



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

The reimposition of sanctions on Iran is opening space for a new round of politics



On 27 September, Tehran **recalled** its ambassadors from London, Paris, and Berlin. This decision followed immediately after the E3 (the United Kingdom, France and Germany) activated the **mechanism** for the renewal of sanctions against Iran within the framework of the United Nations Security Council.

The **sanctions** came back into force after an attempt by Russia and China to delay them **failed** in the Council. In this way, the international framework that had been suspended after signing of the agreement in Vienna on Iran's nuclear programme in 2015 was reinstated.

For Iran, this means the return of global restrictions related to uranium enrichment, the acquisition and transfer of weapons, as well as its ballistic programmes. In addition, measures are being reinstated against individuals and organisations involved in nuclear and missile activities.

Sanctions that had already been partially imposed by the US and the EU in recent years are now gaining wider force, as they are confirmed by the UN Security Council, which binds all member states.

Iran responded by **claiming** that the "snapback" mechanism was illegitimate. Tehran's authorities underscore that the purpose of this instrument was to uphold the nuclear agreement, not to undermine it.

They remind the international community that the United States unilaterally withdrew from the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) in 2018 and that, according to their interpretation, the US had no right to restart the process of **reinstating** sanctions.

Tehran warns that it will respond to the new measures by further reducing cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency, although it still remains within the framework of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Return to the domain of measurement and verification

The "snapback" mechanism was incorporated into Resolution 2231, which the Security Council used to approve the nuclear deal in 2015.

It allows any party to initiate the procedure if it believes Iran is seriously breaching its agreed obligations. After the stipulated period expires, all lifted sanctions are automatically reinstated unless the Security Council decides otherwise.

This time, the attempt by Moscow and Beijing to **block** the process did not receive the necessary support. As a result, the strictest international framework against Iran since the years before the signing of the JCPOA was activated.

The decision to launch a "snapback" was actually a way to reintroduce a single international framework

For the European signatories of the agreement, the move had both legal and political motives. In recent months, it has become clear that the IAEA's inspection regime is not operating on a scale that would guarantee transparency.

Inspectors have publicly warned that they do not have full **access** to the sites, and incidents and sabotage at Iran's nuclear facilities have further fuelled suspicions.

The decision to **launch** a "snapback" was actually a way to reintroduce a single international framework and return the issue to the domain of measurement and verification rather than political assessments.

Limits of Moscow and Beijing's influence

Iran's recall of its ambassadors has a double meaning. Externally, it is a message of discontent and a way to emphasise the seriousness of Iran's opposition. Internally, it is

a gesture that allows the regime to show a tougher stance to the domestic public while also maintaining an exit strategy.

The diplomats were not permanently **recalled** but invited for consultations, which means their return could signal the opening of space for a new format of negotiations.

Russia and China can now only challenge the legitimacy of the "snapback" politically

The latest developments have revealed the limits of Moscow and Beijing's influence. Their proposal to postpone the renewal of sanctions for six months did not pass. Thus, the options for halting the procedure in the short term have been exhausted.

Russia and China can now only challenge the legitimacy of the "snapback" politically, but it remains factually valid and binding on all UN members.

For Moscow, which regards Iran as a partner in countering Western pressure, this reduces the scope for coordinated action. For China, which balances trade interests with its role in the Security Council, the failure of the proposal means the loss of an opportunity to assert itself as a mediator.

Altering the dynamic between key actors in the Middle East

In the Middle East, the return of sanctions is altering the dynamic between key actors. Israel and the Gulf monarchies welcome the renewed restrictions, believing they will reduce the pressure to take unilateral action against Iran.

For Tehran, however, this means further **pressure** on the economy, the rial exchange rate, and trade and finance channels already **weakened** by previous measures.

At the same time, the Iranian authorities may

resort to countermeasures, including limiting cooperation with the IAEA or exerting indirect pressure through networks of regional allies.

The move is formally European, although strongly supported by the United States

For the European signatories, the "snapback" **decision** is also a message to Washington. They want to demonstrate that they are not merely passive followers of American policy but are prepared to use the instruments available to them within the UN.

The move is formally European, although strongly supported by the United States. By doing this, the E3 aims to **prevent** the issue of Iran from becoming solely a transatlantic topic that is overshadowed by US domestic political debates.

An attempt to maintain a minimum set of common rules

A way out of the current situation could be found if Tehran allowed full access to inspectors and if new ceilings for uranium enrichment were agreed. In return, the E3 and the USA could partially lift the measures. The problem is trust.

The 2015 agreement was created in an atmosphere of political will for a new beginning. After years of withdrawal, sabotage, and other parallel measures, goodwill has become scarce.



The "snapback" reinstated sanctions, but it did not bolster trust

This is why the renewal of sanctions acts more as an attempt to maintain a minimum set of common rules than as a prelude to a quick agreement.

The recall of the ambassador and the renewal of sanctions do not mean the end of negotiations, but they do mark the end of the illusion that the dispute over the Iranian programme can be resolved only through temporary arrangements and informal statements.

Europe judged it necessary to bring the issue back within the framework of international law. Iran retaliated with a move that heightens tensions but leaves room to manoeuvre.

Between these actions, space is opening for a new round of politics, which will be measured not by the number of announcements but by the willingness to take verifiable steps. The "snapback" reinstated sanctions, but it did not bolster trust.

If Iran and Europe remain entrenched in their positions, negotiations will be reduced to a ritual without substance, and the international system reduced to a form without strength.