

Biden Special Envoy Warns US Must ‘Prepare’ for Fully Nuclear Iran

The Biden administration’s special representative for Iran admitted Wednesday that America and its allies must brace for a world in which Tehran’s theocratic government “doesn’t have constraints on its nuclear program” as talks aimed at reviving the moribund 2015 nuclear deal grind on in Vienna.

During an event hosted by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Robert Malley said that the US has made clear to Iran’s representatives that “we are prepared to remove all of the sanctions that were imposed by the Trump administration that were inconsistent with the [nuclear] deal, and therefore we could get back to the business that we should have been on.”

“That’s where we are today, and I think that’s the choice that Iran faces,” Malley said. “Are they prepared to go back to that or do they want to choose a different path?”

Despite the White House’s overtures, Malley added, “the Iranians have refused to have direct communication with us, direct contact with us, so everything has been done through intermediaries.”

“It’s not a particularly constructive [format], it’s one that lends itself to delays, it’s one that lends itself to misunderstandings, and all of that has happened.”

Then-President Donald Trump withdrew the US from the nuclear deal in May 2018. Representatives of the other five nations who signed the pact — China, France, Germany, Russia and the United Kingdom — have taken part in six rounds of face-to-face meetings in the Austrian capital this year, with the US participating indirectly.

Iran has hinted it’s ready for more talks, but has not committed to a date. Meanwhile, it has blown through limits on its nuclear activities that had been set by the deal.

Last month, a US-based think tank reported that Tehran could produce enough

weapons-grade uranium for an atomic bomb within a month.

“Every day that goes by, we’re getting a piece of Iran’s answer,” Malley said Wednesday. “Every day where they [the Iranians] are not coming back to the table, every day where they’re making statements about how little was achieved in Vienna, which is what the current team is saying, is telling us that this is a team that may not, in fact, be prepared to come back into what we would consider ... full mutual return to compliance.”

“And so, of course, we have to prepare for a world, which we’re doing now in consultation with our partners from the region ... where Iran doesn’t have constraints on its nuclear program and we have to consider options for dealing with that, which is what we’re doing even as we hope that we can get back to the deal,” he went on. “That is by far our preference. But as I said, Iran is giving us its answer by what it’s doing and not doing every day and we need to take that into account.”

Malley said he would be traveling soon to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar to discuss the matter with leaders there.

Meanwhile, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid said Wednesday that they have opened discussions on “other options” for action should the US rejoin the nuclear deal and Iran reject an offer to come back into compliance with it.

“Time is running short,” Blinken said at a joint event with Lapid and UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan. “We are prepared to turn to other options if Iran doesn’t change course, and these consultations with our allies and partners are part of it.”

Blinken did not elaborate on what those “other options” were, but noted ominously that “it takes two to engage in diplomacy, and we have not seen from Iran a willingness to do that at this point.”

“There are moments when nations must use force to protect the world from evil,” Lapid chimed in. “If a terror regime is going to acquire a nuclear weapon we must act. We must make clear that the civilized world won’t allow it. If the Iranians don’t believe the world is serious about stopping them, they will race to the bomb.”

Lapid had met Tuesday with Vice President Kamala Harris as well as National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan to convey Israel's concerns about the US rejoining the nuclear deal and restoring sanctions relief.

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