

THEWEEK

Is President Trump on a collision course with Iran?

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Donald Trump may be abiding by a 2015 nuclear deal with Iran – at least for now – but he is expected to lay out what the [BBC](#) describes as “a more confrontational strategy” that calls for stricter enforcement of the agreement.

According to officials briefed on the US president’s intentions, Trump will propose fresh sanctions on Iran’s Revolutionary Guard during a speech later today, along with measures to punish Tehran for its ballistic missile programme, [The Guardian](#) says. Congress may also pass legislation levying automatic sanctions if there are future Iranian transgressions.

Trump has already threatened to “decertify” the agreement. This would not immediately withdraw the US from the accord, but would give Congress 60 days to decide whether to do so by reimposing sanctions.

The president has spoken out against what he has called a “very bad deal” and an “embarrassment” to the US, say [CNN](#), “despite all available evidence that Iran is complying with terms which imposed limits on its nuclear programme in return for a lifting of sanctions that had crippled its economy”.

So, is a US conflict with Iran inevitable? Here are some of the likely scenarios in the weeks and months ahead.

Improve the deal

Trump is unlikely to push Congress to impose sanctions should he opt for decertification. “Even critics of the deal fear this would isolate the US and weaken its credibility, because Iran is complying with the agreement,” says the BBC’s Barbara Plett Usher.

Republicans believe decertification would force Iran to go back to the negotiating table, however, to improve the deal with America, its European allies, China and Russia.

Negotiations

European officials have expressed relief that today's speech, at the White House, does not seem likely to “represent an immediate US abrogation of the 2015 deal”, says [The Guardian](#).

European signatories maintain that the deal, negotiated by Barack Obama, cannot be altered without risking its collapse.

However, The Financial Times says that, among other possible scenarios, the European signatories could address Trump's concerns by backing talks for "a new arrangement to cover the period after 2025, when the deal is due to expire, or Iran's ballistic missile programme".

Threat of future sanctions

Even if the US Congress decides to leave the deal untouched, the threat of possible sanctions in the future could dissuade European investment in Iran - thereby negating the benefits of Tehran remaining in the accord.

"Longer term, this will be very humiliating and embarrassing for [Iran's] Rouhani government," says Trita Parsi, author of *Losing an Enemy: Obama, Iran and the Triumph of Diplomacy*.

Path to war?

Regardless of Trump's immediate decision, his administration's rhetoric has set the US on a path to war with Iran, says The Independent's Patrick Cockburn.

"A confrontation with Iran will probably not come soon but in a year or two, when Trump may well feel that he has to show how much tougher and more effective he is than his predecessor, whom he has denounced as weak and incompetent."

The big threat right now, says Trita Parsi, is Trump's apparent intention to ratchet up pressure in the region on Tehrani. "Doing so risks not only scuppering the agreement, but putting the United States and Iran on a collision course that could result in outright conflict," Parsi warns.

Trump expected to decertify Iran nuclear deal next week

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Donald Trump says he is considering "decertifying" a landmark nuclear deal brokered with Iran during the Obama administration, because Iran is "not living up to the spirit" of the agreement.

Speaking during a White House meeting with military leaders yesterday, the US president insisted that "the Iranian regime supports terrorism and exports violence, bloodshed, and chaos across the Middle East. That is why we must put an end to Iran's continued aggression and nuclear ambitions."

According to The Washington Post, "decertification amounts to a middle ground of sorts between Trump, who has long wanted to withdraw from the agreement completely, and many

congressional leaders and senior diplomatic, military and national security advisers, who say the deal is worth preserving with changes if possible”.

If the deal is decertified next week, it would trigger a 60-day period for Congress to decide whether to reimpose sanctions on Iran. The move could push Iran to renegotiate the deal but, if Congress imposes sanctions, it could also trigger its collapse.

European signatories to the agreement with Iran – the UK, France and Germany – are “focusing their energies on lobbying Congress not to reimpose sanctions”, The Guardian says.

An editorial in The New York Times claims Trump’s decision will “ultimately prove to be a step that antagonises Iran, a major regional power, and leads to the proliferation of nuclear weapons around the world”.

The president’s advisors are “undoubtedly aware the president’s choice will most likely undermine or end US participation in the nuclear deal, split us from our European allies, reduce the constraints on Iran’s nuclear programme, and reduce America’s global credibility and negotiating power”, says Emma Ashford of the Cato Institute, a US libertarian think tank. Trump is frustrated by rules requiring him to certify an agreement every 90 days, in keeping with a 2015 law giving Congress oversight of the agreement, Western officials told the Financial Times. The president has described it as the “worst deal ever”.

“He is looking for options that minimise the domestic political embarrassment of ultimately maintaining the deal,” the official told the newspaper.