

'Conflicting status' of Iran's case at UNSC; role of China, Russia

Sanctions Committee cannot function without consensus: *Former diplomat*

INTERVIEW

As October 18 marks the expiration date of UN Security Council Resolution 2231, a new dispute has broken out between Iran and Western powers over the fate of Iran's nuclear file. While Tehran takes the official expiration date of this resolution as the removal of the Iranian nuclear issue from the Security Council's agenda, the three European countries and the United States, leaning on their own interpretation of the JCPOA, claim that UN sanctions have been automatically snapped back following the Council's vote to trigger the "snapback" mechanism. This dispute has also driven a wedge between the Council's permanent members — with China and Russia on one side, and France, the UK, and the US on the other. The disagreement has given rise to discussions on how resolutions should now be implemented, particularly regarding the formation of the sanctions committee and expert panel, and the role of Beijing and Moscow in this context.

To shed light on the future of this dispute and the role of China and Russia as permanent members of the Security Council, Kourosh Ahmadi, a former Iranian diplomat at the United Nations and an international affairs expert, gave an interview, the translation of which you can read below:

Kourosh Ahmadi



With Resolution 2231 having expired on October 18, and considering recent discussions within the Security Council by Iran, can we say that UN sanctions have now been fully reinstated against the country?

AHMADI: Resolution 2231, in paragraphs 8 and 9, clearly lays out the situation we are now facing. Paragraph 8 states that the resolution expires on October 18, meaning that the anti-Iran resolutions terminated under paragraph 7(a) will no longer be enforceable, and Iran's nuclear issue will be taken off the table at the Security Council. Paragraph 9, however, notes that if paragraph 12 is implemented and the six previous resolutions come back into force, paragraph 8 will not apply. The problem now is that Western states, along with some non-Western countries and the UN Secretariat, are talking up the implementation of paragraph 12 and writing off paragraph 8. But we — along with Russia and China — do not recognize the return of sanctions and stick to the view that paragraph 8 remains valid.

As a result, we are now caught in a contradictory situation that has come about following two recent votes at the Security Council, clouding the whole issue. Western parties claim that the six previous resolutions have been brought back, while Iran, Russia, and China reject that claim. The UN, unfortunately, weighed in on September 28 with a statement that effectively hinted at the return of those resolutions. However, politically and morally, the fact remains that the three European states — which failed to uphold their own commitments under the JCPOA — and the United States, which had already pulled out of the deal, were in no position to turn back the clock and push through six old resolutions against Iran.

From a legal standpoint, it remains to be seen how far the international community will fall in line with this view in practice. So far, there are indications that Western countries and some developing nations go along with the idea of reinstating the resolutions — as seen recently in a joint statement by the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council and the European Union, referring to the "return of resolutions against Iran". It now remains to be seen how this process will play out. The outcome will partly depend on decisions taken by the Security Council, on how Russia and China move forward, and on the functioning of the 1737 Sanctions Committee and 1929 Panel of Experts. Member states are required to submit implementation reports to these committees, and that will be a key indicator of which countries file reports and which hold back.



China's former United Nations ambassador Zhang Jun (L) confers with Russia's UN Ambassador Vasily Nebenzya (R) before a UN Security Council meeting at UN headquarters on October 25, 2023.

● BEBETO MATTHEWS/AP

You mentioned that, besides Iran, two permanent members of the UNSC — China and Russia — also agree that the resolution has ended. Given that re-imposing these sanctions involves several steps before they kick in, including the formation of the committee and expert panel, and since the committee's rules require consensus for decisions, to what extent can China and Russia's stance slow down this process?

Sanctions committees at the Security Council, by practice, make decisions by consensus — meaning that if even one member, permanent or non-permanent, objects, no decision can go through. For instance, in the very first step, a chairperson must be appointed. The 1737 Committee, which is now expected to be reactivated, cannot get off the ground without

a chair. If there is no consensus to appoint a non-permanent member as chair, the committee will run into trouble from the start. Therefore, if China and Russia are bent on creating disruptions, they can block the appointment right away.

In later stages, any decision — such as adding or removing individuals and entities from the sanctions list, submitting reports to the Security Council, or putting them out publicly — must all be approved by consensus. A single country can stand in the way of that consensus. We have already seen a similar situation in the 1718 North Korea Sanctions Committee, where Russia and China threw a wrench in the decision-making process, and the work of the committee ground to a halt.

Of course, even if China and Russia pull out all the stops to dis-

rupt the committee's work, some Iranian individuals and entities previously listed will remain under sanctions. The opposition of these two countries will not wipe out the sanctions or reverse the resolutions' reinstatement, but it can bog down the committee's work and the re-establishment of the "expert panel". Under Resolution 1929, this panel must also be renewed annually, and at that stage, China and Russia can veto its reformation.

The three European countries, in the "snapback" process, effectively bypassed certain procedural steps and, instead of referring the dispute to the JCPOA Joint Commission, took it straight to a Security Council vote. Could that process legitimately go ahead in such a way?

Under paragraphs 36 and 37 of

the JCPOA, any dispute must first be referred to the Joint Commission and reviewed in a process lasting about 35 days. If unresolved, only then can it be brought before the Security Council. Our view is that this path was never properly followed through. The Europeans claim they had set the process in motion, but the fact is, it was suspended halfway and was never finalized. Another issue is their claim that Resolution 2231 functions independently from the JCPOA, arguing that paragraph 10 of the resolution merely "encourages" member states to pursue disputes through the Joint Commission — a recommendation, not a legal requirement. Therefore, they claim they could go straight to the Council without completing that step.

Even if it was a recommendation rather than a binding obligation, one would have expected the Europeans to act on the Council's advice, which they didn't. Although they claim to have kicked off the process, from our standpoint, it was never brought to completion and should have been finalized before landing at the Security Council.

On the other hand, while China and Russia can throw sand in the gears of the committee and expert panel, the bigger question is whether they will actually refuse to comply with the resolutions — effectively defying them. For example, will Russia and China go ahead and sell conventional weapons, banned under the resolutions, to Iran and make it public? That would be the biggest show of support they could offer Tehran. Otherwise, beyond stalling the committee and expert panel, not much more can be expected from Moscow and Beijing.

Now that Iran's Foreign Ministry has kicked off a new political and legal process — including official correspondence by the foreign minister and the activities of Iran's missions in international organizations — what practical steps can Tehran take from here on?

The current actions, including political outreach, media work, and communications with the UN, are the right moves. Emphasizing that Western countries had no political or moral ground to bring back the resolutions is a key point Iran can hammer home and keep up in the future. Beyond that, regular diplomatic efforts — such as engaging with other countries and urging them not to enforce the resolutions — are part of the Foreign Ministry's routine mandate and are already underway, with plans to carry on. Whether these efforts will actually bear fruit remains to be seen.



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In this screengrab, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (C) is seen addressing the United Nations Security Council on the triggering of the snapback mechanism of the JCPOA, while his aides sitting behind him listen, at UN headquarters on September 27, 2025.

● WANA

The interview first appeared in Persian on IRNA.