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POLICY BRIEF

What Did Javad Zarif Say on Clubhouse?

JUNE 7, 2023 | Navid Mohebbi, ***POLICY DIRECTOR***

On Tuesday June 6, 2023 Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Islamic Republic's former Foreign Minister, appeared on the social media platform Clubhouse to speak on the Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA). During this extensive conversation, which garnered significant Persian language media attention, Zarif delved into the intricacies of the negotiation process that occurred during the tenure of Saeed Jalili (former chief JCPOA negotiator). Notably, he made accusations against former President Donald Trump, European nations, and Saudi Arabia and also addressed his connection with the National Iranian American Council (NIAC).

The below are excerpts from the conversation (which has been slightly edited for clarity), translated into English.

Clubhouse | Excerpts from Tues. June 6, 2023

- One of the senators close to Trump came to me in New York and said that Trump had invited me to the White House. I conveyed this message to Tehran and said that if I was not successful, I would accept the punishment. But the message did not reach the higher ranks and was rejected at lower levels. When I met Emmanuel Macron in Paris, he told me that Donald Trump was ready to meet with him, but I did not have permission to meet with Trump. Contrary to Trump, who wanted to meet with me, it was Mike Pompeo, the former US Secretary of State, who messed everything up with his ideology about the Iran nuclear deal. The trio of Benjamin Netanyahu, Mike Pompeo, and John Bolton purposefully went out of their way to ensure I did not meet with Trump.

- I asked Vladimir Putin to convey Iran's plan for the JCPOA to Trump so that Pompeo wouldn't interfere, but Pompeo found out and prevented it from happening. John Kerry, the former US Secretary of State, proposed during the signing of the JCPOA that a clause be added regarding the investment of American companies in Iran, so that foreign branches of American companies could have a presence in Iran and their economic viability would be ensured. The leadership was not opposed to US investment in Iran, but rather opposed Iran's dependence on American investors in essential goods.

- We sent all negotiations and meeting reports to the supreme leader; he would give his opinion whenever he wanted and withhold it whenever he wished. If the supreme leader was opposed to any issue, and even in cases where we lacked the ability to pursue a demand, we would inform him first and take action after obtaining permission.

- Iran can exert political pressure on Europe. Europeans have acted weakly towards Iran due to US influence in economic matters, but they have helped the Islamic Republic in securing high-ranking positions in the United Nations. The people declared to the world their popular support and opened our hands in the 2013 presidential elections. We wanted to break the security consensus against Iran, which is why we engaged in negotiations, and lifting sanctions was not our sole objective. In January 2002, two weeks before Bush's speech labeling Iran as part of an "axis of evil," a ship carrying arms for Arafat was discovered on the southwestern coast by Israel. The ship was named Karine A, and it was claimed to be intended for Iran. This incident led to a renewed security focus by Israel.

- Saudi Arabia opposed the finalization of the JCPOA and had promised the United States months before the agreement that it would lower oil prices to ultimately force Iran to accept the demands of the opposing party in the negotiations. After the signing of the JCPOA, some American investors refrained from investing in Iran due to the influence of Jewish, Saudi, and Emirati commercial interests. The Emiratis had told these companies that they either had to invest in Iran or in the UAE.

- The process of negotiations in Muscat actually began during the previous administration before Mr. Rouhani's government. It wasn't the case that Mr. Rouhani's government initiated the negotiations; rather, they had already started during the previous government. In September 2012, I prepared a report with a number of economists, stating that from now on, the timing was unfavorable for our economy. Iran gradually became excluded from the global oil and energy market from 2011 to 2012. Of course, the efforts of Mr. Zanganeh and the team at the National Oil Company were influential in Iran's presence in this field. However, Iran's impact on the energy market had significantly diminished. Iran's presence or absence from the oil and energy market did not have an impact on prices. These were realities that we clearly observed and we predicted the transformation that took place. In fact, the conditions were such that our losses were qualitative, and our achievements had decreased quantitatively. Therefore, the timing was not in our favor. Now, whether our report or the wisdom of the system played a role, it led to the initiation of negotiations.

- If the JCPOA is as treacherous as the Treaty of Turkmenchay, tear it apart, bury it, and throw it away. Why do you have such an eagerness to revive it? Those who have brought the country to this point will one day be prosecuted. They say Zarif was asleep and Trump tore apart the JCPOA. If it was bad, why did he withdraw from it? Trump also withdrew from the Paris Agreement. Was Europe also asleep?

- Those who say that I don't understand the meaning of "suspend" are committing injustice between themselves and God, and it is not my right to legitimize this injustice against the people. Some gentlemen claim to be knowledgeable. Well, let them read the United Nations resolutions. Ms. Sherman used to say that I (Javad Zarif) don't understand the meaning of "lift." The language

of the United Nations is a language of its own. No one knows the language of the United Nations as well as I and Lavrov among the ministers. My professor used to tell me when I was writing my doctoral thesis on the topic of invasion and defense that I should write in English, not the language of the United Nations. Well, Ms. Sherman, who doesn't understand the language of the United Nations as well as I do.

