

Trump to announce new Iran nuclear deal strategy

Loud and clear:Iranians shout anti-United States slogans during Friday prayers in Tehran.AFP

The nuclear deal with Tehran is the worst in the history of the U.S. and he would no longer be certifying for its continuation, President Donald Trump announced on Friday, unveiling a new American strategy on Iran that could heighten tensions in West Asia.

The new policy abandons the focussed approach of the previous Obama administration on rolling back Tehran's nuclear weapons programme and threatens punitive measures against Iran for a range of alleged transgressions. Mr. Trump has also called upon American allies to join in the effort to confront Iran, adding that he would not allow it to obtain a nuclear weapon and threaten America like North Korea is currently doing.

Terming Iran the world's "leading state sponsor of terrorism," Mr. Trump said Tehran was in violation of the terms of the agreement, a doubtful claim as other countries party to it do not share that view. He blamed his predecessor Barack Obama for signing the deal when sanctions were leading to a "total collapse of the Iranian regime."

According to Mr. Trump, the deal would not stop Iran's nuclear pursuit. "... in just a few years, as key restrictions disappear, Iran can sprint towards a rapid nuclear weapons' breakout," the President said. "The Iran deal was one of the worst and most one-sided transactions that the United States has ever entered into."

With the President refusing to certify the deal as required by law, the onus is on U.S. Congress to decide the next course of action.

U.S. Congress key to deal

The Congress will get 60 days to decide whether or not to reimpose the sanctions on Iran that were lifted as part of the nuclear deal. "... I am directing my administration to work closely with Congress and our allies to address the deal's many serious flaws so that the Iranian regime can never threaten the world with nuclear weapons," he said adding that he would use his authority to scrap the entire deal otherwise.

Mr. Trump said he has asked the Treasury department to devise new sanctions against Iran, particularly targeting the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which he termed as a "terrorist militia."

He linked Iran to a litany of terrorism incidents around the world that targeted the U.S and its allies. He said the Iranian regime regime harboured "high level terrorists including Osama bin Laden's son" and accused it of supporting the Al Qaida, Taliban, Hamas and Hezbollah. The President also blamed Iran for the civil wars in Syria and Yemen.

The new approach would target "the full range of the Iranian regime's malign activities," the White House said in a statement ahead of the speech. The statement termed Obama's Iran policy "myopic" and repudiated the U.S policy towards Tehran "over the last decade and a half."

The new "comprehensive" strategy does not immediately upend the deal, but the administration's intent to decertify it, and to pursue a raft of punitive measures against Iran for other alleged transgressions, could make it unsustainable. Iran has said it would not renegotiate the deal.

The other five countries that are party to the deal, Germany, U.K, France, Russia and China, have all said the deal is working fine.

The new Trump policy warns of punitive moves against Iran for “ballistic missile development and proliferation, material and financial support for terrorism and extremism, support for the Assad regime’s atrocities against the Syrian people, unrelenting hostility to Israel, consistently threatening freedom of navigation....cyber-attacks against the U.S., Israel, and America’s other allies and partners in the Middle East; grievous human rights abuses; and Arbitrary detention of foreigners, including U.S. citizens, on specious charges and without due process,” the statement said.

Israel and Saudi Arabia, the American allies in the region, have been calling for scrapping the deal altogether. Following the nuclear deal that removed a range of sanctions against Tehran, Indian private and public sector entities had quickly reached out for opportunities in the country.

Increasing cooperation with Tehran is also meant to counter the Chinese-led One Belt One Road project, as Iranian ports of Bandar Abbas and Chabahar could be creating new transportation routes to Afghanistan, Central Asia and Europe for India. Mr. Trump’s Afghan policy, which involves a more unforgiving approach towards Pakistan for its inability to rein in terrorist groups, could also be under strain as more battlefronts open across the region.

Allies unnerved

While the Sunni regimes in the Asian Gulf and Israel would be pleased by Mr. Trump’s move. Other American allies, already unnerved by a series of recent moves by Mr. Trump — such as withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement and criticism of NATO — could find ties with America under unprecedented stress.

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