

Erdogan to meet Trump amid disagreements on YPG

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President Erdogan will hold discussions in Washington after U.S. President Donald Trump authorized the direct arming of Syrian Kurdish fighters from the YPG.

Erdogan will meet Trump for the first time since the latter assumed office, with the talks “to be in the format of a point rather than a comma” in terms of the allies’ future ties, according to the Turkish leader. Syria will dominate the agenda as the Turkish leader tries for a final time to try to convince the American president to change his mind about cooperating with the YPG ahead of a massive military campaign in Raqqa with the SDF.

The Pentagon has identified the Syrian Kurdish militia as the local partner best-placed to drive the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) out of Raqqa. The U.S. will deliver small arms, ammunition, machine guns, armored vehicles and engineering equipment to the YPG. The shipments were pre-positioned and could be delivered to the Kurdish militia “very quickly,” according to U.S. Col. John Dorrian, a spokesman for the U.S. military in Baghdad.

Erdogan blamed Trump’s decision on civil servants from former President Barack Obama’s administration. “There are Obama’s men in lower positions [in the current administration]. He [Trump] is looking at the situation in Iraq and Syria through the information fed by them. And I say there is no need for the YPG or the PYD [Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party].”

These are terrorist organizations. Considering cooperation with the YPG as a condition to fight Daesh is in fact destroying the reputation of the U.S. and the [U.S.-led anti-ISIL] coalition,” Erdogan told a group of journalists in Beijing. The Obama administration previously provided arms to the SDF, while deploying hundreds of U.S. special operations troops to northern Syria to train Syrian Kurdish fighters.

Turkey and the U.S. are at odds over the designation of the YPG and PYD. Turkey has entirely attempted to portray the two groups as terrorists since Ankara sees the Syrian Kurdish fighters as an offshoot of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), and complains that the American arms will eventually reach the PKK. But the U.S. sees the YPG as effective partners on the ground in their fight against ISIL.

Turkey wants Ankara-backed Free Syrian Army (FSA) fighters to be used instead of YPG/PYD forces in a Raqqa operation, along with Arab elements of the SDF, but has failed to convince Washington to do so. On April 25, Turkish military carried out air strikes against YPG positions in northern Syria, killing at least 20 Kurdish fighters.



The U.S. not only condemned the attack, but also deployed more troops and armored vehicles in the region to serve as a buffer between Turkey and the YPG. Last week, Erdoğan said he would show Trump pictures and video footage showing American flags and YPG banners flying side by side, while U.S. Marines and YPG fighters stood guard together.

Washington, meanwhile, has suggested it will attempt to assuage Turkey's concerns by supporting Turkish security. The Wall Street Journal reported that the U.S. was beefing up joint intelligence efforts with Turkey to help the government better target terrorists in the region, according to U.S. officials. The daily reported the effort could end up doubling the capacity of an intelligence fusion center in Ankara.

A high-level Turkish delegation visited Washington in early May ahead of Erdoğan's talks, with adviser Ibrahim Kalın, National Intelligence Organization (MIT) head Hakan Fidan, Chief of General Staff Gen. Hulusi Akar and Justice Minister Bekir Bozdağ all preparing the groundwork.

"They presented lot of documents to help clear the U.S. stance on YPG. Now we will have the final meeting, and then we will make our final decision. If we are strategic partners, we should make decisions in an alliance. If the alliance will be overshadowed, then we will have to take care of ourselves," Erdoğan told reporters.

Turkey has demanded that Washington sever its cooperation with the YPG and extradite Fethullah Gülen, the self-exiled Islamic cleric who resides in Pennsylvania and whom the Turkish government accuses of masterminding the failed coup attempt of July 2016.

Bozdağ presented new evidence supporting the accusation that Gülen was involved in the attempted takeover as the process between Turkish and U.S. judicial authorities continues in terms of procedure.

On July 19, 2016, Ankara sent four dossiers to support its demand for Gülen's extradition at Washington's request and demanded his temporary arrest in September 2016, but Turkish politicians have reproached the U.S. over its apparent reluctance to process Turkey's request.

