

US ends sanction waivers for nations in Iran nuclear deal

Wed, 2020-05-27 20:57

WASHINGTON: The Trump administration announced Wednesday it is ending nearly all of the last vestiges of US sanctions relief provided under the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said he would revoke all but one of sanctions waivers covering civil nuclear cooperation. The waivers had allowed Russian, European and Chinese companies to continue to work on Iran's civilian nuclear facilities without drawing American penalties.

"The Iranian regime has continued its nuclear brinkmanship by expanding proliferation sensitive activities," Pompeo said in a statement that pointed out that Iran has admitted to activities that are in violation of the deal. He accused Iran of "nuclear extortion" and said it "will lead to increased pressure on Iran and further isolate the regime from the international community."

Pompeo also imposed sanctions on two officials with Iran's atomic energy organization who are involved in the development and production of centrifuges used to enrich uranium.

The nuclear cooperation waivers were last renewed in late March and were due to expire at the end of the month. The revocations will give foreign companies 60 days to wind down their operations.

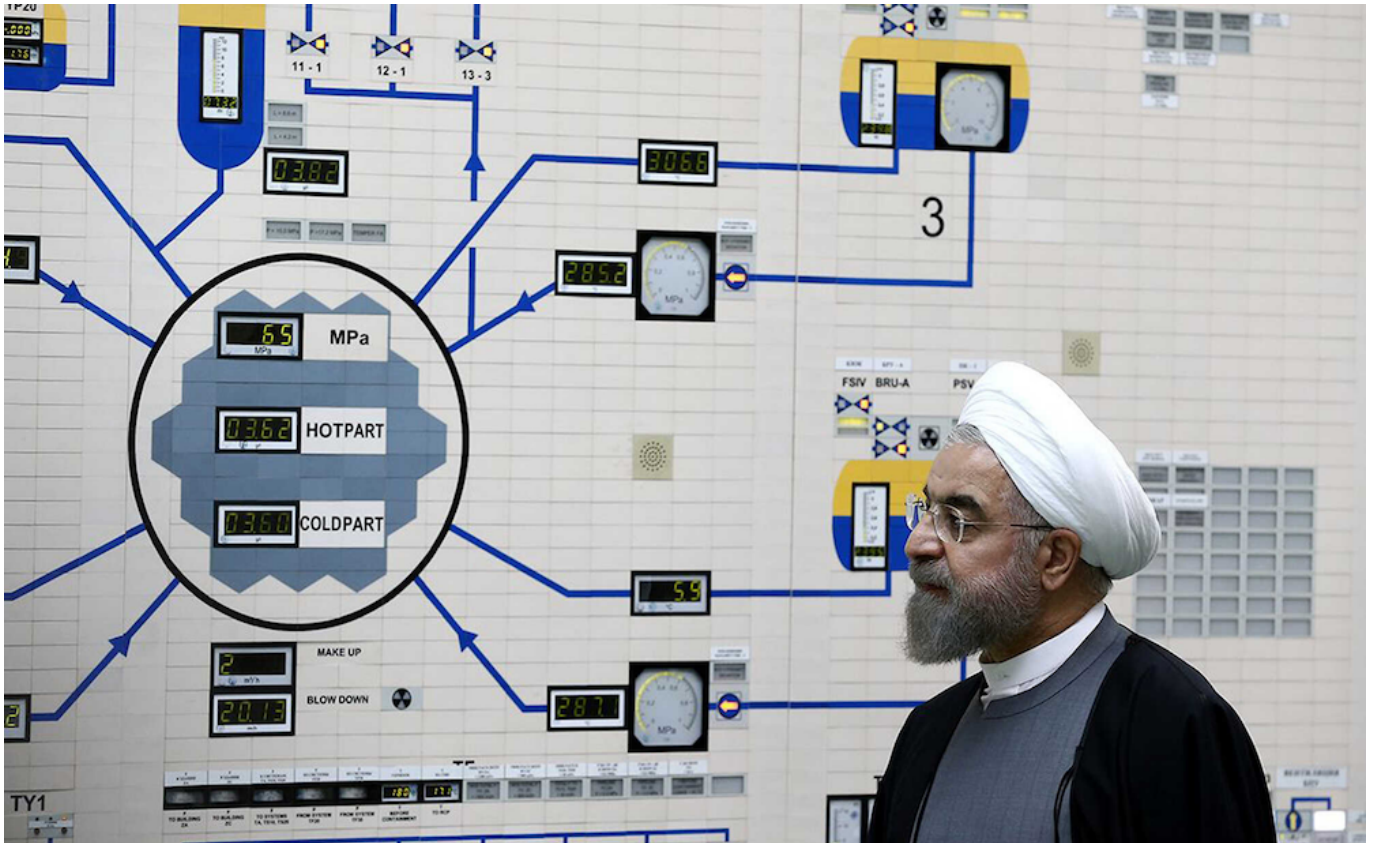
Pompeo in March had opposed extending the waivers, which are among the few remaining components of the nuclear deal that the administration has not canceled. But officials said Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin had prevailed in an internal debate by arguing the coronavirus pandemic made eliminating the waivers unpalatable at a time when the administration is being criticized for refusing to ease sanctions to deal with the outbreak.

