

E3 looks to US in talks with Iran: **Former envoy**

No demands 'beyond JCPOA' can be made by Europe



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INTERVIEW

Nearly a month has passed since the imposed 12-day war ended, and Europe's troika has threatened to invoke the "snapback mechanism". It resulted in the most recent round of talks between Iran and the three European powers (Germany, France, and the UK) in Istanbul on July 25, 2024, with deputy foreign ministers attending.

The European troika announced that it stands ready to activate the snapback, but it offered Iran the option to extend the mechanism if Tehran meets certain conditions. The foreign ministries of the UK and Germany issued a joint statement on X (formerly Twitter), announcing: "The E3 is willing to reactivate the 'snapback'; However, we offered an extension if Iran complies with its legal obligations and specific criteria."

Previously, media outlets reported the European troika planned to call off sanctions temporarily if Iran agrees to resume talks with the US. According to the Financial Times, should Iran resumes negotiations with the US and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), these countries would draft a proposal to delay a looming UN deadline to reimpose international sanctions. The delay may end up taking months, but it is dependent on a Security Council resolution.

Israel's attacks on Iran's nuclear sites and targeted killings of scientists and commanders, backed by the US and Western allies during ongoing US-Iran talks, constitute a blatant breach of IAEA regulations, the UN charter, and the Geneva Conventions. Western powers, however, chose to stay mum on this issue and instead piled up on Iran, the victim of these illegal aggressions.

Iran Daily sat down with Ali Majedi, a seasoned diplomat and former Iranian ambassador to Germany, to delve into the rationale and objectives behind these talks.



Ali Majedi



US President Donald Trump's unilateral actions and sanctions have cast a large shadow over the world.

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Currently, what is really pressuring Iran is the secondary US sanctions, which are as impactful as all UN and European sanctions combined. Under such sanctions, the activation of the snapback mechanism is less game-changing than the security narrative attached to it, which can be used to paint Iran as a threat to international security.

IRAN DAILY: Iran-Europe negotiations have resumed as of late. How do you see these talks playing out?

MAJEDI: Those who put stock in diplomacy and political solutions always welcome negotiations. Of course, every negotiation has two possible outcomes: agreement or no agreement. So, if the talks come through with results, it's a positive development; But if they fall through without any conclusion, it's not necessarily a negative — it's what you might call harmless.

Another key point in negotiations is that when both sides lay out their positions, neither may fully buy into the other's stance. But once they sit down and hash things out, they may find common ground in some areas. Therefore, I fully stand by the principle of negotiation. Usually, each party comes to the table with its maximum demands, which is a smart approach. Yet, to hammer out a deal, both sides must give ground to some extent, or else no agreement will be reached. Of course, sometimes parties have other motives — for example, one side may enter talks merely to clear their name from accusations of being unwilling

to negotiate, while the other might be laying down plans of their own simultaneously. But if both are genuinely keen on reaching an agreement, the odds of striking a deal improve. Before entering talks, parties also draw red lines, which must be heeded when predicting the outcome. These are the general principles behind negotiations. Regarding the Iran-Europe talks, what stands out to me is that European eyes are fixed on the US, and these talks are tied hand and foot to potential future negotiations between Iran and America.

What are the Europeans' maximum demands in these negotiations, in your opinion?

As I noted, Europe's gaze is on the US. Because America has declared that Iran has no right to enrich uranium, the Europeans bring the same issue to the forefront. They may make an agreement contingent on Iran also striking a deal with the US. But we must see whether Europe's own position gives them room to push such demands: Since they are part of the JCPOA, they actually cannot ask Iran to give up enrichment altogether — making such a de-

mand out of line. If Europeans are part of that deal, they can't go beyond the scope of the agreement. Under the JCPOA, Iran is allowed to enrich uranium up to 3.67%. They could argue that Iran has exceeded that level, but our response could be that they failed to actually lift the sanctions as promised. We stuck to our commitments for nearly a year, but they did not uphold theirs.

Europe was supposed to keep the JCPOA afloat through INSTEX, the special financial instrument launched in January 2019 by Germany, France, and the UK to get around dollar-based sanctions and facilitate trade with Iran. But in the end, it didn't live up to expectations. Initially, Europe wanted to collaborate with Iran but never really had the staying power or serious resolve to follow through. The dominance of the dollar and international economic structures also played a role. Back then, I was Iran's ambassador in Germany, and then-French finance minister publicly admitted that they had underestimated how weak the euro was against the dollar. In any case, Europe couldn't keep the ball rolling after the US left the JCPOA. They

could have created some special framework to fulfill their commitments, like China did by founding a bank to facilitate financial exchanges with Iran. That's not the focus now, but the bottom line is that Europe currently can't lay down demands outside the JCPOA framework.

So, logically, Europe should lift sanctions under the JCPOA framework, and Iran should reduce enrichment as agreed?

If the JCPOA is the yardstick for negotiations between Iran and Europe, that's how it should go: We must scale back enriched uranium above 3.67% — if such stock remains — and in return, sanctions must be lifted. However, the secondary US sanctions weigh heavily on Europe, making European companies think twice before stepping out of line with Washington. So, like it or not, the US gets pulled into the picture. Currently, what is really pressuring Iran is the secondary US sanctions, which are as impactful as all UN and European sanctions combined. Under such sanctions, the activation of the snapback mechanism is less game-changing than the

security narrative attached to it, which can be used to paint Iran as a threat to international security.

From a legal standpoint, the question for Europe is: Since Iran's nuclear facilities were attacked and you Europeans not only failed to condemn these attacks but, in some ways, played along, do you even have the legitimacy to make demands on Iran? The harsh reality is that the world today runs on power and force rather than justice or reason. Humanity's conscience has long been shut down. We are witnessing genocide and atrocities in Gaza and Palestine, with the so-called defenders of human rights in the West and Europe remaining tight-lipped while innocent people are killed daily. Despite all this, I believe we must keep the lines open and continue to negotiate, trying to win the other side over because dialogue is one of our key tools. Both Iran and Europe must return to their JCPOA commitments. Meanwhile, we must simultaneously negotiate with the US because lifting sanctions under the JCPOA alone won't ease pressure if secondary American sanctions remain.