Erdoğan is also likely to request the release of Reza Zarrab, a Turkish-Iranian businessman, and Mehmet Hakan Atilla, a deputy general manager of the Turkish state-owned Halk Bank, who are both on trial in the U.S. for violating sanctions against Iran. Zarrab was at the center of a massive graft scandal in 2013 that included senior government figures.

Turkey and US to ‘fight terror’ together despite rift over YPG

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Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his U.S. counterpart Donald Trump gave strong messages of cooperation against terrorism at a crucial meeting at the White House, despite continued discord over their respective stances against the YPG, a Syrian Kurdish group that Turkey views as a terrorist organization.

The U.S. will “support any effort to reduce violence in Syria and create a peaceful resolution,” Trump told reporters alongside Erdoğan after the meeting, which he said was productive.

He said his country “offers support to the Turkish nation in its fight against [the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant] ISIL and the [outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party] PKK.” Erdoğan raised the YPG issue, saying that using YPG militants in the region goes against agreements and “will never be accepted.”

He added that “Turkey will work with the U.S. to fight all terrorist groups in region.” Erdoğan said he “hopes and prays” for future consultation and cooperation in laying a “new foundation” for the Turkey-U.S. relationship under Trump.

The duo was scheduled to have lunch following the meeting before a press conference. For his part, Trump vowed that the U.S. will rapidly deliver military orders placed by Turkey. The two were meeting for the first time since Trump took office in January, amid lingering disagreement over Washington’s partnership with the YPG.

Trump authorized last week the direct arming of YPG fighters with heavy weapons, according to which the U.S. will deliver small arms, ammunition, machine guns, armored vehicles and engineering equipment to the YPG ahead of a push ISIL out of Raqqa. The shipments were prepositioned and could be delivered to the Kurdish militia “very quickly,” according to U.S. Col. John Dorrian, a spokesman for the U.S. military in Baghdad.

Ankara regards the YPG as an extension of the PKK. However, the United States sees the YPG as distinct from the PKK and as the most effective partner on the ground in the fight against ISIL. Erdoğan has blamed Trump’s decision to arm the YPG on officials left over from former President Barack Obama’s administration. The visit is also complicated by Turkey’s calls for the U.S. to take steps to extradite Pennsylvania- based Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen, believed to be behind the failed coup attempt of July 2016.

Turkey can help integrate Muslim Asia into China's Silk Road project

Hurriyet Daily News, 15.05.2017



If the 20th century was about the integration of China into the global economy; including Afghanistan and Pakistan, into the global economy is the major project for the 21st century, according to Güven Sak, the head of TEPAV. As the Silk Road is about connecting China to Europe via land routes, Turkey could play a role there in integrating the Muslim geography into the global economy, Sak told Hürriyet Daily News.

How do you think we should evaluate Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's recent visit to China participating in the Silk Road summit?

China-Turkey relations in the political front have started with the wrong root due to Chinese complaints about ethnic Uyghurs. But now, we are trying to change that into something more positive. In 2015, after Erdoğan visited China, he noted that the problems in Xinjiang were a domestic issue for China. The Chinese were also concerned about the Uyghurs going to participate in the war in Syria, and later returning to China. But Turkey is now trying to change this negative setting into a positive one, by collaborating in the One Road, One Belt initiative.

Can you elaborate?

The One Road, One Belt project is an idea that was first declared by President Xi in 2013. It is about the integration of Asia into the global economy. The Chinese are trying to create a land route between China and Europe, and this is setting two types of issues.

There are hardware issues related to international trade. Both China and Turkey are countries in which international trade is very important. The major hardware issue in creating connectivity between China and Europe through land roads and railway lines is that there are too many countries to pass through. So first, there is the need for land routes, the hardware of international trade.

The second issue is related to software. There is the need to define how border crossings are going to be managed; how regulations will have to change. There is a problem even in the case of traffic signs.

So when the issue is about changing the regulations of those countries at the same time, this then becomes a project that requires a lot of diplomacy. For the Chinese, Turkey is important because of the Turkic republics. When you look at how the Silk Road is functioning, there is now one route that is functioning, going out of Xinjiang and passing through Kazakhstan.



It then runs through to Russia, and then to Germany. But the Silk Road that we have known in the past is not composed only of one route, but many of them. The importance is to create as many routes as possible from China to Europe so that there is a kind of competition that can emerge along the way.

