



[Iran Nuclear Talks Restart in Vienna After a Five-Month Hiatus](#)

Following a five-month hiatus, Iran nuclear talks restarted this week in the Austrian capital city of Vienna. Representatives from Iran are meeting with counterparts from Russia, the United Kingdom, Germany, and others in an effort to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal, which the United States withdrew from several years ago under the previous Trump administration. Due to this, Iran refuses to engage in face-to-face meetings with the United States, and as such the negotiations are indirect talks between the two with messages being relayed to American representatives. U.S. President Biden has voiced the United States' dedication to return to the JCPOA, but analysts have expressed a notable degree of skepticism and uncertainty regarding the prospects of successful negotiations. On the one hand, some are hopeful because of Iran's desire to have hampering economic sanctions on itself removed, but at the same time, its seemingly rigid position on the lifting of all sanctions could make diplomacy attempts extremely challenging. There is also concern over Iran's continued nuclear enrichment and the potential implications that this may have on the possibility of reviving the JCPOA. As this week's talks are adjourned until next week, there is a sense that at the moment negotiations have stalled and that the gaps for compromise are wide and will be hard to bridge moving forward.

The original JCPOA was a widely accepted and agreed upon deal. Iran was found to be compliant to the standards that were set and tariffs were largely lifted, helping the nation's struggling economy. The JCPOA was also a staple agreement for international cooperation, particularly among adversaries such as the United States and Iran. However, when former President Trump pulled out of the deal, the United States lost credibility on the global stage and left some wondering about whether adherence to something like the JCPOA was too volatile and subject to shifts in foreign policy that may be affected by administration transitions within the country. The ramifications of this are being dealt with even regarding the format of the Vienna talks, as Iran is still unwilling to engage in direct negotiations with the United States.

Iran's continued uranium enrichment has elicited worry among security experts. Recently, Iran has increased these levels to 20% consistently across its nuclear program, well above the 3%-5% used in nuclear energy. Although 20% is not enough for weapons-grade uranium, it makes the ability to reach that level of enrichment far more likely. Iran has also grown two small-size reactors containing listed levels of 60% enriched uranium, getting even closer to the 90% weapons mark, further fueling the efforts to revive the JCPOA or reach a new deal. There are other observers who have retained a sense of optimism. With Iran's economy struggling like many amid the COVID-19 pandemic, a widespread eagerness exists to lift sanctions that have harmed access to food and medical access. In fact, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi has called it his administration's top priority. While Iran is largely focused on alleviating sanctions, United States officials are concerned with the country's accelerated rate of nuclear development which they fear could make it too late to realistically return to the JCPOA. Analysts have also highlighted that enrichment may be being used as a tactical tool by Iran to get a leg up in the ongoing negotiations.

While there is a desire on both sides for progress on the Iran nuclear talks, a clear sense of reservation and skepticism does exist. The JCPOA itself was a long and complex process which was initially challenging to achieve, and now the possibility of a revival or a new deal is even more daunting. Experts are hopeful that the talks in Vienna will be fruitful, but are fully aware that it is a major uphill battle.