

US seeks to extend, strengthen Iran nuclear pact despite Khamenei defiance

Mon, 2021-02-22 19:23

LONDON: The United States will seek to strengthen and extend the agreement between world powers and Iran aimed at curbing its nuclear program, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday.

It's a new sign of Washington's ambition to revive the 2015 nuclear deal rejected by former President Donald Trump even as Tehran appears to be backing further away from it.

The UN nuclear watchdog said on Sunday it had struck a deal with Iran to cushion the blow of steps Tehran plans to take this week that include ending snap inspections, with both sides agreeing to keep "necessary" monitoring for up to three months.

The announcement by International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Rafael Grossi, made at Vienna airport after a weekend trip to Iran, confirmed that Tehran would go ahead with its plan to slash cooperation with the agency on Tuesday.

Blinken, addressing the UN-sponsored Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, said in a pre-recorded speech: "The United States remains committed to ensuring that Iran never acquires a nuclear weapon. Diplomacy is the best path to achieve that goal."

US President Joe Biden has said that if Iran comes back into "strict compliance" with the 2015 pact, his administration will do the same, Blinken said.

"Working with allies and partners, we will also seek to lengthen and strengthen the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) and address other areas of concern, including Iran's destabilizing regional behavior and ballistic missile development and proliferation," Blinken said.

"Iran must comply with its safeguards agreements with the IAEA and its international obligations," he added.

White House press secretary Jenn Psaki said US allies in Europe are still waiting a response from Iran on the European Union's offer to host an informal meeting between current members of the nuclear deal and the US. Iran has slowly walked away from all the nuclear deal's limitations on its stockpile of uranium and has begun enriching up to 20%, a technical step away from weapons-grade levels.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Monday Iran might enrich uranium up to 60% purity if the country needed it and would never yield to US pressure over its nuclear activity, state television reported.

Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with six powers caps the fissile purity to which Tehran can refine uranium at 3.67%, well under the 20% achieved before the agreement and far below the 90% suitable for a nuclear weapon.

"Iran's uranium enrichment level will not be limited to 20%. We will increase it to whatever level the country needs...We may increase it to 60%," the TV quoted Khamenei as saying.

Khamenei also repeated a denial of any Iranian intent to weaponize uranium enrichment.

“Our respected government did not abandon its commitments and gradually reduced some of them, which are still reversible in the case that they return to their responsibilities,” he said.

Moreover, Iran said on Monday it will end at 2030 GMT the implementation of the Additional Protocol that allows the UN nuclear watchdog to carry out snap-inspections at sites not declared to the agency, the semi-official Tasnim news agency reported.

“As of midnight tonight (2030 GMT), we will not have... commitments beyond safeguards. Necessary orders have been issued to the nuclear facilities,” Tasnim quoted Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran’s envoy at the IAEA as saying.

US State Department spokesman Ned Price said Khamenei’s comment about uranium enrichment “sounds like a threat” and declined to respond to what he described as “hypotheticals” and “posturing.”

Price also reiterated US willingness to engage in talks with Iran.

French Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told his EU colleagues during a meeting in Brussels that the situation regarding Iran’s nuclear program is “worrying,” his ministry said on Monday.

(With AP, AFP and Reuters)



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[UK must stand up to Iran: MPs](#)

Mon, 2021-02-22 19:02

LONDON: A cross-party group of British MPs has written to the government urging it to have the "courage" to downgrade diplomatic relations with Tehran in response to the threat posed by Iran's state terrorism.

The letter, issued by the British Committee for Iran Freedom (BCFIF), said the case of Assadollah Assadi – an Iranian diplomat convicted of terrorism for trying to bomb an opposition rally in Paris in 2018 – is evidence that Tehran uses its diplomatic missions abroad as a cover for terrorism.

"Iran's decision to act as a pariah state and to use its diplomats to threaten the security of Europe and the life of its citizens must be met with maximum pressure and not maximum diplomacy by the EU and UK," the MPs and Lord Alton of Liverpool said in the letter.

In a separate statement, Lord Alton said the Assadi ruling and investigation "show beyond any doubt that this was an act of state terrorism by the regime in Iran against the country's organised pro-democracy opposition, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), by targeting their conference, leader and supporters on European soil."

Lord Alton denounced the invitation extended to Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif to speak at the virtual Europe-Iran Business Forum in March, and urged the UK to downgrade relations with Tehran and investigate its diplomatic mission in London for evidence of terrorist activity.

"A Global Britain must have the courage to take the lead in Europe to address the serious threats of Iran's state terrorism," the BCFIF said.

It added that until the UK has confronted the Iranian threat within the county, it should proscribe the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organization and sanction senior Iranian leaders such as Zarif and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

Ali Safavi, an official with the NCRI's Foreign Affairs Committee, told Arab News that "the concern over the Iranian regime's illicit and dangerous nuclear weapons program shouldn't dwarf other aspects of its malign and sinister behavior," including "its renewed intelligence gathering and terrorist schemes on European soil."

He said Tehran's terrorism in Europe, its pursuit of nuclear weapons, its human rights abuses at home and its expansionism across the Middle East "are

part and parcel of the same policy and, as such, must be dealt with in their entirety. A piecemeal approach to all these nefarious actions will be to no avail.”

He added: “It’s time for the EU to revise its policy vis-a-vis the ruling theocracy, and stand with the Iranian people and not with their oppressors.”