If you consider the Russian route as the northern route, Turkey has been discussing a lot about the middle corridor. But the middle corridor means more countries to pass through; mainly Turkic republics. From Kazakhstan, it needs to pass through the Caspian Sea, which is problematic. Then you come to Azerbaijan. From there the route toward Georgia is one possibility and the route toward Armenia is another.

That's why diplomacy is important, since there are so many frozen conflicts in the region that needs to be dealt with. It is not only about finding a solution to the hardware and software issues; there are also political problems on the route.

Turkish insistence on the middle corridor is one thing; but the middle corridor is not the only alternative either. It is also possible to pass through Pakistan, where there is already a project: the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor; it is possible to tie this corridor to Istanbul. So there is also a southern corridor that passes from Iran.

The major problem there is that it is not easy to divert the flow in the sea route to the land routes. The important thing is to provide a secure route to traders, but we have not managed to accomplish this. If you look at south and southwestern Asia, even from India to Pakistan, it is not possible to pass through with containers, not because of the absence of hardware, but because of political problems.

If you look at it as a whole; on the one side of Asia there is China, while on the other side there is Turkey. It is possible for these two countries to do something together to integrate this part of the world into the global economy.

It can be a positive agenda for China and Turkey to focus on. Up until now, our relation was standing on the wrong route. With the Syria conflict as well, the radicalization issue became of utmost importance. But after the attack on Reina (a nightclub on the Bosphorus), I believe there is a better understanding in moving forward in these issues. I think it is a turning point in our relations. Turkey has been doing its utmost to prove to the Chinese that it is doing the most it can when dealing with radical elements.

Apparently the Chinese have been putting the brakes on in terms of economic cooperation due to this problem.

A major issue when it comes to trade is that it is not easy for foreigners to do business with China. If you look at the extent of investment, for instance, there is, let's say four units of investment to European countries, one unit of investment is allowed by the Chinese. This is related to protective measures that the Chinese are taking, and this is an issue raised by Turkish companies as well. For Turkish companies, it is very hard to obtain a visa to do business in China, for instance. They say "we are only getting a visa for a week, but China is a vast country; it is not easy to complete our business in one week."



They would like to have longer visas, but they are not getting it. Although President Xi has been saying they are doing their utmost to prevent protectionism to uphold global trade, I think they are not doing their utmost. If you look at the Turkish numbers, China is number one in terms of our trade deficit.

But Turkey is expecting more investment from China as well, and again it is said to be political.

If you compare 2003 to 2012, there are more Chinese investments in Iran, Greece and in countries surrounding Turkey. So it is obvious that there is some kind of restrictive practice there. I am sure this is an issue on the agenda between Turkey and China. When you raise this issue, the Chinese start to talk about the terror element.

The Turkish side says they are doing their utmost, but that it is too difficult to convince the Chinese. Well, Turkish officials have been saying that Turkey is not like China; there are some rules and procedures. It is not that easy to take measures when it comes to these issues. There are independent courts, etc.

This is exactly what the Europeans have been telling Turkey.

Yes, we have been telling the Chinese the same story. But I think Turkey needs to do more regarding this issue. Radicalization in an Islamic context for China today is what Marxism used to be in the 1970's.

But it is possible to turn this into something of a positive element. If the 20th century was about the integration of China into the global economy; the integration of Asia and Central Asia particularly, including Afghanistan and Pakistan, into the global economy; it is the major project for the 21st century.

And if it is that; then Turkey could play a role there in integrating the Muslim geography into the global economy. It is possible for Turkey to play a positive role in terms of the Turkish example. The Turkish experience could be a source of inspiration because we, in TEPAV, just finished a study on Islam in Turkey regarding Salafi movements; as around 65 to 70 percent of Turks consider Islam and religion as an important issue. But when you look at radicalization, only around three percent are radical. The Turkish example can be a source of inspiration to all Muslims in the Muslim geography.

Many in the West are asking whether Turkey is looking for an alternative to the Western alliance.

Turkey is a country that is a part of the western alliance; there is no doubt about that. Since both the Russians and the Chinese do not have enough money to sustain Turkey. Turkey is a country with a current account deficit with a saving deficiency. It is not possible for Turkey to sustain its way of living outside the U.S. dollar market.

