

Iran-U.S. relations: On dangerous footing

By [refusing to certify the Iran nuclear deal](#), which curbed its nuclear programme in return for lifting global sanctions, U.S. President Donald Trump has put the two-year-old pact on dangerous footing. Under American law, the administration has to certify that Iran is technically in compliance with the deal that was struck between Iran and six other world powers, including the U.S., every 90 days. All other signatories, as well as the UN, insist that Iran is fully complying. But Mr. Trump, who had during his election campaign [threatened to tear up the deal](#) and as President continued to call it the “worst agreement in American diplomatic history”, disavowed it days before the next certification was due. From its early days, his administration has taken a hawkish line towards Iran, imposing new sanctions on its missile programmes and joining hands with its regional rivals in West Asia. But even as he withdrew certification, he did not scrap the deal. Instead, he passed the buck to U.S. lawmakers. The Republican-controlled Congress now has 60 days to decide whether sanctions should be reimposed. It is unlikely to do anything radical in the near term as any sweeping legislation would require bipartisan support in the Senate. Nonetheless, the damage Mr. Trump’s decision has done to the agreement and to American diplomacy in general is huge. He appears to be driven by political calculations rather than a realistic assessment of the agreement, which, by its own standards, is working.

With the withdrawal from the certification, Mr. Trump has put the final nail in the coffin of an Iran-U.S. reset that had appeared possible during the Obama days. Now the threat of sanctions will hang over the nuclear deal. This is a boon for hardliners in Iran, who have suffered a political setback in recent years. The deal became possible only because the reformists and moderates rallied behind President Hassan Rouhani’s agenda, despite strong opposition from the Iranian deep state. Even Mr. Rouhani, who promised a solution to the nuclear crisis, got the deal done and won re-election this year, will now find it difficult to mobilise public opinion behind the agreement in the light of continued U.S. hostility. The larger question is, what kind of example is the U.S. setting for the global non-proliferation regime? The Iran deal, despite its shortcomings, was a shining example of the capacity of world powers to come together and sort out a complex issue diplomatically. It assumed greater significance given the recent wars and chaos in West Asia. It should have set a model in addressing other nuclear crises. Instead, by going after Iran even though it complies with the agreement, the U.S. is damaging its own reputation.

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