

Trump set to decertify Iran nuclear agreement

The Iran nuclear deal between Tehran and six world powers reached in 2015 appears to be in jeopardy as President Donald Trump is unlikely to issue a certification mandated by a U.S law for the country's continuing participation in the agreement.

Decertification by Mr. Trump will not directly result in the U.S withdrawal from the agreement, but could a trigger a series of events that may destabilise and eventually dismantle it.

The President is expected to give a speech explaining his position and a new, tougher policy towards Iran next week.

"We must not allow Iran to obtain nuclear weapons. The Iranian regime supports terrorism and exports violence, bloodshed, and chaos across the Middle East [West Asia]. That is why we must put an end to Iran's continued aggression and nuclear ambitions. They have not lived up to the spirit of their agreement," Mr. Trump told senior leaders of the U.S military at the White House on Thursday.

At odds with IAEA

The President's view that Iran is not in compliance with the deal, also called the the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), is at odds with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the other five signatories to the deal — Russia, China, France, Germany and U.K.

The IAEA and these five countries maintain that Iran is in full compliance. Mr. Trump appears to be going by the advice of a segment of the Republican Party and two key American allies in region, Israel and Saudi Arabia, both bitter opponents of the deal negotiated by the Barack Obama administration. The deal has provisions to deal with an Iranian breach, but does not foresee an American non-compliance.

Four points

Under the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act of 2015, the President is required to issue a certification to Congress every 90 days that makes a determination on four points — that "Iran is fully implementing the JCPOA, Iran has not committed a material breach, Iran has not taken any action that could significantly advance a nuclear weapons programme, and suspension of sanctions is appropriate and proportionate to the measures taken by Iran and vital to U.S. national security interests."

The next certification is due on October 15. Mr. Trump has certified the deal twice, but has indicated that he does not intend to do it a third time. The last point about the deal being vital to U.S national interests is an entirely subjective one.

When the President refuses to certify, the onus is on the U.S Congress to decide the course of action. The Congress will get 60 days to decide whether or not to reimpose the sanctions on Iran, lifted as part of the nuclear deal. For now, supporters of decertification argue that this move could open the path for a stronger deal that could be negotiated.

'Fix it or nix it'

The U.S. could then ".. move forward on trying to find a way to actually strengthen the deal, fix the deal and get rid of some of the fatal flaws of the deal," Mark Dubowitz, CEO of the Foundation for

Defence of Democracies, who has been advising the White House on the issue, told the National Public Radio on Thursday. "Fix it, or nix it," said Israel PM Benjamin Netanyahu in his speech at the U.N. General Assembly last month.

Mr. Trump is in agreement with this view. "We cannot abide by an agreement if it provides cover for the eventual construction of a nuclear programme," he said in his speech at the UNGA. However, senior officials of his administration and the European allies fear that American withdrawal from the deal could destabilise the region further. Defence Secretary James Mattis told a Congressional committee earlier in the week that Iran was "fundamentally" in compliance with the agreement.

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