FM Çavuşoğlu: Germany is free to withdraw troops from İncirlik air base, Turkey will not beg

Reuters, 18.05.2017



Germany is free to withdraw its troops stationed at Turkey's İncirlik air base if it wants to, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said, adding Berlin should change its attitude towards Ankara.

In an interview with private broadcaster NTV, Çavuşoğlu said Ankara was not attempting to blackmail Berlin by preventing German lawmakers access to İncirlik, where some 250 German troops are stationed as part of the coalition against Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Turkish officials have told Reuters that such a visit by German lawmakers would not be appropriate at the moment.

Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen said the German government had been evaluating possible alternatives to İncirlik for some time and was considering moving the troops to Jordan. "If they want to leave, that is up to them," Çavuşoğlu said.

"We are not going to beg. They were the ones who wanted to come and we helped them. If they want to go, we would say 'Goodbye'," he said. Relations between NATO allies Germany and Turkey have deteriorated sharply after a series of diplomatic rows.

Most recently, Turkey has expressed anger that Germany is granting asylum to Turks accused of participating in the July 2016 failed coup attempt. German officials have said more than 400 Turkish citizens with diplomatic passports and other government work permits have sought asylum in Germany since the attempted takeover.

Çavuşoğlu said that Germany should change its attitude towards Turkey. "You can't treat Turkey as you wish anymore," he said. "If you want to get closer to Turkey, treat it like a friend, don't act like a boss."

Erdoğan: Turkey cannot be left out of Syria plans

Hurriyet Daily News, 17.05.2017



The United States will be beating a path to Turkey's door regarding upcoming moves in Syria, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said after a meeting with U.S. counterpart Donald Trump in Washington on May 16, noting that Turkey cannot be excluded from the Syrian table.

"Turkey cannot be excluded as a decision-maker," Erdoğan told journalists at the Turkish Embassy in Washington. "We are determined to carry bilateral relations to a further point and strengthening economic ties," Erdoğan also said following his nearly three-hour meeting and lunch with Trump.

"I believe that they will also knock on our door on the Syria issue," he said. Coalition forces have already surrounded Raqqa, the self-proclaimed capital of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Syria, the president noted.

"Let's see what will happen. But Turkey will be in the field in the region – both in Iraq and Syria," Erdoğan said. Turkey has repeatedly declared that it would like to take part in an operation on Raqqa, but it also strongly opposes any involvement by the People's Protection Units (YPG), which it views as a terrorist group.

The issue will be on the agenda at a NATO summit in Brussels on May 24 and 25, Erdoğan said. The anti-terrorism fight will also be on the agenda at the summit. Turkey has called on its NATO ally, the U.S., as well as Russia, to cut contact with the YPG due to its alleged links to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), but the two major world powers have declared that they will continue working with the group in Syria.

"The U.S. has already made up its mind on Raqqa. And this is what we tell them: We do not embrace such an attitude under the current circumstances; we absolutely cannot act with you. We think cooperating with a terror group for Raqqa is not healthy," Erdoğan said.

Turkey openly told the U.S. that it will retaliate against any possible attacks from the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) or its armed wing YPG within the rules of engagement, Erdoğan said, recalling that Turkey has already hit the group in Syria's al-Rai, Jarablus and al-Bab within the scope of the Euphrates Shield operation.

Erdoğan also questioned who would take over Raqqa once it is cleaned of ISIL, as the YPG has continued to hold Manbij, a smaller Syrian town taken from the jihadist group. "As Turkey we will do what is necessary in the struggle against terrorism within the field of our responsibility.

We will not let terror groups breathe within or outside our borders. We will not permit a belt [of terrorism],” he said. The extradition of Fethullah Gülen, a U.S.-based preacher accused by Ankara of masterminding the July 15, 2016, coup attempt, was also discussed at the meeting, Erdoğan said. Trump’s approach to the issue is different than his predecessor, Barack Obama, and some questions have been raised in his head on the matter, he said.

The two sides have agreed that the related ministries will remain in contact on the issue as well as that of Andrew Brunson, a pastor jailed in Turkey, according to the Turkish president. “We told them that this person was arrested for links to the [Fethullahist Terrorist Organization] FETÖ,” he said.