President Donald Trump withdrew from the nuclear deal in 2018 and has steadily reimposed US sanctions on Iran that had been eased or lifted under its terms. The "civilian-nuclear cooperation" waivers allow foreign companies to do work at some of Iran's declared nuclear sites without becoming subject to US sanctions.

Deal supporters say the waivers give international experts a valuable window into Iran's atomic program that might otherwise not exist. They also say some of the work, particularly at the Tehran reactor on nuclear isotopes that can be used in medicine, is humanitarian in nature.

But Iran critics in Congress have pressed Pompeo to eliminate all the waivers, saying they should be revoked because they give Iran access to technology that could be used for weapons. These critics strenuously objected to the waiver that allowed work at Iran's once-secret Fordow facility, which is built into a mountain.

Pompeo canceled that waiver in mid-December but the others, which permit work at the Bushehr nuclear power station, the Arak heavy water plant and the Tehran Research Reactor, had been kept in place until now. The waiver for work at Bushehr will be the only one extended. Pompeo said the waiver for work at Bushehr, which predated the Iran deal, would be extended for 90 days.



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[Amnesty slams Qatar tracing app for exposing data of a million users](#)

Tue, 2020-05-26 20:52

DOHA: A security flaw in Qatar's controversial mandatory coronavirus contact tracing app exposed sensitive information of more than one million users, rights group Amnesty International warned Tuesday.

The glitch, which was fixed on Friday after being flagged by Amnesty a day earlier, made users' ID numbers, location and infection status vulnerable to hackers.

Privacy concerns over the app, which became mandatory for residents and citizens on pain of prison from Friday, had already prompted a rare backlash and forced officials to offer reassurance and concessions.

Users and experts had criticized the array of permissions required to install the app including access to files on Android devices, as well as allowing the software to make unprompted phone calls.

Despite insisting the unprecedented access was necessary for the system to work, officials said they would address privacy concerns and issued reworked software over the weekend.

“Amnesty International’s Security Lab was able to access sensitive information, including people’s name, health status and the GPS coordinates of a user’s designated confinement location, as the central server did not have security measures in place to protect this data,” the rights group said in a statement.

“While Amnesty International recognizes the efforts and actions taken by the government of Qatar to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures introduced to date, such as access to free health care, all measures must be in line with human rights standards.”

More than 47,000 of Qatar’s 2.75 million people have tested positive for the respiratory disease – 1.7 percent of the population – and 28 people have died.

Like other countries, Qatar has turned to mobiles to trace people’s movements and track who they come into contact with, allowing officials to monitor coronavirus infections and flag possible contagion.

