

Tensions rise with Trump set to announce decision on Iran nuclear deal

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President Donald Trump is set to announce his decision today on whether he will renew the waiver of US sanctions against Iran. He tweeted at midday on Monday: “I will be announcing my decision on the Iran deal tomorrow from the White House at 2:00 p.m.”

The announcement comes four days before the deadline for issuing the waiver, amid mounting concern that the White House will upend the nuclear agreement between Tehran and six major world powers, thereby setting the stage for a new war that would eclipse those already waged by US imperialism in the Middle East.

In advance of Trump’s decision, representatives of Washington’s NATO allies and fellow signatories of the 2015 nuclear deal—the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA—have issued stark warnings that Trump’s actions could lead to catastrophic consequences.

The JCPOA, which Tehran signed with the US, Russia, China, the UK, Britain and France, imposed severe limitations upon Iran’s nuclear program and a strict inspections regime in return for the lifting of crippling economic sanctions imposed by Washington and its allies.

Under US law, Trump is obliged to renew the waiver of US sanctions every 120 to 180 days. In January, he refused to join five other major powers in re-certifying the nuclear deal, a largely symbolic action meant to threaten Iran.

Then in January, he issued a statement renewing the waiver of certain US sanctions, while vowing that he would not do so again unless steps were taken to “fix the terrible flaws” in an agreement he has described as the “worst deal ever.” The “fixes” he has demanded include conditions that Tehran cannot accept, including ending the agreement’s sunset clause, restricting Iran’s non-nuclear ballistic missile program and rolling back Iranian influence in the Middle East.

One indication of Trump’s intentions came over the weekend in a speech delivered by his new lead attorney

and political confidante, former New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani. He was speaking before a conference billed as the “Iran Freedom Convention for Democracy and Human Rights.”

“What do you think is going to happen to that agreement?” Giuliani asked the audience, taking a piece of paper representing the nuclear accord and ripping it apart. He went on to tell the crowd: “We have a president who is tough. We have a president who is as committed to regime-change as we are.” Confronting Iran, he added, is “more important than an Israeli-Palestinian deal.”

Giuliani is exceedingly well-known to this audience. The so-called “Freedom Convention” is a front for the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK). Beginning as a group opposing the US-backed dictatorship of Shah Reza Pahlavi, espousing an eclectic mixture of nationalism, Islam, Marxist phraseology and “armed struggle,” it initially backed the Islamic regime established after the revolution of 1979, but then turned against it after suffering severe repression. Any significant popular support for the MEK in Iran evaporated after the group fought alongside the Iraqi army during the 1980s Iran-Iraq war and then carried out a series of terrorist attacks inside Iran. Until 2012, it was on the US State Department’s list of terrorist organizations.

Seeking support from the US, Western Europe and Israel, it recast itself as a pro-Western movement committed to free market capitalism and regime-change, while creating a cult of personality around its leader, Maryam Rajavi. Giuliani is one of a number of prominent politicians, including Democrats like Senator Robert Menendez and Republicans like John McCain and Trump’s new national security adviser, John Bolton, who have promoted the group, in many cases in return for tens of thousands of dollars in donations and speakers’ fees.

With the deadline for the renewal of the US waiver on sanctions approaching, the Western European signatories

to the nuclear agreement have issued public statements attempting to dissuade Trump from blowing up the deal, while indicating that they themselves will try to maintain the agreement, with or without the US.

British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson arrived in Washington Sunday, launching a PR campaign aimed at convincing Trump to continue the nuclear agreement, portraying it as a useful instrument for containing Iran.

Appearing on "Fox and Friends," reportedly Trump's favorite news source, Johnson called upon Trump not to "throw the baby out with the bathwater."

The UK foreign secretary commented that "Plan B," i.e., a war with Iran, did "not seem, to me, to be particularly well developed at this stage."

"Are we seriously saying that we are going to bomb those facilities at Fordo and Natanz?" he added.

"Is that really a realistic possibility? Or do we work round what we have got and push back on Iran together?" Johnson concluded, "There doesn't seem to me at the moment to be a viable military solution."

His words were carefully chosen: war plans are not sufficiently developed "at this stage," and there is not a viable military option "at the moment." The clear implication is that war at some future stage or moment is inevitable.

Meanwhile, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian met in Berlin Monday to express their governments' continued support for the nuclear accord.

"We fear a failure [to abide by the deal] would result in an escalation," said Maas. Drian added that his government, along with those of Germany and the UK, were prepared to maintain the agreement, whatever Trump announces today.

The European powers have seen the Iran accord as an opening for profitable investments and exports to a market of over 80 million people. While companies like the French oil giant Total and Airbus have negotiated multi-billion-dollar deals, few of them have matured due to concerns over potential US sanctions being imposed against European corporations and banks. Trump's threats are deliberately aimed at instilling such fears under conditions where US capitalist interests have been unable to make inroads.

Even more significantly, the European powers fear that they will suffer the brunt of the blowback from a war with Iran in terms of spiraling energy costs, political destabilization and a renewed flood of refugees.

While the recklessness of US policy is exacerbating

divisions between the European powers and the United States, Washington's foremost ally in the Middle East, Israel, is actively promoting a scuttling of the Iran nuclear deal and the launching of a new region-wide war.

The Israeli media has been filled with reports, based on government sources, that an Iranian attack, in retaliation for airstrikes last month that killed dozens of Iranian military personnel in Syria, is imminent.

Speaking at the beginning of a weekly cabinet meeting Sunday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu argued for a policy of military confrontation.

"We are determined to stop Iran's aggression in its early stages, even if it this involves a conflict," he said. "Better now than later. Nations that were unprepared to take timely action against murderous aggression paid much heavier prices afterwards."

The labored attempts to equate Iran with Nazi Germany fall flat. It is Israel itself that is guilty of "murderous aggression," from the illegal airstrikes against Syria to its slaughter of unarmed Palestinian protesters in Gaza.

A further escalation of Israel's bellicose threats came on Monday from Israeli Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz, who warned that Israel will "eliminate" Syrian President Bashar al-Assad if he continues to allow Iranian military force to operate inside Syria.

With reports of the Israel Defense Forces sending tanks and troops to Israel's northern border, Tel Aviv has also issued fresh threats in response to Lebanon's parliamentary election, which strengthened the position of Hezbollah and substantially weakened that of Prime Minister Saad Hariri, the focus of Washington's efforts to install a US puppet regime.

"The state of Israel will not differentiate between the sovereign state of Lebanon and Hezbollah, and will view Lebanon as responsible for any action from within its territory," Israeli Education Minister Naftali Bennett wrote on Twitter.



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