

Britain, France, Germany to impose sanctions on Iran as part of Middle East war drive

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On Thursday, Britain, France and Germany announced their intention to reimpose United Nations sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program.

The action, by countries collectively known as the E3 that were party to the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear deal with Iran, follows Tehran's refusal to submit to three key demands. These included Iran resuming negotiations with the United States; granting the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) renewed access to its nuclear facilities that had been completely halted following the Israel/US war on Iran in June; and providing a full account of the more than 400kg of 60 percent enriched uranium reported by the IAEA.

UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy said, "Despite repeated warnings, Iran has made no substantive effort to meet the conditions of our extension offer and has consistently failed to provide credible assurances on the nature of its nuclear programme".

The E3 claim that, unless it agrees to these conditions, Iran is in "significant" violation of the 2015 nuclear agreement, triggering the "snapback" provisions restoring measures in force prior to the agreement, including an arms embargo, restrictions on ballistic missile production, a ban on new foreign investment in Iran's oil and gas sector, sweeping sanctions on the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) which controls much of Iran's economy via its affiliated companies, asset freezes and visa bans, as well as a complete halt to uranium enrichment.

The next day, Germany upped the ante, telling its citizens to leave Iran due to fears of retaliatory actions by Tehran, presumed to mean hostage-taking.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Washington supported the E3's decision and would work with them to complete the snapback process, adding that it would, however, still pursue negotiations with Iran.

The three European powers hypocritically claimed that they sought a "diplomatic solution", saying, "The E3 will fully make use of the 30-day period following the notification [to the UN Security Council]".

Far from rescuing the negotiations between Washington and Tehran, by setting down conditions designed by Israel that they know are completely unacceptable to Iran, which Tehran has already rejected, the European powers are paving the way for another, more destructive, military assault that would trigger a broader conflagration.

This comes just two months after the European powers supported the specious pretext used by Israel and the US to justify their attack on Iran: that it must never have a nuclear weapon or pose a threat to the region's security.

It is Israel that has for decades attacked its neighbours, including the ongoing genocidal war on the Palestinians in Gaza. It is widely acknowledged that Israel has at least 100 nuclear bombs. As one of only five countries not to have signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), its nuclear facilities are not open to inspection by the International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA).

The first Trump administration unilaterally abandoned the JCPOA agreement in May 2018, reimposing sanctions on Iran even though Tehran was in full compliance. Despite their protestations, the European powers did nothing to circumvent US sanctions, jeopardising their own export trade with Iran that had reached \$6.9 billion in 2018.

Washington and Tel Aviv's criminal and unprovoked war on Iran took place even as negotiations between the US and Iran were underway. It targeted its nuclear facilities, industrial plants and cities, deliberately assassinating high-ranking politicians, scientists and officials, in pursuit of US imperialism's aim of controlling the resource-rich Middle East and its geostrategic transportation routes—as a prelude to a broader confrontation with China.

Then, too, the European powers demanded Tehran capitulate unconditionally to imperialist aggression under the guise of calling for "de-escalation" and a "diplomatic solution". German Chancellor Friedrich Merz stated openly what was in the minds of the European politicians when he acknowledged that Israel, by bombing Iran—a country aligned with Russia—"is doing the dirty work for all of us".

The European powers are seeking, amid their open differences with Washington, to demonstrate their support in this matter as a quid pro quo to ensure the US commits to supporting the war in Ukraine, and to prevent the Trump administration from concluding an agreement with Russia over their heads. They have ended their attempts to posture as a bridge between Tehran and Washington and have come down four square on the side of the US and Israel. This is despite fears that a war with Iran would be far more disastrous than the wars with Afghanistan and Iraq, plunging the global economy into a mammoth recession, especially if Iran carries out its threat to block the Strait of Hormuz through which about one-fifth of the world's oil supply is transported.

Like the US, the E3 have abandoned all the post-World War II international legal arrangements in favour of a policy of "might is right", making it clear that international law is valid for everyone except for the US, Israel and themselves.

It is expected that the reimposition of sanctions will prompt Israel and the US to push for a complete ban by the Security Council on Iran's uranium enrichment, which is presently allowed for civilian purposes, including energy and medical uses.

A UN arms embargo on Iran would prevent Tehran from replenishing its military hardware and materiel, including its air defence systems. While Russia and China might choose to ignore the sanctions as illegitimate and supply Iran with the necessary hardware, Iran's alignment with Moscow and Beijing only increases the likelihood of a US/Israeli attack.

Sanctions would further devastate Iran's economy which is plagued by hyperinflation, a plunging currency and economic recession, exacerbated by the recent US/Israeli bombardment and decades of international sanctions that have caused economic losses estimated at \$1.2 trillion between 2011 and 2023 alone.

Its oil and gas industry, whose output is declining, needs \$19 billion investment a year for the next four years. Its currency, the rial, fell to near record lows after the E3's announcement, trading at more than one million rials to the dollar. In 2015, it traded at 32,000 rials to the dollar. The Iranian parliament is preparing legislation to reform the currency and remove four zeros from the current denomination. In practice, Iranians long ago abandoned the rial for daily transactions, using the toman that equals 10 rials instead.

This will escalate the already runaway inflation and worsen the plight of the Iranian working class and rural poor, 30 percent of whom live below the poverty line, according to official reporting. It means higher prices, scarcer imports and an even harsher squeeze on daily life. For Europe and America, it means greater instability in a

country of nearly 90 million people with spillover effects across the region. As far as Israel is concerned, the move by the E3 will provide it with an excuse to attack Iran again.

Iran's foreign ministry has rejected the E3's move, saying that "the three European countries have no legal or moral authority to resort to the so-called snapback mechanism". It accused the European powers of bad faith and "blackmailing" Tehran by speaking of the 30-day window.

Iran has indicated that it may withdraw from the NPT—the Iranian parliament has started drafting a plan to this effect. It has also threatened to cease cooperating with the IAEA, with a bill already passed suspending cooperation until the agency guarantees the safety of Iran's nuclear facilities from further assault

Tehran has accused the nuclear watchdog of aiding Israeli attacks on Iran by sharing information with Mossad—enabling Israel's spy agency to carry out attacks on its nuclear sites and assassinate its scientists—and failing to condemn the war. It fears that sharing the location of its enriched uranium stockpile with the IAEA would be as good as handing over a list of targets to Washington and Tel Aviv.

Russia and China have condemned the E3's move and tabled a UN Security Council resolution calling for a six-month extension of JCPOA-related sanctions relief, citing the need for "breathing space for diplomacy." Their draft urges all JCPOA participants to resume negotiations and allows for a possible further extension of relief until April 2026.

In the meantime, Israel's attacks on Iran's allies and former allies have continued relentlessly. On Wednesday, it attacked Syria and its stocks of weapons accumulated under the Assad regime, with a commando force raiding a military site south of Damascus, killing security personnel. On Thursday, Israeli airstrikes targeted the Iranian-backed Houthi leadership in Yemen's capital Sana'a, killing Prime Minister Ahmed al-Rahawi, the military chief of staff, the defence minister and other senior officials.



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