
TRUMP TO ANNOUNCE DECISION ON IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL, EUROPEAN ALLIES ON EDGE

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US President Donald Trump will announce today (8 May) whether he will pull out of the Iran nuclear deal or stay in and work with European allies who say it has successfully halted Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Trump has consistently threatened to pull out of the 2015 agreement because it does not address Iran's ballistic missile program or its role in wars in Syria and Yemen, and does not permanently prevent Tehran from developing nuclear weapons.

A senior US official close to the process said France, Germany and Britain had moved significantly to address Trump's concerns over the ballistic missile program, the terms under which international inspectors visit suspect Iranian sites, and sunset clauses under which some terms of the deal expire.

But it was not clear whether those last-ditch efforts had made enough progress to persuade Trump to stay in the pact.

The big question in my mind is does he think the Europeans have moved far enough so that we can all be unified and announce a deal? the official told Reuters.

European leaders have warned that a US withdrawal would undo years of work that led to and sustained a landmark deal that has kept nuclear weapons out of Iran's hands.

Trump, in a tweet on Monday, said he would make the announcement at 2 p.m. (1800 GMT) on Tuesday.

The Iran deal, negotiated during the administration of Trump's Democratic predecessor, Barack Obama, eased economic sanctions on Iran in exchange for Tehran limiting its nuclear program.

But Trump has called it the worst deal ever negotiated and he wants Britain, France and Germany – which also signed the pact along with Russia and China – to toughen up the terms.

In the past few weeks, the Republican president has consulted either in person or by telephone with leaders of all three countries.

British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson made the rounds in Washington on Monday, including talks with Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Still, European diplomats privately said they expected Trump to withdraw from the agreement.

Two White House officials and a source familiar with the debate inside the administration said last week that Trump had all but decided to pull out.

Under the deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the United States committed to ease a series of US sanctions on Iran and it has done so under a string of waivers that effectively suspend them.

Trump has until Saturday to decide whether to extend the waivers or withdraw and reintroduce sanctions related to Iran's central bank and Iranian oil exports.

That would dissuade foreign companies from doing business with Iran because they could be subject to US penalties.

Iran has said it will not renegotiate the accord and threatened to retaliate if the United States pulls out, although it has not said how.

Diplomats and military experts say Tehran could seek to resume its nuclear arms program or step up its military involvement in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Lebanon.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani suggested on Monday that Iran might remain in the nuclear deal even if Trump abandons it and imposes sanctions.

But he also warned that Tehran would fiercely resist US efforts to limit its influence in the Middle East.

France and Germany vow to stick to the deal

Germany and France vowed to stand by the 2015 nuclear deal even if the United States pulls out.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said it was clear that the agreement made the world safer and there was a risk of escalation were it to be cancelled.

We don't think there is any justifiable reason to pull out of this agreement and we continue to make the case for it to our American friends, Maas said during a joint news conference with visiting French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian.

We'll deal with the (US) decision but like Jean-Yves said, we want to adhere to this agreement, Maas added.

Le Drian said France, Britain and Germany would keep to the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran irrespective of the United States decision because it is the best way to avoid nuclear proliferation.

We are determined to save this deal because this accord safeguards against nuclear proliferation and is the right way to stop Iran getting a nuclear weapon, Le Drian said.

Financial markets are also watching Trump's decision closely. On Monday, oil prices broke above \$70 a barrel to their highest level since late 2014.

Kaynak/Source: