

US and Iran to join talks aimed at rejoining nuclear deal



Iran and the United States will join talks in Vienna next week that aim to return all parties to the terms of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

There will not be direct contact between Iran and the United States at the in-person meeting, according to a European Union statement issued after a virtual meeting Thursday of the countries left in the deal — China, Russia, Iran, Britain, Germany, and France.

Instead, a coordinator will make “separate contacts” with “all JCPOA participants and the United States.”

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The Trump administration pulled the United States out of the deal in 2018.

The New York Times, which first reported on the resumption of talks, quoted a U.S. official saying that the indirect talks would sketch out a sequence for the parties to return to the original agreement. Once the sequence was in place, Iranian and U.S. officials would meet directly.

President Joe Biden has said he wants a return to the deal, which traded sanctions relief for a rollback of Iran's nuclear program. But Iran wants the Biden administration to first end the sanctions that President Donald Trump imposed after leaving the deal.

Biden wants Iran to first return to full compliance with the deal. Iran, retaliating against Trump, broke components of the agreement relating to enhanced uranium enrichment.

Israel continues to vehemently oppose the deal in any form, and Biden's aim to rejoin it has been the first point of tension between him and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The U.S. official told The Times that the United States would not seek to keep in place the sanctions Trump imposed as a means of leverage. Republicans, a number of Democrats, and the centrist pro-Israel movement have pressed the Biden administration to maintain some sanctions.

The EU statement said that the virtual meeting Thursday was at the level of deputy foreign ministers. The parties "emphasized their commitment to preserve the JCPOA and discussed modalities to ensure the return to its full and effective implementation," the statement said.

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