Turkey has demanded that the U.S. establish an FBI investigation committee for FETÖ, Erdoğan said, noting that the U.S. had noted the demand. Responding to a question on his impressions on Trump after a first meet, Erdoğan said his counterpart looked like a “practical” person as he does not come from diplomatic but business life. “I saw him as a determined person. As far as I can see, he is a direct person who does not hesitate to say what he thinks,” he said.

Turkey-Russia-Iran meet in Ankara for ‘de-escalation zones’ in Syria

Hurriyet Daily News, 18.05.2017



Delegations from Turkey, Russia and Iran met in Ankara on May 18 for discussions to declare “de-escalation zones” in rebel-held areas of Syria, another round of talks will be held in Iran on May 21, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu has stated.

“There are recommendations about which soldiers should be deployed in de-escalation zones. The countries can give troops under the supervision of the U.N. We want it to be under the supervision of an institution. But there are no concrete steps yet and no decision has been taken yet.

Nobody will hesitate if it is under the U.N. roof,” Çavuşoğlu said during a televised interview on May 18. A U.N. resolution is necessary for imposing sanctions on parties violating the ceasefire in Syria but there has yet to be any action in line with that, he added. Ankara has urged Washington to focus on finding a political solution in Syria as much as it works on defeating the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Russia, Turkey and Iran agreed in a memorandum signed on May 4 to establish four separate de-escalation zones in Syria for at least six months. The largest de-escalation zone includes Idlib province and the adjoining districts of Hama, Aleppo and Latakia provinces. Russia, Turkey and Iran will form a joint working group on de-escalation zones in Syria within two weeks, in order to delineate the lines of the de-escalation areas and security zones, as well as to resolve other operational and technical issues related to the implementation of the deal, according to a memorandum signed by the countries.

The guarantors will finalize the maps of the de-escalation zones by June 4. According to the accord, checkpoints will ensure the safe flow of humanitarian aid and provide secure passage for civilians. Observation points will also monitor the cease-fire in the region.

Turkey was offered to establish a cease-fire observation mission in the opposition-held Syrian province of Idlib during a meeting last month in Astana, Deputy Prime Minister Veysi Kaynak told the Hürriyet Daily News on May 12.

Theresa May accused of refusing to accept Brexit has caused pound and living standards to fall

Independent, 17.05.2017



Theresa May has been accused of refusing to accept that Brexit has caused a fall in the value of the pound and a squeeze in living standards.

It came as the Office for National Statistics said inflation hit its highest level in nearly four years in April at 2.7 per cent, as sterling's weakness, electricity price hikes and rising air fare bumped up the cost of living. Inflation is now expected to rise as high as 3 per cent later in 2017. In her first joint appearance with Philip Hammond, the Chancellor, the Prime Minister outlined the "economic blackhole" in Labour's manifesto which was released on Tuesday.

But during the press conference in Canary Wharf the Prime Minister also cast aside assertions that Brexit is to blame for the rising cost of living standards in Britain and the slide in the value of the pound since the referendum last June. "If you look at what happened to sterling, sterling had started to fall back before the referendum came through," Ms May said. "So there have been adjustments to sterling. It isn't just that sterling has gone down. We've seen currencies move around as currencies do.

"I didn't say Brexit was responsible for the troubles that he had," she added. "I did say we had seen an impact on inflation from changes to currency over the last few months and that as everybody knows we're going into a negotiation on Brexit in the next few years."

Tom Brake, the Liberal Democrat's foreign affairs spokesperson, however, said the Prime Minister's refusal to accept the economic impact of Brexit "could have come straight out of Nigel Farage's mouth". He added: "The falling pound is already hitting wages and pushing up prices, but Theresa May doesn't care. On top of that she is refusing to back her own Chancellor, one of the only Cabinet ministers left who accepts the economic risk posed by Brexit. "People don't have to accept an extreme version of Brexit that will permanently damage living standards.

We will give you your say on the Brexit deal in a referendum, with the choice to remain in Europe if you don't like the deal on offer." Chris Leslie, a former shadow minister and supporter of the Open Britain campaign group, said it is "absolutely clear" the Government's "hard Brexit" is making working people worse off. He added: "As wages shrink, prices are surging as the collapse in the value of the pound has pushed up the price of imported food, clothes and fuel.

