not merely an issue between Iran and the US; it concerns the global economy and the energy security of all countries in the region.

Qatar's efforts to engage in this issue should be viewed as a form of "preventive diplomacy." Doha knows that if the crisis spirals out of control, no country on the Persian Gulf will be immune to its consequences. Recent reports also indicate that reopening maritime routes and easing tensions

around Hormuz have now become key areas of focus for mediation efforts.

Some reports suggest that the US administration is unwilling to return to the Islamabad understanding and continues to emphasize increased economic pressure and sanctions. What objectives is Washington pursuing by maintaining this approach and is it essentially prepared to return to negotiations? What conditions does Tehran consider necessary for resuming talks?

It appears that Washington has, at this stage, replaced or complemented military pressure with economic pressure. The main US objective is probably to increase the cost of maintaining the current situation for Tehran and use economic pressure to force Iran to accept negotiations from a position Washington considers favorable.

The US administration's stated position is also that there is cur-

rently no direct dialogue underway and that economic pressure will continue until Iran shows readiness for "meaningful" negotiations.

However, there is a strategic contradiction here: pressure can bring the other side closer to the negotiating table, but excessive pressure may eliminate the incentive to negotiate. If Washington's objective is to reach an agreement, it needs to make clear to Tehran that negotiations can produce tangible gains. Otherwise, Tehran may conclude that negotiations are merely a prelude to accepting further US demands. On the other hand, Tehran's conditions have largely taken shape around several issues: an end to economic pressure and the economic blockade, the reduction or lifting of sanctions, the release of Iran's resources and assets, and the creation of guarantees to prevent a repeat of the experience of the US unilaterally withdrawing from agreements.

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