



Iran Nuclear Talks with European Countries and the Possibility of Another Round of Hostilities Between Israel/U.S. and Iran

Late last week, Iranian diplomats held nuclear talks in Turkey with their European counterparts from Germany, the United Kingdom, and France – the first such meeting since Israel’s mid-June attack on Iran that prompted a 12-day conflict which drew in the United States. The European nations, known as the E3, have threatened to trigger the so-called “snapback mechanism” under the terms of the 2015 nuclear deal which if done, would reinstate United Nations sanctions on Iran. This was one of the main points of discussion between the parties, where it was agreed that consultations would continue as the option to trigger the mechanism expires in October. Tehran has warned of consequences should the E3 decide to activate it, including the possibility that it could withdraw from the global nuclear non-proliferation treaty. The latest round of talks between Iranian and European diplomats in Istanbul ended last Friday with both agreeing to meet again to try and break the diplomatic deadlock. They also acknowledged that there is no prospect of Iran re-engaging with the United States at the negotiating table for now.

During the course of previous U.S.-Iran nuclear talks prior to these being derailed as a result of Israel’s unprovoked attack on Iran in June, experts largely pointed to the issue of uranium enrichment as the main obstacle to progress towards a potential new nuclear agreement. Iran has described uranium enrichment as a non-negotiable right for civilian purposes and a matter of national sovereignty, while the United States under the Trump administration has labeled it as the “red line” surrounding nuclear talks. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has stated that Iran is enriching uranium above the cap which was placed on it under the 2015 deal, but well below the 90 percent needed for weapons-grade levels. Additionally, it is important to note that before the United States unilaterally withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal during Trump’s first term in office, Iran had been found to be consistently abiding by the terms set out in it and only began increasing its enrichment levels following Trump’s abandonment of the agreement.

On top of the main issue holding back the prospect of progress on the nuclear talks, there is also significant concern regarding the possibility of another round of hostilities between Israel/the United States and Iran. The recent conflict back in June – which dragged in the United States – ultimately resulted in a fragile truce, but this has highlighted the potential for future escalation, particularly if diplomatic efforts falter and sanctions are reinstated on Iran. The lack of a diplomatic breakthrough and military preparations on both sides contribute to the sense of a highly volatile situation, as do reports of continued Israeli covert operations and acts of sabotage against Iran. Despite the ceasefire that ended the 12-day conflict, there are suggestions that Israel and Iran are engaged in strategic military planning and that a surprise attack could occur. Ultimately, a single incident has the potential to trigger a new round of hostilities, and many analysts have therefore voiced that the risk of yet another confrontation will persist with a chance of this transpiring at any moment under the current state of affairs.

One of the reasons for this is the belief that Israel is actively looking for an opportunity to destabilize the Iranian regime. As such, the Netanyahu government hopes that ongoing attempts at diplomacy between Iran and Europe fail, as this and European countries’ possible reimposing of sanctions on Tehran could give Israel pretext for initiating future attacks against Iran. Should this scenario unfold, whether or not another round of hostilities takes

place between Israel and Iran may very well come down to a green light being given – or lack thereof – from the United States. All told, observers seem to be indicating that Iran is expecting Israel to continue its belligerence, even as most hold out hope that a deal on its nuclear program can be achieved through diplomacy.