

US initiates plan to blow-up Iran nuclear deal

Keith Jones

21 September 2017

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson outlined Washington's demands for the reopening of the 2015 Iran civil nuclear accord at a meeting yesterday of the signatories to the agreement—the US, Britain, France, Germany, the European Union (EU), Russia, China, and Tehran.

The US demands are a provocation aimed at blowing up a complex agreement that was only reached after the Obama administration provoked a crisis then imposed punishing economic sanctions on Iran, in concert with the major European powers, and repeatedly threatened Tehran with war.

Yesterday's meeting was convened by the US on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, where President Donald Trump had delivered a bellicose, fascist diatribe the day before, much of it given over to denouncing Iran and the nuclear agreement.

The other parties to the nuclear accord unanimously rejected Tillerson's call for its revision and the imposition of far more onerous terms on Iran.

EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini, who chaired the closed-door meeting, told reporters at its conclusion, "There is no need to renegotiate parts of the agreement because the agreement is concerning a nuclear program and as such is delivering."

"We have all agreed," she added, "that all sides are implementing so far the agreement."

Referring to the acute tensions on the Korean Peninsula which US President Trump further inflamed Tuesday with his threat at the UN to obliterate North Korea, Mogherini said, "We already have one potential nuclear crisis. We definitely do not need to go into another one."

At his own Wednesday evening press conference, Tillerson conceded that Iran has implemented the nuclear agreement or Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to the letter. However, he and President Trump have repeatedly attacked Tehran for not fulfilling the "spirit" of the agreement, by which they mean bowing completely to Washington's diktats.

Yesterday, the former Exxon CEO all but spelled this out, saying Tehran is in "technical compliance" with the nuclear accord, but the expectation that the deal would remove a

"serious threat" to the region has not been realized.

At yesterday's meeting, Tillerson reportedly called for more intrusive IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) inspections, including unfettered access to Iranian military facilities, additional restrictions on Iran's civil nuclear program after 2025, and severe limits, if not the outlawing, of Iran's ballistic missile program—an issue that was at no time part of the nuclear negotiations.

Adding to the menacing atmosphere surrounding the meeting, Trump announced earlier Wednesday that he had come to a decision on whether to carry out his threat to declare Iran in violation of its obligations under the nuclear accord. He did not say what he had decided.

Under US law, the president must report to Congress every 90 days on Iranian compliance with the JCOPA. The next deadline falls on October 15.

In his UN speech Tuesday, Trump denounced the Iran deal as "an embarrassment to the United States" and "the worst deal ever" and all but announced his intention to scuttle it, saying "I don't think you've heard the last of it."

NBC News is reporting that it has learned from four sources, including a "senior administration official," that Trump will declare Tehran non-compliant before the October 15 deadline. Such action would not, by itself, constitute US abrogation of the agreement, but it would set the stage for the "snapping back" of punitive US sanctions and immediately precipitate a crisis with Iran—one that could rapidly escalate into a military clash.

In arguing for acceptance of the nuclear accord, US President Obama repeatedly said the only alternative was war.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani told the UN General Assembly Wednesday, "Iran will not be the first country to violate the [nuclear] agreement. But it will respond decisively and resolutely to its violation by any party."

"If the US breaks its commitments," continued Rouhani, "then no other country will be willing to enter into negotiation with the US."

In a pointed reply to Trump's lurid denunciations of Iran as a "terror" and "rogue" regime, Rouhani said Americans should ask themselves why the billions Washington has

spent in the Middle East “has only brought” the region “war, misery, poverty” and “the rise of extremism” [a reference to al-Qaeda and ISIS].

Tillerson knew long before yesterday’s meeting that the US demands would be rejected by the other JCOPA signatories. Indeed, for Tehran to accept the dismantling of its missile program under conditions where the US Fifth Fleet is parked off Iran’s shores and the US is arming its regional rivals, Israel and Saudi Arabia, to the teeth, would be tantamount to unilateral disarmament.

For months, the other great powers have been publicly warning against any attempt to reopen or repudiate the nuclear deal, saying it would dangerously exacerbate tensions in the Middle East.

In recent days, these warnings were amplified. On Tuesday, French President Emmanuel Macron told the UN General Assembly, “Renouncing [the nuclear deal] would be a grave error ... would be irresponsible, because it is a good accord that is essential to peace at a time when the risk of an infernal conflagration cannot be excluded.”

A pamphlet by Keith Jones

Russia and China, which are themselves targets of US militarism and have developed significant strategic and commercial ties with Iran, view the Trump administration’s plans to provoke a war crisis with Iran as a major threat.

The European powers played a pivotal role in the US offensive against Iran under Obama, imposing and enforcing sanctions that halved Iran’s oil exports and otherwise crippled its trade by denying it access to the world banking system.

Since removing sanctions, the European powers have moved rapidly to stake their claim to Iran’s oil and other resources. Rouhani, for his part, has rolled out the red carpet for European investors and only last week, using the metaphor of a dinner party to describe the nuclear deal, urged the US to eschew confrontation “and also enter the room where the food is served.”

The opposition of the EU powers to Trump’s plans to scuttle the Iran nuclear accord has everything to do with advancing their own predatory interests in the Middle East. With Germany in the lead, the European imperialist powers are themselves rearming—cynically exploiting the popular opposition to Trump to advance their plans to develop European military power, including a European Army, so as to be able to act independently of, and when needed in opposition to, the US.

Hoping to avoid a direct confrontation between Washington and Europe over Iran and to dissuade Trump from setting course for war, Macron has suggested there should be further negotiations with Iran outside the framework of the nuclear accord. According to the French

president, these would include restrictions on Iran’s ballistic missile program, a follow-on deal after much of the nuclear accord expires, and an “open discussion with Iran” about the “current situation in the region,” including Syria.

Everything to date suggests that the Trump administration will dismiss this proposal out of hand. Anti-Iran hawks in and around the administration argue that even if Europe dissents from re-imposing sanctions on Tehran, the US can coerce the EU into doing so by threatening to sanction any European company or financial institution that trades or facilitates trade with Iran.

The US political establishment and military-security apparatus was bitterly divided over the Iran deal at its inception and two years later, after the defeat of the US proxy forces in Syria, those divisions are even more acute. Supporters of the accord, who include both Democrats and Republicans, argue that it can be part of an effective campaign to contain Iran. This could enable US imperialism to exploit cleavages within the Iranian bourgeoisie to push Tehran to accept US hegemony over the Middle East. This faction fears a showdown with Iran will undercut American imperialism’s military-strategic offensives against its more powerful strategic rivals, China and Russia.

Like Trump, this faction favors a more aggressive stance against Iran, but not the blowing up of an agreement which did compel Iran to dismantle much of its civil nuclear program. The *New York Times*, which for months has been arguing that it would be blunder to repudiate the Iran deal, has also published a series of articles decrying the spread of Iranian influence from Afghanistan to Lebanon.

Defence Secretary James Mattis and National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster, who are both notorious for their animus to Iran, are reported to be cautioning Trump against a precipitous repudiation of the Iran deal. As an alternative they have championed plans for a more aggressive diplomatic and military posture against Iran across the Middle East. These plans were reportedly endorsed at a recent National Security Council meeting, with their broad outlines soon to be publicly revealed.

Press leaks indicate they include a more aggressive US naval posture against Iranian small-boats in the Persian Gulf and bolder steps against Iranian forces in Syria—steps that could easily spiral into direct clashes and all-out war.



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