- We had agreed with the Westerners that two words should not be used in the text of the JCPOA. One was "prohibition," and the other was "suspension." I said in parliament that it's not the word "suspension", which was my mistake. The reason was that we had instructed all our friends who were negotiating the annexes of the JCPOA not to use certain phrases. In the final moments of the JCPOA negotiations, the European representative had said that we are lifting the sanctions on Iran, canceling them, or in other words, we are lifting them. But the decisions of the European Union, which include other things, we cannot lift until all sanctions are removed, meaning, for example, the military sanctions or other sanctions that were supposed to remain in place according to the UN Security Council resolution for another 5 or 8 years. Therefore, we suspend those and then lift them later. Unfortunately, my deputies also accepted this European position and did not inform me, and it has nothing to do with the Americans.

- Some friends have said that Zarif did not read the JCPOA. If the JCPOA wasn't good, why couldn't Trump point out any flaws in the clauses when he wanted to withdraw from the agreement? For example, he could have cited Article 36 as flawed and said that's why he left the JCPOA. Why couldn't John Bolton rely on it either? He was the US representative at the United Nations for two years.

- Some claim that I couldn't secure guarantees in the JCPOA, but those who conclude that guarantees can be obtained through international commitments, are often unaware of the intricacies of the international system ... Typically, in international commitment, the benefits of staying must outweigh the costs of leaving in order to satisfy all parties. For the US, the benefit of exiting outweighed the benefits of staying.

- Martyr Fakhrizadeh was instrumental in our success in the JCPOA negotiations. I do not know how satisfied or dissatisfied he was with the outcome. Our military friends are usually not very satisfied and do not like any restrictions on their activities. However, I can also say that General Soleimani never mentioned anything specific about the JCPOA to me. The points he discussed were about the situation in Syria, Iraq, and Russia. He complained about the behavior of the Americans and Russians, who were not seriously fighting against ISIS. As for Martyr Fakhrizadeh, I do not know whether he accepted the JCPOA or, as some friends say, had reservations about it. But I do know that Martyr Fakhrizadeh played a valuable role in the JCPOA and was even one of the individuals honored by the President in a non-public manner.

- In the negotiations regarding the centrifuges, we did not destroy any centrifuges. They were within the nuclear domain, and we did not give any concessions beyond the JCPOA. We stated that we would return to the JCPOA under certain conditions. The Europeans wanted us to destroy all centrifuges, but we insisted that we would not destroy them at all. Eventually, I said that we would open the centrifuges and place them under the supervision of the IAEA in a monitored facility,

even though the number of centrifuges had increased significantly. However, Mr. Trump came with the intention to destroy the JCPOA.

- I was the first person to be sanctioned due to my affiliation with the Office of the Supreme Leader. Those who claim to support the Supreme Leader are not subject to US sanctions, nor are they from Canada. In any case, we were supposed to issue a statement at the P5+1 summit, and the date had been specified. However, the negotiating parties insisted on discussing regional matters as well, but we did not accept this.

- The conditions set by the Supreme Leader regarding the JCPOA consisted of 9 points, which were mentioned in a letter. We claim that we have fulfilled all these conditions. Most of the conditions were related to the United States taking action earlier than us. Another condition was the conclusion of the Arak reactor contract. Well, we reflected on all the actions in accordance with the Supreme Leader's guidance, and we even addressed the issues related to the Chinese. We introduced a substitute in this project as well. The Supreme Leader stated that no sanctions should remain in any area. Due to the fact that our negotiations did not cover human rights and terrorism, we included a condition in the JCPOA that once a sanction is lifted based on the negotiations, it cannot be reinstated. The understanding between myself, Dr. Rouhani, and Dr. Salehi, as the three officials responsible for implementing these conditions, was that we had already implemented all these conditions...

- I do not have any inside information about the negotiations, so I do not want to make any judgments. However, based on what I see from the outside, the picture is not a pleasant one. In my opinion, there is no possibility of reaching a better agreement than the JCPOA. According to what they say, we now have more capabilities, and if they can go forward, they can sign a new agreement and gain more advantages. They have sufficient justification because the United States and Europe did not fulfill their commitments.

- I made efforts to secure the release of Siamak Namazi. You should go and ask those individuals who had him in their custody why he was not released at that time. I stated that we chose our aspiration over realism, and I did not say that we chose unemployment or a woman being harmed on the streets, for example. As for how the exchange of prisoners takes place, I have no information. We had about 30 prisoners, and the Americans had four prisoners. The Americans stated that they could not release approximately four prisoners, and the issue came.

- Regarding the Ukrainian plane incident, when I said to let me handle it, please consider that I did not announce that the plane had a technical flaw. People were telling me that I was terrified and influenced by the West, but I resisted. I insisted that the truth must be announced. My approach was seeking accountability. My tweet is available, where I stated that the culprits must be identified.

- As the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic, when confronted with the question of not trying anyone in Iran for political reasons, I would respond by stating that no one is prosecuted in Iran solely for political reasons because their offenses are related to security matters.However, utilizing this document to improve the situation is not appropriate. The improvement of the situation lies within the country itself. The current state of affairs indicates that I have not

defended everything, and if I had defended everything, I wouldn't have been a simple university professor after 40 years.

- These individuals who have become defenders of the Iranian people are lobbyists for Zionists. We should protest against the violation of human rights in Iran, but not in the language of those who support Zionists. These individuals are defenders of sanctions and attacks on Iran, while claiming to support the Iranian people.

- NIAC (National Iranian American Council) never took money from Iran. They had a policy regarding sanctions and the war with Iran that was aligned with ours. The extent of my cooperation with these friends was limited to providing information. NIAC had access to me at all times.