

Snapback sanctions on the table as Iran threatens to go nuclear

Mechanism would bring back all sanctions from the start of the 2015 Iran deal, as the Islamic Republic continues to enrich uranium to nearly weapons-grade purity

By Lahav Harkov / November 4, 2024

Snapback sanctions, the 2015 Iran nuclear deal's fail-safe mechanism, may be back on the West's agenda after recent threats and aggression by the Islamic Republic.

U.K. Foreign Secretary David Lammy is prepared to trigger snapback sanctions as Iran gets closer to nuclear breakout, The Telegraph reported over the weekend, citing a Foreign Office official who said that London is "committed to preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons using every diplomatic tool available, including the snapback mechanism if necessary."

[...]

Raz Zimmt, a researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University, said that snapback is only a "symbolic step," noting that the U.S. and EU never lifted their sanctions on Iran and that China doesn't abide by them anyway.

"It sends a message to the Iranians if you have U.N. Security Council sanctions, but in practicality, it doesn't have much significance ... I'm not convinced it will make a difference," he said.

Zimmt suggested that the best way for the West to have economic leverage on Iran is to actually enforce its sanctions, especially on Iranian oil sales to China, which is something that can be done without snapping back sanctions.

Zimmt was skeptical that the U.K. would actually invoke snapback anytime soon, noting that Iranian officials are "constantly bringing up the option of renewing their nuclear doctrine" to include the development of weapons, and that the E3 would be unlikely to take any big steps before knowing who is elected president of the U.S. and what his or her Iran policies will be.

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