

Denouncing Iran as a terrorist state, Trump refuses to recertify nuclear accord

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14 October 2017

US President Donald Trump vowed Friday that he will use his presidential powers to blow up the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran unless it is quickly amended to Washington's satisfaction.

"In the event we are not able to reach a solution working with Congress and our allies, then the agreement will be terminated," declared Trump. "It is under continuous review and our participation can be canceled by me as president at any time."

The vow came at the end of a bellicose rant in which Trump denounced Iran as "fanatical," a "rogue state," and the "world's leading state sponsor of terrorism." He accused Tehran of fomenting "conflict, terror and turmoil throughout the Middle East and beyond."

Trump and the US imperialist ruling elite for which he speaks are in no position to be denouncing others for stoking conflict and terrorizing people in the Middle East and elsewhere. For the past quarter-century, the United States has continuously waged illegal wars of aggression across the broader Middle East in which it has killed hundreds of thousands of people, turned millions more into refugees, and destroyed entire societies. Washington has incited sectarian Sunni-Shia conflict and used Islamist terrorists as its proxy fighters, including in its regime-change wars in Libya and Syria.

Trump's diatribe was billed as an address outlining a more aggressive US strategy toward Iran, aimed at "fixing" the nuclear accord and rolling back Tehran's "malign" influence across the Middle East. It was the occasion for Trump to make public his long-rumored decision to refuse to continue certifying that Iran is fulfilling its obligations under the nuclear accord (Joint Comprehensive Program of Action), and that the JCPOA serves the US "national interest."

Under a 2015 law, Congress gave itself the power to quickly re-impose economic sanctions on Iran should the president fail to issue, at 90-day intervals, certification of the White House's continued support for the nuclear agreement.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani quickly took to the airwaves to give a nationally televised rebuttal of Trump's speech. "Mr. Trump's remarks on Iran ... contained nothing but expletives and a pile of delusional allegations against the Iranian nation," he said.

In reply to Trump's denunciation of the 1979 popular

revolution that overthrew the Shah's despotic, US-installed regime and his attempt to cast the past four decades of American war threats and sanctions against Tehran as Iranian "aggression," Rouhani said Trump should "study history better and more closely and know what (US officials) have done to the Iranian people over the past sixty-something years and how they have treated the people of Iran ... after the victory of the Revolution."

All the other signatories of the nuclear accord—Germany, France, Britain, the European Union, Russia and China—have repeatedly said that it should not, and legally cannot, be reopened.

As it became clear in recent weeks that Trump was determined to overturn the 2015 agreement, world leaders, particularly the leaders of Washington's traditional European allies, issued increasingly dire warnings. Scuttling the agreement—whether immediately or, as Trump has now done, by lighting a fuse under it—will, they have warned, greatly exacerbate the war danger in the Middle East. And by demonstrating that Washington arrogates to itself the right to unilaterally modify or repudiate international agreements, the US will, they have stressed, slam shut the door to any diplomatic solution to the crisis in the Korean Peninsula.

Like Rouhani, the European Union's foreign policy chief, Frederica Mogherini, was quick to respond to Trump's speech. She dismissed the US president's claim that Iran has violated the JCPOA, declaring that there have been no Iranian "violations of any of the commitments in the agreement." (In fact, even the Pentagon and US State Department acknowledge that Tehran has implemented the agreement to the letter.)

Noting that the JCPOA was subsequently endorsed by the UN Security Council, Mogherini added, "To my knowledge, there is not one single country in the world that can terminate a UN Security Council resolution that has been adopted. The president of the United States has many powers, but not this one."

Later, British Prime Minister Theresa May, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron took the rare step of issuing a joint statement to reaffirm their support for the JCPOA, which they hailed as "the culmination of 13 years of diplomacy."

“We encourage the US administration and Congress,” said the leaders of Europe’s principal powers, “to consider the implications to the security of the US and its allies before taking any steps that might undermine” the nuclear agreement.