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Iranian envoy charged over Paris rally bomb plot
Iran protests to Belgium over Iranian envoy’s bomb plot case

[Kuwait closes land and sea border crossings – cabinet](#)

Mon, 2021-02-22 19:17

LONDON: Kuwait will close its land and sea border crossings, with the exception of shipping operations and workers in the neutral zone, from Wednesday until March 20, the cabinet said on Monday via Twitter. Citizens, and domestic workers accompanying them, are allowed to return through land and sea ports, as are citizens' first-degree relatives, the cabinet added.

The Council of Ministers said that citizens arriving into the country will be subjected to mandatory quarantine, and they must spend a week at a hotel and another week at home.

During their weekly meeting, the cabinet also said it would form a joint committee, headed by the Ministry of Interior and including the health ministry the civil aviation authority, tasked with overseeing that quarantine measures are enforced upon arrival.

تعلن [#وزارة_الصحة](#) عن تأكيد إصابة 899 حالة جديدة، وتسجيل 955 حالة شفاء، و 5 حالات وفاة جديدة بـ [#فيروس_كورونا_المستجد](#) COVID-19 ، ليصبح إجمالي عدد الحالات 184,989 حالة pic.twitter.com/0UG3hBHFYn

- [@KUWAIT_MOH](#) [February 22, 2021](#) وزارة الصحة - الكويت

It also said that as of Wednesday, restaurants and cafes, including those in shopping malls, would only operate for delivery and take away services until further notice.

Kuwait on Monday reported 899 new confirmed cases in the previous 24 hours, and five deaths related to the virus, bringing the totals to 184,989 and 1,049, respectively. Health authorities also said 955 patients recovered from the virus, raising the total to 173,182.

On Saturday, Kuwait announced it was extending an entry ban for non-Kuwaiti citizens until further notice as part of coronavirus restriction measures.

(With Reuters)



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Kuwait bans entry for non-Kuwaiti citizens until further notice
Travelers arriving in Kuwait from COVID-19 hotspots must isolate in local hotels

[Abbas decrees a minimum of seven seats for Christian Palestinians](#)

Author:

Sun, 2021-02-21 22:05

AMMAN: Mahmoud Abbas signed a presidential decree Sunday guaranteeing a minimum of seven parliamentary seats to Palestinians of the Christian faith. Palestinians in the occupied territories are expected to choose 132 legislators based on proportional representation.

Former Bethlehem Mayor Vera Baboun told Arab News that the new legislative council needs to mirror Palestinian society's diversity so as to include a plurality of Palestinians, saying: "The upcoming elected council needs to reflect the widest national experience and representation of all of our society including women and Palestinian Christians."

Ramzi Khoury, head of the Presidential Higher Committee for Churches Affairs, welcomed the decision, saying this is the first time the quota is open-ended.

"The fact that the decree calls for a minimum of seven members are welcomed because it gives opportunities for Palestinians of all walks of life to compete with the opportunity of more individuals being elected than the minimum quota," he told Arab News.

Jerusalem's Orthodox Archbishop of Sebastia Atallah Hanna told Arab News that Palestinians welcome this decision.

"We wish generally for the upcoming Palestinian Legislative Council to bring in new blood and we hope that they are chosen based on qualifications and abilities."

Nashat Filmon, director of the Palestinian Bible Society, said it is good to have a guaranteed representation that reflects the Palestinian Christian presence in the cradle of Christianity.

"I would like the representatives to the Palestinian Legislative Council to focus on the living stones, the Christians of Palestine, and not just the physical stones that represent the history of Christianity in Palestine," he told Arab News.

Ibrahim Daebes, a former Christian school principal and a leading columnist for Al Quds daily, told Arab News that it is imperative that the new representatives act to curtail hate speech.

"Palestinian Christians are facing personal and religious persecution from all corners and it is important for the newly-elected council to draft legislation that can put a stop to radical elements within our society who spew hate speech and religious bigotry at fellow Palestinians," he said.

Bernard Sabella, former member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, welcomed the decision of the President. "This is an excellent decision because our experience is that the Palestinian electorate votes on the basis of geography, not nationality," he said.

Sabella added that previous experience which was not successful "requires us to have a new vision and a holistic plan that addresses our needs. We need our representatives to represent their nation and not a religion."

He added: "We are at a political crossroads and we can't live with the mindset of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. While I respect ideologies, we need to revive international support for the Palestinian cause and to stop the rhetoric that fails to face the local and international realities. What we need instead is to look to improve our steadfastness on the ground and to

work for a state that will help us in this effort to stay put on our land.”



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[UAE officials visit SAMI's stand at IDEX 2021](#)

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Sun, 2021-02-21 21:02

LONDON: The UAE's ministers of interior and foreign affairs paid a visit on Sunday to the Saudi Arabian Military Industries (SAMI) stand at the International Defense Exhibition and Conference (IDEX) taking place in Abu Dhabi.

Sheikh Saif bin Zayed, who is also deputy prime minister, and Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, visited the Saudi company that is owned by the Kingdom's Public Investment Fund (PIF).

The ministers were accompanied by the governor of the General Authority for Military Industries (GAMI), Ahmed bin Abdul Aziz Al-Ohali, who is leading the Saudi delegation at the exhibition and the Kingdom's ambassador to the UAE Turki bin Abdullah Al-Dakhil

The delegation was received by the CEO of Saudi Arabian Military Industries (SAMI) Walid Abukhaled and other executives.

The dignitaries were briefed on SAMI's efforts to advance localization of the Kingdom's military industry, and the company's pursuit of innovation in defense production to ensure Saudi Arabia's sustainability and self-sufficiency in the sector.

IDEX runs between Sunday and Thursday this week.







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