Snapback now

written by David M. Weinberg | 29.08.2025

The so-called “snapback” mechanism for sanctions against Iran was triggered several days ago. But the three European countries who made the call – Britain, France, and Germany (the E-3) – may yet fudge the issue and fritter away Western leverage on Iran. They are talking about giving Iran an extension, up to six months’ grace to reach understandings about curbs on its nuclear bomb and missile programs.

That would be a whopping mistake. With Iran charred by the emphatic Israeli and American military strikes of July and weakened by economic and domestic upheavals, the Europeans should be toughly negotiating Iran down and away from its aggressive capabilities and postures, not giving the Islamic Republic a sugarcoated lifeline.

A BIT OF BACKGROUND is necessary. Between 2006 and 2010, the UN Security Council passed six tranches of sanction resolutions against Iran because of its nuclear weapon and ballistic missile programs.

Then in 2015, the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council: Britain, France, Russia, China, and America, plus Germany) reached an agreement with Iran called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to limit Iran’s nuclear program in exchange for massive sanctions relief and the release of billions of dollars of escrowed Iranian funds. This was US President Obama’s signature foreign policy “achievement.”

But an emergency brake was built into the JCPOA that allows for swift reimposition of United Nations sanctions against Iran on the tenth anniversary of the agreement – which will be soon, on October 18, 2025 – if Iran is found in violation of its nuclear commitments by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). This is the snapback mechanism.

Well, the IAEA formally determined this past June that Iran is indeed in flagrant “non-compliance” with its nuclear obligations. And then shortly thereafter Iran showed off its illegal ballistic missile capabilities by firing more than 600 of them at Israel.

Invoking snapback requires a majority of P5+1 members, but not a UN Security Council resolution. (The snapback was specifically designed this way to *avoid* the UN Security Council, where Russia and China could be expected to veto any decision against Iran.)

Now here is the math: Since Russia and China are in cahoots with Iran, and since President Trump withdrew the US from the P5+1 and the rotten JCPOA in 2018, that leaves the decision to trigger snapback to the E-3.

So the E-3 had to do something, because snapback requires 30 days' advance notice, which brings the deadline forward to September 18, and the E-3 said it would pronounce on snapback by the end of August, which is this weekend.

At the same time, even after starting the snapback process, the wishy-washy Europeans are offering Iran a way out; suggesting that they won't actually *apply* snapback if Iran returns within 30 days to the negotiating table – in direct talks with the US too, and if Iran accounts for the country's large stock of enriched uranium and fully re-opens its nuclear facilities to IAEA inspections.

OF COURSE, Iran is up to its old tricks: Promise, postpone, stall, threaten, smile and negotiate, and then threaten and negotiate some more. All the while, in some as-yet-undetected Iranian bunker, the uranium centrifuges may be spinning.

Iranian foreign minister Abbas Araghchi is demanding an extension to the snapback deadline, "to give diplomacy the time and space it needs," and threatening the E-3 with a "harsh" Iranian response (– terrorism?) if the Europeans play tough.

(Araghchi also this week threatened Israel with a repeat war, and Gulf countries with blockage of their oil shipping through the Straits of Hormuz – if they don't line-up with Iran against Israel.)

Russia also is trying to buy more time for Iran. It has circulated a draft Security Council resolution that would tack a six-month extension onto the Iran nuclear accord, during which time no snapback action could be taken.

And note this: Iran's "Supreme Leader" Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Sunday that the nuclear issue is "unsolvable." He defiantly declared that "Tehran would never bow" to US, European, and Zionist pressures. "They want Iran to be

obedient to America. The Iranian nation will stand with all its power against those who have such erroneous expectations," he declared.

Given such Iranian intransigence and arrogance, the E-3 must not revert to the failed diplomacy of the past. It must not fall prey to Iran's bait-and-delay scam. It is high time for the E-3 to crack the whip and trigger snapback now – without waffling and equivocating, without offering Iran yet another opportunity to wiggle off the hook.

This would mean automatic reinstatement of the pre-JCPOA sanctions: a renewed global embargo on arms sales to Iran, limits on Iranian missile production and distribution, trade restrictions, banking and financial sanctions on Iran, a freeze on Iranian assets around the world, and travel bans on Iranian leaders.

Iran is genuinely concerned about this. Given the rickety state of the Iranian economy, such sanctions could accelerate deep rifts inside Iran and destabilize the Islamic Republic; and perhaps even bring an end to the radical theocratic regime that has ruled Iran since 1979.

IN FACT, even full compliance with past UN resolutions may no longer be sufficient. Those demands were the floor. Today's reality demands much more.

After all, Iran didn't just aggressively enrich uranium to bomb-grade levels over the past ten years, but it launched hundreds of ballistic missiles at Israeli civilian and military targets. As Jacob Nagel and Mark Dubowitz of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies have written in this newspaper, this alone justifies new redlines.

Among the necessary new redlines are *elimination* of the three pillars of Iran's nuclear weapons program: Complete destruction of all enriched uranium, centrifuges, and enrichment facilities. Full disclosure and termination of all nuclear warhead design, related research and development, and any remaining weaponization infrastructure. Termination of Iran's ballistic missile, cruise missile, and drone arsenals, including ICBMs that can strike Europe and the US.

This also means an end to Tehran's longtime arming of Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, and other proxy forces; and cancellation of Iran's nuclear, missile, and arms agreements with Russia, China, and North Korea.

All this would require super-invasive American or IAEA monitoring of Iran's bank accounts, uranium mines, mills, ore processing facilities, military and missile bases, ports and airfields, along with total destruction of Iran's underground bunkers for nuclear activities and weapons storage.

In short, another naïve diplomatic deal based on delayed snapback and flimsy-phony inspections, without real-time dismantlement of Iran's core nuclear and terrorist infrastructure, would repeat Obama's fatal errors.

Hello E-3, wake up! A dawdling deal is worse than no deal. Half-measures benefit Iran, providing camouflage for nuclear rebuilding. Weakness will whet Iran's jihadist appetite for rage and revenge.

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