Clearly, they are hoping that Trump can still be roped in by senior members of the administration—Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Defense Secretary James Mattis and National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster—who oppose abrogating the Iran agreement at this juncture, believing that a head-on confrontation with Iran will cut across US military-strategic offensives against China and Russia and dangerously fray US-European relations and the NATO alliance.

In his remarks on Friday, Trump did not call on Congress to immediately “snap back” sanctions on Iran. He did, however, praise proposed US legislation that would sanction any person or group in any way connected to Iran’s ballistic missile program and a second bill that would declare the sweeping temporary restrictions placed on Iran’s civil nuclear program under the JCPOA to be permanent.

Trump also announced that the US Treasury Department is placing Iran’s entire Revolutionary Guard Corps under sanction for supporting “terrorism.” Given the Revolutionary Guards’ extensive role in Iran’s economy, this action is expected to act as a strong deterrent to foreign investment in Iran.

Trump’s stratagem and hope is that the double threat of Congress re-imposing sweeping sanctions on Iran’s energy and banking sectors, thereby torpedoing the nuclear deal, or direct action on his part to smash the agreement, will compel the Europeans to fall into line behind Washington in demanding that Tehran “correct” the JCPOA’s “many flaws.”

Trump made no offer to negotiate with Iran, underscoring that he was issuing an ultimatum. He simply outlined a series of non-negotiable demands that would violate Iran’s sovereignty and effectively reduce the country to the status of a vassal state, while implicitly demanding that the other signatories to the JCPOA, especially Washington’s ostensible European allies, put pressure on Iran to capitulate.

These demands include: eliminating the JCPOA’s “sunset” clauses, i.e., transforming the temporary limits on Iran’s civil nuclear program into permanent prohibitions; giving International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors unfettered access to Iranian military sites; and dismantling Iran’s ballistic missile program.

For Iran to accept these demands would be tantamount to accepting neo-colonial status and unilateral disarmament. For decades, Washington, under Republican and Democratic administrations alike, has pursued a policy of regime-change in Tehran while arming to the teeth US client states in the region, beginning with Israel and Saudi Arabia.

The fear and anger in Europe over Washington’s unilateralist course is palpable and deep-rooted. Earlier this week, German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel complained that Washington

was “replacing the rule of law with the law of the strongest.”

He warned that US “termination of the Iran agreement would turn the Middle East into a region of hot crises” and shut the door to diplomacy with North Korea. The European Union said Gabriel will “have to tell the Americans that their behavior on the Iran issue will drive us Europeans into a common position with Russia and China against the USA.”

The European imperialist powers played a decisive role in imposing the brutal sanctions that ravaged Iran’s economy for four years and are currently in the midst of major rearmament programs. Their disagreements with the US over Iran are entirely bound up with their own predatory agendas.

Since the 2015 nuclear deal, they have all rushed to take advantage of Tehran’s offers of huge commercial opportunities, including in the energy sector. Not only do Trump’s plans to scuttle the Iran deal place these investments in jeopardy; the European powers, which are much more dependent on Mideast oil than the US, fear the economic fallout and the socially destabilizing impact on Europe of a ratcheting up of tensions with Iran.

The anti-Iran hawks in and around the Trump administration have expressed confidence that ultimately the threat of European companies being sanctioned through the US-dominated world financial system for continued dealings with Iran will force the Europeans to accede to Washington’s demand that they join it in a new economic war against Iran.

But there is a growing mood in Europe for a push back against Washington. David O’Sullivan, the European Union’s ambassador to the United States, has said Europe may have to bring forward legislation to protect European companies from the threat of US sanctions.

In arguing for the Iran nuclear accord, President Obama repeatedly said the only alternative was war. What he didn’t say was that such a war would rapidly become a regional war, drawing in US allies like Saudi Arabia and Israel and Iranian-allied groups like Hezbollah and Hamas, and potentially Russia and other outside powers.

Military action is certainly under discussion in the Trump administration. Republican Senator Tom Cotton, who has been working closely with Trump and his aides in formulating the administration’s new Iran strategy, told a recent Council on Foreign Relations meeting that if renewed sanctions did not force Iran to submit, the US could launch “calibrated strikes” against Iran’s nuclear infrastructure.



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