

## On Iran, the US can't push India further

The US wants India to completely cut petroleum imports from Iran, the country's third-largest supplier of oil, in a little more than four months, with no scope for a waiver of sanctions that Washington intends to impose. The move, also applicable to China, the largest importer of oil, has already roiled financial markets around the world. In the past, the US granted waivers to Indian and Chinese entities provided there was a gradual reduction in imports of Iranian oil. With the rupee at a low and the higher prices of crude, the measure will have significant implications for inflation and growth of the Indian economy.

All of this comes against the backdrop of growing fears about a trade war brought on by protectionism and tit-for-tat tariffs. The proposed sanctions are an outcome of President Donald Trump's decision to pull the US out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or the Iran nuclear deal. Some have suggested the latest US move is part of its efforts to influence crunch talks in Vienna next month between Iran and the other signatories to the nuclear deal.

Experts believe it is unlikely that China will end its imports of Iranian oil, especially at a time when it is engaged in a burgeoning trade war with the US. India finds itself caught in other pulls and pressure — while New Delhi has worked with Washington to address legitimate concerns related to Tehran's nuclear programme, India has had long-standing friendly relations with Iran, which remains the third-largest supplier of crude after Saudi Arabia and Iraq despite efforts to reduce dependence on Iranian crude.

At a time when the US administration is projecting India as a key partner in what is now known as the "Indo-Pacific" region, such measures that dictate terms and appear to set the agenda for India are hardly likely to go down well with policymakers in New Delhi. For a leader who relies so much on the dictum "America First", Mr Trump should realise that other countries too have the right to put their own interests first. The US should also pause to consider the fact that other signatories to the Iran nuclear deal have chosen to stick with efforts to salvage the accord instead of backing the solitary path it has adopted. The Iranian nuclear issue is unlikely to be adequately addressed through such unilateral actions, and countries such as India and China have the right to adopt a path that best suits their interests.

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