Campbell Robb, the chief executive of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, said while it is encouraging employment has reached a record high "even people in work are facing a tough time to make ends meet as a living standards squeeze takes hold".

He continued: "It is encouraging that employment continues to rise and has reached another record high. But even people who are in work are facing a tough time to make ends meet as a living standards squeeze takes hold. "Inflation has crept higher, pay has fallen for the first time since 2014 and working-age benefits are frozen, meaning people on low incomes will feel the squeeze in their pockets. "The challenge now for the next government is to build on record employment so work provides a route to economic security.

Macron wins Merkel backing to shake up EU Europe

Hurriyet Daily News, 17.05.2017



France's new President Emmanuel Macron secured backing on May 15 from key ally Chancellor Angela Merkel for his bid to shake up Europe, despite skepticism in Berlin over his proposed reforms.

Travelling to the German capital to meet the veteran leader in his first official trip abroad, President Emmanuel Macron used the opportunity to call for a "historic reconstruction" of Europe. During his campaign, Macron had thrown up ideas on reforming the eurozone, noting that the currency bloc cannot go on as it is if it wanted to avoid falling prey to protest and populism.

Among reforms he wants to see are setting up a separate budget for the 28-member group, as well as giving it its own parliament and finance minister. But the proposals have sent alarm bells ringing in Berlin, and initial relief about his victory against far-right leader Marine Le Pen had quickly given way to fears about his reform plans.

Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble warned that such deep-reaching reforms would require treaty changes, which were "not realistic" at a time when Europe is hit by a surge of anti-euro populism. May 13's edition of weekly news magazine Der Spiegel featured a cover picture of Macron with the headline "expensive friend." But at a joint press conference following their talks, Merkel adopted a conciliatory tone and offered what appeared to be a key concession.

“From the German point of view, it’s possible to change the treaty if it makes sense,” she said. “If we can say why, what for, what the point is, then Germany will be ready.” Germany and France are the eurozone’s two biggest economies.

Merkel’s approach underlined her view that it was crucial not only for France, but for Germany, to help Macron succeed -- a point that she has repeatedly stressed. Yet it remains to be seen if her approach would go down well in Germany, which is deeply adverse to shouldering burdens of eurozone laggards.

Macron sought to bat away German fears on debt, saying he was opposed to mutualizing “old debt” between eurozone countries. However, he signaled readiness to look at sharing future burdens. “I am not a promoter of the mutualization of old debt” within the eurozone, said Macron after meeting Merkel, adding however that the joint financing of future projects should be considered.

Underlining the concerns over Macron’s proposals, Germany’s biggest selling daily Bild warned ahead of the French leader’s meeting with Merkel that before seeking deeper EU integration, “France must once again be at the same level as Germany politically and economically.”

“Only then can the EU be reformed or develop deeper integration,” it said. Any reforms would likely still have to be held off until after September, when Merkel faces reelection. “Her room for maneuver is very limited -- with her migration policy she has used up a lot of political capital in her own party,” said a German minister speaking on condition of anonymity, referring to her liberal immigration policy that let more than a million asylum seekers into Germany since 2015. “On the other hand, Macron’s style suits the chancellor. She likes substance, she likes people who are hands on and she knows he won’t take her for a ride,” said the minister.

Trump keeps the Iran deal alive, for now

Foreign Policy, 10.05.2017



The Trump administration said it will renew sanctions relief for Iran promised under a 2015 nuclear deal but also announced new punitive measures against Iranian officials over the country’s ballistic missile program.

The moves indicated while President Trump was not ready to openly jettison the agreement with Iran, he was keen to display a tougher line over Tehran’s actions. “They want to send a signal that is: ‘don’t count on us sticking to the deal, don’t think everything is OK,’” said Trita Parsi, president of the National Iranian American Council and a strong supporter of the agreement negotiated between Iran and world powers.



The administration's announcement came before Iran holds a presidential election on Friday, and it's unclear if Trump's strident rhetoric — and the fate of the nuclear deal — will shape the outcome. The current president, Hassan Rouhani, a relative moderate who pushed for the 2015 nuclear deal, is considered the slight favorite over Ebrahim Raisi, a former prosecutor who is closely tied to the country's ruling hardline clerics.

