

# China protests US sanctions on Iran

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The Chinese government has formally protested the decision by the Trump administration last Friday to impose US sanctions on Iran over its latest missile test. Among the 25 sanctioned individuals and entities were three Chinese citizens and two Chinese companies, which will now be barred from access to the American financial system and dealings with US corporations.

The sanctions follow a menacing statement by US National Security Adviser Michael Flynn last week accusing Iran of “destabilising behaviour across the Middle East” and “officially putting Iran on notice.” The penalties against Chinese individuals and companies are another indication that the Trump administration is preparing to confront China as well. Iran has denied that its missile test is in breach of UN resolutions.

Beijing formally complained on Monday that the sanctions will severely affect Chinese businesses. Foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang told a daily press briefing that China, which has in the past supported the US push for UN sanctions against Iran, is opposed to “unilateral sanctions,” saying the move adversely affected other countries.

Lu warned: “The sanctions will not help in enhancing trust among the different parties involved and will not help in resolving international problems.” The remark suggests that the Chinese government, which has confronted repeated threats by Trump on trade, North Korea and the South China Sea, could be less supportive in the future of US actions in the Middle East and internationally.

China along with Russia, Britain, France and Germany were part of the Obama administration’s agreement in 2015 with Iran to severely restrict its nuclear programs in return for the gradual lifting of punitive economic sanctions. Trump, however, along with many of his top officials, has been scathing in his criticism of the 2015 deal and could move to abrogate

it.

China’s state-run Xinhua news agency published a comment which pointed out that the latest sanctions will have little effect on Iran but signalled an escalating confrontation between Washington and Tehran. “Now Trump has taken office, uncertainly in the US-Iran relationship has risen and this may become a ticking time bomb for peace and stability in the Middle East,” it stated.

The US Treasury department named only one Chinese citizen—Qin Xian—among those who had been sanctioned and gave no detailed reasons for the decisions. Those on the US list have been targeted for allegedly either being involved in Iran’s ballistic missile program or supporting the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corp’s Quds Force.

Yue Yaodong, an executive at Cosailing Business Trading Co, told the *South China Morning Post* that his firm had been forced to shut down after his accounts at the Agricultural Bank of China were closed. He insisted that his company had only provided quotations to Iranian customers for “daily use items” and machinery parts via email more than three years ago. He had sent product samples but no deals were completed.

“I don’t know what my company has done that would lead to US sanctions,” Yue said. “I have no idea why the Agricultural Bank of China would freeze my accounts. I have not been engaged in trade with Iranian customers for years.” Foreign banks and corporations, including in China, can face penalties for having dealings for blacklisted individuals and companies.

The blacklisting of Chinese individuals and companies took place amid rising tensions between the US and China and an increasingly open discussion in the American and international media about the rising danger of war between the two countries.

In his first overseas trip, US Defence Secretary James Mattis visited South Korea and Japan last week to

reassure both governments over their alliances with the United States. In the course of last year's election campaign, Trump had threatened to walk away from the alliances unless Japan and South Korea paid more towards the cost of American bases.

While he suggested that the US would take no immediate "dramatic military moves" in the South China Sea, Mattis did provoke Chinese protests when he announced the deployment in South Korea of a sophisticated anti-ballistic missile system by the end of the year.

Mattis also assured the Japanese government that it could invoke the US-Japan Security Treaty in the event of a war with China over disputed rocky outcrops in the East China Sea known as Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China.

The islets have become the focus of an increasingly dangerous cat and mouse game between Japanese and Chinese aircraft and vessels. The Japanese defence ministry reported in early 2016 that for the 2015 fiscal year, its air force scrambled fighter jets a record 571 times to intercept Chinese aircraft allegedly approaching Japanese-claimed airspace near the Senkakus.

Following Mattis's visit to Tokyo, three Chinese coast guard ships approached the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands on Monday and, according to the Japanese coast guard, entered Japanese territorial waters around the outcrop. The intrusion was the fourth for the year following 36 such incidents in 2016.

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson rang his Japanese counterpart on Tuesday to reaffirm that Washington would go to war with Japan against China if conflict erupted over the disputed islets. "The United States will be against any unilateral action made to damage the Japanese administration of the Senkaku islands," he said, according to a Japanese foreign ministry statement.

The Trump administration's decision to link its punitive reaction to the Iranian missile test with its increasingly bellicose stance against China is another sign that the confrontations and wars of the Bush and Obama administrations are coalescing into a global conflict as the Trump administration embarks on a reckless and militarist drive to shore up American hegemony.



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