

Imperialist powers tighten the noose around Iran with reimposition of sanctions

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3 October 2025

The United Nations reimposed sanctions on Iran, September 28—lifted under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)—after Britain, France and Germany (the E3) invoked the “snapback” mechanism, accusing Tehran of violating its nuclear obligations under the agreement.

This is the threat to Iran: capitulate to Washington’s diktats, end the nuclear programme and the alliance with Russia and China or face another, far more destructive, military assault. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio described it as “an act of decisive global leadership on the part of France, Germany and the United Kingdom”.

The JCPOA was jointly signed in 2015 by Iran, the European Union (EU), and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, plus Germany. The first Trump administration unilaterally withdrew from the deal in 2018 and imposed crippling sanctions on Iran, including efforts to block Iranian oil exports, along with secondary sanctions on countries trading with Iran—plunging Iran deeper into economic crisis. This was despite Tehran being fully compliant with the agreement.

While the European powers opposed the US pullout, which impacted on their rising trade with Iran, they did nothing to circumvent US sanctions and de facto aligned themselves with Washington.

Initially Iran continued to abide by the agreement in the hope that the European powers would either find a work-around to the sanctions and/or persuade the Trump administration to rejoin the agreement. Later, citing article 36 of the JCPOA deal stating that any party can treat a violation by another party “as grounds to cease performing its commitments under this JCPOA in whole or in part and/or notify the UN Security Council that it believes the issue constitutes significant non-performance”, it began to enrich its uranium beyond the agreed limit of 3.5 percent to 60 percent purity.

The reimposed UN sanctions include a ban on: any trade and investment related to Tehran’s nuclear and ballistic missiles programme, including an arms embargo and restrictions on ballistic missile production; 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 and other nuclear activities previously allowed under the JCPOA. In addition, the snapback reimposes an embargo on all weapons transactions with Iran that had expired in 2020.

These sanctions will pile on the pressure on Iran’s already fragile economy. Protests and demonstrations over unpaid wages, pensions and conditions have been ongoing across the country that has been devastated by years of crippling US sanctions and secondary sanctions, leading to soaring inflation and a precipitous decline in the value of Iran’s currency, with the rial falling to 1,123,000 per US dollar, a record low on the announcement.

There have been frequent planned and unplanned electricity blackouts, while climate change and the government’s chronic mismanagement have depleted groundwater reserves at an alarming pace, with 24 out of 31 provinces experiencing severe water shortages. The government has been forced to designate Wednesdays as public holidays in Tehran and the surrounding areas to reduce energy and water consumption.

Iran is reeling from the impact of the US/Israel’s unprovoked and criminal bombardment in June that targeted its industrial and nuclear facilities and assassinated key politicians, scientists and officials.

The war was launched 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. It followed Washington’s shifting of Israel from US European Central Command to US Central Command, enabling direct military cooperation with Arab states after the establishment of the Abraham Accords. This spawned a huge expansion of Israel’s export of weapons and intelligence and surveillance tools to the Gulf and has in turn facilitated the flow of these technologies to countries without direct links to Israel.

The US/Israeli bombing followed nearly two years of Israeli attacks on Iran’s regional allies, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Syria and the Houthis in Yemen, severely weakening them, and above all on Hamas and the Palestinians in Gaza. The weapons embargo on Iran is intended to hinder its ability to arm its allies, including Russia which it supplies with drones for the war in Ukraine. The European powers justified the June war, supporting the specious pretext used by Tel Aviv and

Washington to justify their attack on Iran: that it must never have a nuclear weapon or pose a threat to the region's security. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was still monitoring its nuclear facilities to ensure that its nuclear programme was only for civilian purposes and IAEA chief Rafael Grossi acknowledged that it had no evidence that Iran was pursuing weaponisation.

It is Israel, not Iran, that has for decades attacked its neighbours, including the genocidal assault 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 European powers demanded Tehran capitulate unconditionally to US/Israeli aggression with calls for "de-escalation" and a "diplomatic solution". Germany, which was particularly incensed by Iran's support for Russia against Ukraine, led the push for the sanctions alongside Britain and France. Chancellor Friedrich Merz, Europe's most fervent advocate of war with Russia, stated openly the real attitude 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 E3 demanded that Iran agree to resume the duplicitous negotiations with the US, brokered by Oman, underway when the US and Israel attacked Iran in June; grant the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) renewed access to its nuclear facilities halted following the Israel/US war; and provide a full account of the more than 400kg of 60 percent enriched uranium reported by the IAEA.

Tehran made strenuous, last-minute efforts to satisfy the E3's conditions—despite harsh criticism from Iran's conservative faction—agreeing to resume cooperation with the IAEA. Iran submitted a series of proposals on a new nuclear accord to Trump's officials and holding discussions on them on the sidelines of the opening of UN General Assembly that were apparently accepted by French President Emmanuel Macron's envoy. But the E3, at Washington's insistence, dismissed them as insufficient. Steve Witkoff, Trump's Middle East envoy, demanded zero enrichment and the export of its enriched uranium to the US.

The reimposition of sanctions followed the failure of a UN Security Council resolution submitted by Russia and China for a six-month delay to enable further discussions to win a majority. Russia condemned the sanctions, with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accusing the imperialist powers of undermining the Security Council's authority and pursuing unilateral pressure tactics against Iran.

Russia dismissed the sanctions as invalid and made it clear it would not enforce them. Lavrov said the sanctions "finally exposed the west's policy of sabotaging the pursuit of constructive solutions in the UN security council, as well as its

desire to extract unilateral concessions from Tehran through blackmail and pressure".

At the same time, the Arab and Muslim states in the region have supported President Donald Trump's take it or leave ultimatum to Hamas to accept a US takeover of Gaza and their own disarming.

Abbas Araqchi, the Iranian Foreign Minister, said, "The US has betrayed diplomacy, but it is the E3 which have buried it," telling the Security Council that the snapback was "legally void, politically reckless and procedurally flawed".

With the resumption of sanctions, the three imperialist powers with veto power on the UN Security Council, including the US, which scuttled the UN-approved nuclear deal with Iran, have veto power over their removal, further strengthening their hand. The reinstatement of sanctions means that Iran is deemed to be in breach of international laws and subject to chapter seven of the UN charter, providing the US with the grounds to declare Iran's entire nuclear programme illegal and a threat to international peace and legitimizing an attack on the country.

Iran's President, Masoud Pezeshkian, speaking in New York after the meeting of the UN General Assembly, called the invocation of the snapback "unjust and illegal. They want to topple us ... If you were in our place, what would you do?" He told journalists Iran would decide on retaliatory steps after he returned to Iran and conferred with other officials. "The dream of forcing Iran to its knees is a fantasy and a delusion. We will never yield to such filthy and despicable individuals."

Iran has accused France, Germany and the UK of abusing the snapback process and recalled its ambassadors to the three countries September 27 for consultations. It has mooted the termination of its 1974 Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA, which sets the parameters for the agency's access and oversight of nuclear material, while Iran's hardline faction has called for a withdrawal from the NPT. The Iranian parliament has started drafting a plan to this effect. It has already passed a bill suspending cooperation until the agency guarantees the safety of Iran's nuclear facilities from further assault.



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