Raisi has sought to portray the nuclear deal as an empty promise perpetrated by Iran's adversaries, calling it "a check the government has been unable to cash." Trump, who is due to visit the Middle East next week, vowed to "tear up" the nuclear deal as a candidate but since taking office in January, the administration has upheld the agreement while reviewing U.S. policy and announcing a series of narrow sanctions that fall outside the accord.

The nuclear agreement eased crippling economic sanctions on Iran in return for imposing strict limits on its nuclear program. Critics in Iran have complained that the deal has not produced sufficient economic benefits, and critics in the United States say it rewarded Iran without long-term guarantees to prevent Tehran from securing nuclear weapons.

The United States will continue to "waive sanctions as required to continue implementing U.S. sanctions-lifting commitments" under the nuclear deal, the State Department said in a statement. Trump administration officials say the White House is carrying out a comprehensive review of U.S. policy on Iran, which is focused on what officials consider Tehran's expanding influence in the region.

Washington has labeled Iran as a "state sponsor of terrorism" and accuses it of sowing instability in the region through its backing of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime, Hezbollah militia in Lebanon and Houthi rebels in Yemen's civil war.

The administration's policy review "does not diminish the United States' resolve to continue countering Iran's destabilizing activity in the region, whether it be supporting the Assad regime, backing terrorist organizations like Hezbollah, or supporting violent militias that undermine governments in Iraq and Yemen," the State Department statement said. While extending sanctions relief for Iran under the nuclear deal, the Treasury Department separately announced it had imposed sanctions on two Iranian defense officials, an Iranian company, a Chinese national and three Chinese companies for supporting Iran's ballistic missile program.

Some experts and congressional staffers dismissed the latest sanctions as largely cosmetic measures that would not have any concrete impact on the country's economy. "These are symbolic actions that don't really change anything," one Democratic congressional aide told FP. But some supporters of a more aggressive approach to Iran praised the measures unveiled Wednesday, arguing that the United States needed more time to gain leverage over Iran before it addressed the shortcomings of the nuclear deal.

"Call it the waive-and-slap approach," Mark Dubowitz and David Albright wrote in a commentary in the Wall Street Journal. Both Dubowitz, president of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, and Albright, a physicist with the Institute for Science and International Security, have heavily criticized the nuclear agreement.



"It's a clear message to foreign banks and companies looking to do business with Iran: You will be taking significant risks if you deal with a country still covered by a web of expanding nonnuclear sanctions," they wrote.



Announcements & Reports

Central Asia at 25

Source : Bruegel
Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2017/05/central-asia-at-25/>

Maintaining Arctic Cooperation with Russia

Source : Rand
Weblink : http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1731.html

The unprecedented expansion of the global middle class

Source : Brookings
Weblink : <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-unprecedented-expansion-of-the-global-middle-class-2/>

Upcoming Events

Competitive Gains in the Economic and Monetary Union

Date : 25 May 2017
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/534-competitive-gains-in-the-economic-and-monetary-union/>

The Future of Capitalist Democracy: UK-Japan Perspectives

Date : 25 May 2017
Place : London - UK
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/event/future-capitalist-democracy-uk-japan-perspectives>

13th Asia Europe Economic Forum (AEEF)

Date : 26 May 2017
Place : Beijing - China
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/13th-asia-europe-economic-forum/>

Emerging Markets and Europe: Time for Different Relationships?

Date : 27 May 2017
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/524-emerging-markets-and-europe-time-for-different-relationships/>



What future for Europe's Social Models?

Date : 27 May 2017
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/526-what-future-for-europes-social-models/>

Challenges for Growth in Europe

Date : 27 May 2017
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/521-challenges-for-growth-in-europe/>

Global Governance of Public Goods: Asian and European Perspectives

Date : 28 May 2017
Place : Paris - France
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/529-global-governance-of-public-goods-asian-and-european-perspectives/>

The Future of the Welfare State

Date : 28 May 2017
Place : Berlin - Germany
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/541-the-future-of-the-welfare-state/>

Vision Europe Summit 2016

Date : 28 May 2017
Place : Lisbon - Portugal
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/vision-europe-summit-2016/>