

# Fallout of triggering snapback mechanism

## INTERVIEW

Europe's approach to the Iran-US nuclear talks, the Islamic Republic's nuclear dossier, the Ukraine war, and its relationship with the US has been shaped by Europe's self-imposed isolation. The continent — especially Germany, the UK, and France — has opted to tear down rather than talk through this isolation. To dig into the consequences, causes, and how Europe might break out of this isolation, Morteza Makki, an expert on European affairs, gave the following interview.

It seems Europe is very worried about being sidelined in the nuclear talks with Iran and has chosen to break out of this isolation by threatening Iran with the snapback mechanism. Could this choice serve Europe's interests?

**MAKKI:** Europe's discontent over being left out of the Iran-US nuclear talks is real. Over the past 20 years, Iran-Europe relations have gone through various mediations, culminating in the P5+1 group, where Europe tried to play a pivotal role in reaching a nuclear agreement with Iran. But Europe's frustration goes beyond just being sidelined. To get to the bottom of this dissatisfaction, one must look back three years to the Ukraine war, which led Europe to paint Iran as siding with Russia against Ukraine and itself. From Europe's perspective, any country backing Russia's attack is a security threat.

On the other hand, the events of the summer and autumn of 2022 also added to tensions between Iran and Europe. Unlike previous talks — whether nuclear negotiations or discussions on human rights and terrorism — these issues never escalated to security challenges. Now, Iran is viewed as a security threat by Europe. That's why Europeans have held back from serious talks or setting up regular, agenda-driven dialogues to ease tensions over the past four to five months.

Given this, Europe is trying to use the tools at its disposal to counter Iran. The snapback mechanism is one such tool for clamping down on Iran. Europeans believe that threatening to pull the trigger on snapback will force Iran to back off from its nuclear activities and other issues without offering any concessions.

The Iran-Europe relationship runs far deeper than mere participation in nuclear talks. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi recently stated on Iranian TV that Europe is not a priority in Iran's foreign policy. Several rounds of talks may have shown that Europe's intent is to call the shots from a position of strength. While Iran remains open to dialogue, recent talks show Europe won't solve any of Iran's foreign policy problems or relieve sanctions.

If, however, Iran and the US reach an agreement, Europe is unlikely to go ahead with snapback because most sanctions are American. If the US lifts them post-agreement, Europe loses leverage over Iran. Still, the snapback mechanism hangs over Iran-US talks like a shadow. It seems Iran has now reached a crossroads in deciding its future with Europe.

If Europeans want to follow through on snapback threats, they must start preparing reports on Iran's non-cooperation under the JCPOA and UN Reso-



French President Emmanuel Macron (2nd-L), UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer (2nd-R), German Chancellor Friedrich Merz (R), and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy speak to US President Donald Trump by phone, in Tirana, Albania, on May 16, 2025.

● STEFFEN KUGLER/BUNDESREGIERUNG

lution 2231 from June 2025, get the IAEA's approval, and bring it to the Joint Commission. This process will take about two months, leading up to October 2025, when Resolution 2231 expires. This will be a make-or-break month in Iran-Europe relations, and all eyes will be on how Iran-US talks pan out.

**In the coming weeks, the IAEA director general is expected to present a comprehensive report on Iran's nuclear activities. How might European pressure influence this report?** Grossi must report back to the Board of Governors on Iran's nuclear program and disputes. This report will be decisive. Grossi is certainly keeping tabs on Iran-US talks, and a positive outcome will be reflected in his report. If talks fail and parties walk away without an agreement, Grossi's report will likely mirror that fall-

out, pushing the US and Europe closer to pulling the snapback trigger.

The current situation is very sensitive and worrying. Europeans may try to throw a wrench in the US dialogue process. However, Europe itself is vulnerable to snapback's consequences. If Europe pushes ahead with snapback, Iran's countermeasures will be unpredictable. Though costly for Iran, the fallout won't stay within Iran's borders. Considering Arab countries' concerns about escalating Iran-West tensions, Europe must weigh up these repercussions carefully in its decision-making.

**Among the European troika, France seems to be the most vocal against Iran, raising various accusations. Has Paris returned to its "bad cop" role from the JCPOA era?**

Iran-France relations have been

fraught for 40 years. Despite hosting revolutionary leaders briefly before Iran's Islamic Revolution, France became a refuge for anti-Iran groups, providing political and other support to undermine Iran. These facts cannot be swept under the rug when examining bilateral ties. During JCPOA talks, then-French foreign minister Laurent Fabius tried to throw a spanner in the works under the influence of powerful pro-Israel lobbies deeply embedded in French politics and economy. France continues this stance in recent talks, exemplified by the foreign minister's hostile remarks and legal actions related to French spies imprisoned in Iran. This signals France's serious agenda against Iran and its likely role as Europe's "bad cop". Despite France's prominent role, it should be remembered that Europe is more than just France.

## Morteza Makki

Germany takes a more cautious approach, and the UK quietly pursues its goals, recently designating the IRGC as a terrorist group.

We are in a tense phase with Europe and must pull out all the stops diplomatically to ease tensions. Although recent European moves and Iran's foreign minister's statements suggest no major shift in EU stance is expected in the next four months, public diplomacy can help smooth over tensions.

**Europe is currently being sidelined in the Iran nuclear dossier, and this is mirrored in other cases like the Ukraine war. Moreover, the continent no longer holds onto its former stature in the Middle East. How did Europe end up here, and how can it break out of this predicament?**

Europe has always tried to leverage its normative power



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International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi (C) visits an exhibition of Iran's nuclear achievements, in Tehran, Iran, on April 17, 2025.

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