

Iran on notice after Paris bomb plot



French President Emmanuel Macron. Picture: AFP

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The US has warned Iran over its “outrageous behaviour” after France slapped sanctions on Tehran in response to a Paris bomb plot. State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said the uncovering of the terrorist plan reinforced that Iran was “the world’s top sponsor of terrorism”.

“France taking strong action against failed Iranian terrorist plot in Paris — Tehran needs to know this outrageous behaviour will not be tolerated”, the White House’s National Security Council tweeted.

France announced it was freezing assets of two suspected Iranian intelligence operatives over the alleged plot to bomb a rally in Paris three months ago. Paris said it was responding to an attempt on June 30 to strike a conference of the National Council of Resistance of Iran, which is based in the city and styles itself as Iran’s government-in-exile.

US President Donald Trump’s lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, was a keynote speaker at the event at Villepinte, near Charles de Gaulle Airport. About 25,000 people attended.

Iran immediately denied any involvement.

“This extremely serious act envisaged on our territory could not go without a response,” France’s Interior, Foreign and Economy ministers said in a joint statement. “In taking this decision, France underlines its determination to fight against terrorism in all its forms, particularly on its territory.”

Iran’s Intelligence Ministry, which is controlled by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, ordered the attack, French diplomats said. Paris believes the bombing was hatched by hardline opponents of President Hassan Rouhani within the state apparatus as a means of undermining his government.

“Behind all this was a long, meticulous and detailed investigation by our services that enabled us to reach the conclusion, without any doubt, that responsibility fell on the Intelligence Ministry,” a diplomat said.

Israel’s intelligence service Mossad was also involved in thwarting the attack, according to reports.

The French decision to apportion blame comes as tension between Tehran and Paris grows, despite Iran’s reliance on France to help maintain commercial ties with the West after Mr Trump’s reimposition of sanctions. Assadollah Assadi, an Iranian diplomat based in Vienna, is suspected of organising the plot, which was thwarted when Belgian police arrested two other Iranians in a car allegedly carrying 500gm of explosives and on their way to attack the meeting.

They are being held in Antwerp on terrorist charges. Mr Assadi, who is alleged to have handed the couple the bomb, was arrested in Germany and is due to be extradited to Belgium. His assets were frozen, along with those of Saeid Hashemi Moghadam, another alleged member of the Iranian intelligence services, as well as other French-based assets of the services.

The incident comes after Mr Trump pulled out of an international agreement on curbing Iran’s nuclear program, defying allies including France, which say the deal is working. The Trump administration has vowed to curtail Iranian influence and criticised the Europeans for seeking to evade impending US sanctions on transactions with Iran. The US considers Iran to be the world’s biggest state sponsor of terrorism because of its links with a host of armed groups, particularly the Hezbollah militia in Lebanon and Hamas in the Palestinian territories, as well as other networks in Iraq and Yemen.

The sanctions come as French President Emmanuel Macron and Mr Rouhani are at odds over a host of issues.

Mr Macron, who hoped to improve ties with Tehran at the start of his presidency last year, has allied with Iran over the 2015 nuclear deal that limits the Islamic Republic's atomic program. But he is at loggerheads with Mr Rouhani over the wars in Syria and Yemen, in which Iran is a major player, and has raised concerns about the country's ballistic missile program.

Iran has been blamed in the past for carrying out attacks in countries as far afield as Argentina, India and Thailand.

The Times, AFP