White House: Iran adhering to nuke deal, but fresh sanctions likely for non-nuclear activities

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Iran is complying with the letter of the nuclear deal but not its spirit, the White House said Monday, as Secretary of State Rex Tillerson certified to Congress that Tehran was abiding by the terms of the pact.

During a conference call with reporters, a senior administration official said that while the US verified the conditions of the agreement have been met, the Iranian regime’s non-nuclear behavior poses multiple threats to US interests and foments instability in the region, actions that will likely lead to fresh sanctions. “We do expect that we will be implementing new sanctions,” he said.

Under the 2015 agreement brokered by former president Barack Obama and world powers, the White House [must certify](https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-114hr1191enr/pdf/BILLS-114hr1191enr.pdf) to Congress every three months whether Iran is honoring the deal, which rolled back sanctions in exchange for curbing Iran’s nuclear program.

The Trump administration issued its first certification in April and faced its second deadline Monday, when it was mandated to confirm whether Iran is still adhering to the deal.

Despite Iranian compliance with the strict contours of the pact, US President Donald Trump and Tillerson would emphasize the regime “remains one of the most dangerous threats to US interests and to regional stability” while “highlighting the range of malign activities by Iran that extend well beyond the nuclear realm,” the official said.

“The president and the secretary of state judge that these Iranian activities severely undermine the JCPOA,” he added, using the initials for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the deal’s formal name. “As a result, the president and the secretary of state judge that Iran is unquestionably in default of the spirit of the JCPOA.”

Iran’s “ballistic missile testing and development, support for terrorism, complicity in the atrocities committed by the Assad regime against the Syrian people … numerous human rights violations and arbitrary detainment of foreigners” were listed as unacceptable.

Also cited was Tehran’s “continuing hostility of Israel” and its “cyber attacks against the United States and Israel,” the official said.

The official criticized the Obama administration for making the Iran deal the “centerpiece” of its Iran approach, resulting in too “narrow” a focus that neglected Tehran’s nefarious regional activities.

“Moving forward the administration intends to employ a strategy that will address the totality of Iran’s malign behavior and not narrowly focus on just the Iran nuclear agreement,” he stated.

The Trump administration, this official went on, will seek to convince allies of the deal’s flaws and address them while also “looking for ways to more strictly enforce the deal.”

The deal’s critics often cite minor infractions as grounds to say Iran is not complying. But the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations agency that monitors the pact, has said Iran is in compliance.

As a presidential candidate, Trump was highly critical of the deal, often calling it the worst ever negotiated. But he also provided contradictory messages for how he would handle the Iranian challenge.

In his [address](http://www.timesofisrael.com/donald-trumps-full-speech-to-aipac/) at the 2016 AIPAC conference, for instance, Trump said he would both “dismantle the disastrous deal with Iran” and “enforce the terms of the previous deal to hold Iran totally accountable.”

As president, he has refrained from abrogating the agreement.

He did, however, [impose new sanctions](http://www.timesofisrael.com/after-trump-says-iran-playing-with-fire-white-house-imposes-fresh-sanctions/) on multiple Iranian entities and individuals in February after Tehran defied a United Nations Security Council resolution by testing ballistic missiles.