



Iran Sanctions Unrelated to Nuclear Pact Poised to Pass House

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The U.S. House is poised to pass new sanctions in response to Iran's ballistic missile program and support for Hezbollah, while stopping short of addressing the Islamic Republic's compliance with the multinational accord designed to curb its nuclear program.

Three sanctions bills set for floor votes Wednesday are expected to receive bipartisan support and represent the first action from Congress against Iran since President Donald Trump earlier this month refused to certify the country is complying with the terms of the nuclear pact. Trump demanded a tougher stance from Congress that could include renegotiating or pulling out of the Joint Plan of Comprehensive Action, as the Iran nuclear deal is formally known. The legislation under consideration Wednesday stops short of Trump's request for trigger points that would automatically reimpose sanctions unless Iran meets a list of U.S. demands, including to curb its ballistic missile program.

The sanctions under consideration aren't the most effective way to change Iran's behavior but could be the best political solution to balance Trump's demands with U.S. international commitments, said John Glaser, director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute, a libertarian research group in Washington.

"If Congress handles this delicately, avoids reimposing nuclear sanctions -- which would constitute a violation of the deal itself -- imposes some harsh sanctions that sound really tough and placate Trump, then this seems plausibly like the best way out of this impasse that the president has put us in," Glaser said.

Nuclear Pact

Iranian officials have said there is no room to renegotiate the nuclear deal. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said last week Iran wouldn't move first to abandon the nuclear deal but "will tear it to pieces" if the U.S. violates its side of the agreement.

Even with non-nuclear sanctions eroding some of the economic benefits Iran should see from the nuclear deal, Iran is likely to hold on to the deal unless the U.S. takes more explicit action on nuclear sanctions, according to Behnam Ben Taleblu, senior Iran analyst at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

"Ultimately Iran has the highest threshold for pain" because it wants to preserve the international legitimacy conferred by the Iran deal, Behnam said.

Congress in July passed a sanctions package to impose penalties on Iran, as well as Russia and North Korea. Trump signed off on the legislation. One of the bills to be voted Wednesday, H.R. 1698, would expand those Iran sanctions and require the administration to create an implementation plan.

This bill also imposes additional sanctions on individuals or entities that help Iran develop ballistic missiles and other conventional weapons, but doesn't apply to any nuclear activity. Sanctions options include freezing U.S. assets, denying entry into the U.S., barring imports and exports, restrictions from participating in federal contracts and imposing criminal or civil penalties.

Another one of Wednesday's bills, H.R. 3329, would require the administration to impose penalties on entities, including financial institutions and foreign government agencies, that support Hezbollah, considered by the U.S. to be a terrorist organization. The Shiite Muslim political and military organization in Lebanon has received support from the Shiite government in Iran.

According to the U.S. State Department, Iran's listing as a state sponsor of terrorism is based, in part, on its support of Hezbollah.

Also under consideration is H.R. 3342, which would direct the president to impose economic sanctions on members of Hezbollah who have used human shields, and bar those individuals from entering the U.S. The legislation lays out actions by the administration that would be required to identify and punish Shiite militants that orchestrated the use of civilians as cover in armed conflicts.

The House will also consider a resolution to express appreciation for support from the European Union for countering Hezbollah's "criminal and terrorist activities."