



Iran's president defends uranium enrichment after Europeans 'trampled on their commitments'

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On GPS: President Raisi on Iran's nuclear ambitions

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(CNN) — Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi has defended his country's enrichment of uranium to near weapons-grade levels, claiming it was a response to European states not living up to their end of the 2015 nuclear agreement.

"In the beginning, we were not seeking 60% levels of enrichment. They (European states) trampled upon their commitments," Raisi told CNN's Fareed Zakaria in New York on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly this week. "What the Islamic Republic of Iran did was in response to a breaking of commitment of the signatories to the (2015) agreement."

Iran announced that it was enriching uranium to 60% in 2021, following an attack on its above-ground nuclear facility in Natanz, which Tehran blamed on Israel.

CHOOSE WORKOUT PLAN TO GET D

7-DAY PLAN		14-DAY PLAN		28-DAY PLAN
DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 1
DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 3
DAY 5	DAY 6	DAY 5	DAY 6	DAY 5
DAY 7	REST	DAY 7	REST	DAY 7
30-DAY PLAN				
DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5
DAY 6	DAY 7	DAY 8	DAY 9	DAY 10
DAY 11	DAY 12	DAY 13	DAY 14	DAY 15
DAY 16	DAY 17	DAY 18	DAY 19	DAY 20
DAY 21	DAY 22	DAY 23	DAY 24	DAY 25
DAY 26	DAY 27	DAY 28	DAY 29	DAY 30

The move alarmed the West, as it shortened Iran's so-called "breakout time" to build a nuclear weapon, which requires uranium that is enriched above 90%. The UN's nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), said earlier this month that Iran was the only country without a nuclear weapon that was enriching uranium to 60% purity, and in March the agency announced that uranium particles enriched to 84% were found at Iran's Fordow plant.

This month, Reuters cited a confidential IAEA report stating that Iran's stock of uranium enriched to up to 60% purity continued to grow, albeit at a slower pace than in the previous quarter.

Nuclear power, which Iran says is the purpose of its nuclear program, requires uranium to be enriched to 3% to 5%.



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There is also concern that if Iran's nuclear program is not kept in check, it could lead to further nuclear proliferation in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said Wednesday that if Iran acquires a nuclear bomb, "we have to get one."

Raisi rejected accusations that Iran's ramped up enrichment was because the country is seeking to build a bomb, telling CNN: "It was officially announced that the action that we intend to take is not intended to reach nuclear weapons of any type or a military dimension of any type, but it is... a response for the lack of commitment demonstrated by the Europeans."

He also reiterated Tehran's long-standing claim that it does not plan to acquire a nuclear bomb.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), as the 2015 deal to limit Tehran's nuclear program was known, was signed between Iran and world powers including the United States and the European Union. The agreement capped Iranian uranium enrichment at 3.67% in exchange for sanctions relief.

The US withdrew from the deal in 2018 under President Donald Trump, then launched a wave of sanctions designed to crippled Iran's economy. JCPOA signatories have since 2021 attempted to bring Washington and Tehran back to the negotiation table. The parties have held on-and-off talks but have so far failed to return to an agreement.

While it was only the US that pulled out of the deal, that withdrawal affected European trade with Iran, said Ali Vaez, Iran Project Director at International Crisis Group think tank.

"As a result... around 80% of Europe's trade with Iran evaporated almost overnight," Vaez told CNN. "And the Europeans made plenty of lofty promises to the Iranians in 2018 ... and none of it materialized."



Tit for tat

Iran has long argued that after the US' withdrawal, other JCPOA signatories have also failed to stick to their parts of the deal, continuing instead to impose sanctions against Tehran.

The Iranian president told CNN that should Europeans at "any time return to a fulfillment of their commitments, rest assured, and have no doubt that the Islamic Republic as it has done in the past, will fully adhere to [its] commitments."

Tehran has recently expressed frustration with mounting Western sanctions against it, as well as the refusal by the UK,

France and Germany (the E3) to lift a number of sanctions on individuals and entities involved in Iran's missile, nuclear, and other weapons programs, which under the 2015 nuclear pact were due to be lifted next month.

This month, the E3 said they will not be lifting sanctions on Iran's missile programs as scheduled, but will instead be transferring them into domestic laws "in response to continued Iranian non-compliance with their JCPOA commitments and ongoing nuclear escalation."

Iran's foreign ministry called the decision "illegal," and that it "amounts to a tension-building measure, which is taken in bad faith," Iranian media reported.

Iran this month barred several UN inspectors from conducting verification activities on its nuclear program, the IAEA said, adding that Tehran has "effectively removed about one third of the core group of the Agency's most experienced inspectors designated for Iran."



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Raisi told CNN that Iran's intention is not to bar the IAEA from conducting inspections, but that Tehran has withdrawn designations of inspectors from France, Germany and the United Kingdom, the countries Iran accused of not living up to their commitments under the 2015 deal, as well as the US.

"Iran hasn't said we do not wish any inspectors to be here," Raisi told CNN. "We have said what these three countries, what has been said by the IAEA is that we have certain considerations vis-a-vis individuals from these three countries," he said, adding that "their trust is under a shadow of doubt."

In a joint statement, the three European countries and the US on Monday demanded that Iran immediately reverse its decision and "fully cooperate with the Agency."

The European signatories to the JCPOA have lost a lot of credibility in the eyes of the Iranians, Vaez of Crisis Group said, adding that the Iranians see them as having "overpromised and underdelivered." This view, he added, is taken up by hardline politicians like Raisi, as well as more moderate ones.

"Now, you see that the Iranians and the Americans have reached an understanding that has toned down Iran's nuclear program, in which Europe played no role," Vaez said.

In a sign of a diplomatic breakthrough, Iran this week released five American prisoners in a Qatar-mediated deal that also included the unfreezing of some \$6 billion in Iranian funds and the release of five Iranian prisoners in the US.

The deal was a sign of what analysts described as a method of unwritten arrangements between Washington and Tehran, with smaller exchanged concessions in lieu of a wider, formal agreement.

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