Magazine says Trump invited Iranian foreign minister to White House

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President Donald Trump invited Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif to the White House last month at the height of tensions between the two countries, The New Yorker magazine reported.

The invitation, extended by Sen. Rand Paul with permission from the president, was turned down for now, The New Yorker reported Friday. Zarif said it was up to Tehran to decide on accepting it.

Neither the White House nor the State Department responded to requests for comment on the report, which quoted U.S. and Iranian sources and what the magazine called a well-placed diplomat.

Zarif told the magazine he would not want a White House meeting that yielded just a photo op and a two page statement afterwards, The New Yorker said.

Trump has said publicly several times that he is willing to hold talks with the Iranians even as he lambasts Tehran as a corrupt, incompetent and dangerous regime that is a threat to regional security and U.S. interests.

Last year Trump pulled the U.S. out of an international accord designed to curb Iran’s nuclear program, and has reimposed sanctions on Iran — and even slapped them on Zarif this past week — in an effort to force it to renegotiate the agreement.

Rand had been working for weeks on setting up a meeting with Zarif and on July 15 conferred with him in New York, passing on an invitation from Trump for him to come to the White House, the magazine said.

At the one-hour meeting with Rand, Zarif suggested ways to end the nuclear impasse and address Trump's concerns, The New Yorker said.

Tensions soared in the Persian Gulf in June and July amid attacks on oil tankers, Iran's downing of an unmanned U.S. surveillance drone and after the U.S. said it had downed an Iranian drone.

Trump has said the attack against the U.S. drone prompted him to order a military strike in response, only to call it off at the last minute.