“The Ehteraz app’s user privacy and platform security are of the utmost importance,” Qatar’s health ministry said in a statement on Tuesday.

“A comprehensive update of the app was rolled out on Sunday May 24 with expanded security and privacy features for all users.”

But Etheraz, which means “Precaution,” continues to allow real-time location tracking of users by authorities at any time, Amnesty said.

“It was a huge security weakness and a fundamental flaw in Qatar’s contact tracing app that malicious attackers could have easily exploited,” said Claudio Guarnieri, head of the group’s security lab.

“The Qatari authorities must reverse the decision to make use of the app mandatory,” he said.



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Qatar World Cup organizers fear coronavirus impact on 2022 football tournament

[US Military: Russia has deployed military aircraft to Libya](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-05-26 18:01

LONDON: The US military said Tuesday that Russia has recently deployed military fighter aircraft to Libya.

The jets are likely to be providing air support for the Wagner Group, a Russian private military contractor operating in Libya, the US Africa Command said.

The statement also said Moscow has employed the state-sponsored contractor in Libya to conceal its direct role and to afford Moscow "plausible deniability"

of its actions.

US Army General Stephen Townsend, commander of the US' Africa mission, said: "Just like I saw (Russia) doing in Syria, they are expanding their military footprint in Africa using government-supported mercenary groups like Wagner."

The statement warned that Russian presence in Libya could "exacerbate the regional instability that has driven the migration crisis affecting Europe."

Libya has been gripped by chaos since longtime dictator Muammar Qaddafi was ousted and killed in 2011, with rival administrations in the east and west vying for power.

In April, the UN-recognised Government of National Accord rejected a truce unilaterally proposed by the eastern-based Libyan National Army (LNA), saying it "did not trust" them.

The LNA is led by the commander Khalifa Haftar, who launched an offensive to capture the capital Tripoli last year.

His forces have suffered a series of setbacks in recent months as Turkey stepped up support for for the Government of National Accord and the militias that support it.



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[Jordan's civil servants return to work after two months break](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Tue, 2020-05-26 11:30

AMMAN: Jordan's public sector employees began a phased return to work on Tuesday, more than two months after they were told to stay at home under a coronavirus lockdown, officials said.

Most of the country's 250,000 civil servants had not been working in their offices since a state of emergency was declared in mid-March.

Sameh al Nasser, the head of the civil service commission, said that about 60% of civil servants were expected to show up for work under a gradual plan involving social distancing.

Schools, universities and border crossings were closed and international flights were halted under the lockdown, but tens of thousands of state employees in the medical services, civil defense, customs, security forces and army continued working to maintain essential services.

The government said at the end of last month it had contained the coronavirus outbreak, and many restrictions have of the lockdown restrictions have been lifted, with most businesses and industries now open again.

Jordan has reported 711 confirmed coronavirus cases, with nine deaths. Some medical officials have warned there could be a new rise in infections after the easing of the restrictions.



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[UAE reports 779 new coronavirus cases, additional recoveries and deaths](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-05-26 12:59

DUBAI: The UAE's Ministry of Health and Prevention has confirmed 779 new coronavirus cases, state news agency WAM reported on Tuesday. The new cases were detected after conducting over 28,000 new tests, increasing the total number of infected people in the country to 31,086. The authority has also reported five more fatalities, bringing the death toll to 253. There were also 325 further recoveries, bumping the total number of patients to recover to 15,982.

Meanwhile the Emirate of Dubai – which has a massive expat population and is popular with tourists – has announced an additional [easing](#) of coronavirus regulations to start on Wednesday, such as reopening of gyms, cinemas and entertainment attractions.

The resumption of businesses will be governed by new rules to curb the spread of coronavirus, where in opening hours will be limited between 6 a.m. and 11 p.m., continuation of sterilization efforts and maintaining a two-meter distance between customers.



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