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Trump to unveil new responses to Iranian 'bad behavior': White House

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - President Donald Trump will announce new U.S. responses to Iran's missile tests, support for "terrorism" and cyber operations as part of his new Iran strategy, the White House said on Friday.

U.S. President Donald Trump participates in a briefing with senior military leaders at the White House in Washington, U.S., October 5, 2017. REUTERS/Yuri Gripas

"The president isn't looking at one piece of this. He's looking at all of the bad behavior of Iran," Sarah Huckabee Sanders, the White House press secretary, told reporters.

Sanders continued.

Trump “wants to look for a broad strategy that addresses all of those problems, not just one-offing those,” she said. “That’s what his team is focused on and that’s what he’ll be rolling out to address that as a whole in the coming days.”

A senior administration official told Reuters on Thursday that Trump was expected to announce he will decertify the landmark international deal curbing Iran’s nuclear program, in a step that could cause the accord to unravel.

Trump on Friday declined to explain what he meant when he described a gathering of military leaders the evening before as “the calm before the storm,” but the White House said his remarks were not meant to be mischievous.

The administration was considering Oct. 12 for Trump to give a speech on Iran, but no final decision had been made, an official said previously.

It was not clear to what illicit nuclear program Sanders was referring as the International Atomic Energy Agency says Iran is complying with the 2015 nuclear deal reached with the United States, Russia, China, Britain, France, Germany and the European Union.

The Trump administration also has acknowledged that Iran has not breached the accord’s Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, which is designed to prevent Iran developing a nuclear weapon. The administration, however, contends that Tehran has violated the “spirit” of the deal.

The issue came up during a telephone call on Friday between Trump and French President Emmanuel Macron. The pair discussed “ways to continue working together to deny Iran all paths to a nuclear weapon,” according to a White House statement.

Macron has been a fierce defender of the JCPOA, denounced by Trump as “the worst deal ever negotiated.” But the French leader also has suggested that restraints on Iran’s nuclear program that expire in 2025 could be bolstered, a senior French official said last month.

response to Iran's satellite missile tests, cyber espionage and backing of Hezbollah, Hezbollah and other groups on the U.S. list of foreign terrorist organizations.

The administration earlier this year considered, but then put on hold, adding the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Iran's most powerful internal and external security force, to the U.S. list of foreign terrorist organizations.

The Quds Force, the IRGC's foreign espionage and paramilitary wing, and individuals and entities associated with the IRGC are on the list, but the organization as a whole is not.

Last month, current and former U.S. officials told Reuters the broader strategy Trump is weighing is expected to allow more aggressive U.S. actions to counter what the administration views as Iran's efforts to boost its military muscle and expand its regional influence through proxy forces.

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Under a 2015 U.S. law, Trump has until Oct. 15 to certify to Congress that Iran is complying with the JCPOA. If he decides to decertify, lawmakers would have 60 days in which to consider reimposing U.S. sanctions on Iran lifted under the deal, an action that many experts warn could unhinge the accord.

Knowledgeable sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, have said the administration is looking for ways to fix what it views as serious flaws without necessarily killing the deal.

Critics say the flaws include the so-called sunset clauses, under which some of the restrictions on Iran's nuclear program expire over time.

Trump's national security adviser, General H.R. McMaster, met with Republican and Democratic lawmakers on Wednesday in an effort to win their support for the strategy.

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