

The Vienna Talks & US Interests

13th June 2021: "Indirect talks between Tehran and Washington on reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal resumed in Vienna on Saturday as the European Union said negotiations were "intense" and Germany called for rapid progress...The U.S. delegation to the talks, known as the Joint Commission of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), is based in a hotel across the street as Iran refuses face-to-face meetings."

The Background:

- In 2015, Iran and several other states (including the USA) signed the Iran Nuclear Deal. The Deal gave Iran sanction relief, and placed restrictions on Iran's nuclear program.
- Then in 2018, President Trump withdrew the US from the deal, claiming that it had failed to curtail Iran's missile program and their regional influence.
- A year later, Iran began ignoring limitations on its nuclear program.
- During the US Presidential elections, Biden said that he'd return the US to the Iran Nuclear Deal. And in October 2020, the USA failed to extend to extend the embargo and reimpose international sanctions on Iran using the JCPOA's "snapback" mechanism.
- Back in April, Iran's foreign ministry, Saeed Khatibzadeh, said that Iran would return to the 2015 nuclear limits once the US removed "all imposed, re-imposed and re-labeled sanctions." And the US State Department's Ned Price said that would "lift sanctions inconsistent with the JCPOA, while stressing he could not offer chapter and verse on what those might be." ([Source](#))
- At present, the Vienna talks have restarted, after they fell short of reaching a final agreement when they ended on May 19. They are aimed at allowing the United States and Iran to return to compliance with the 2015 Iran nuclear deal. And the political leaders are saying that they will reach an agreement but they need time. Biden's administration has also said that they have a commitment to a 'follow-on' agreement or series of agreements. ([Source](#))

The original Nuclear Deal specified the limits on the nuclear programme as well as the sanctions that the US had to lift. But the USA 'complicated matters', when the Trump administration issued several overlapping sanctions designations under ballistic missile, terrorism and human rights authorities. Joe Biden said that he had an "unshakable commitment" to preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon while also promising to offer Tehran "a credible path back to diplomacy." ([Washington post](#))

In terms of Iran's stance in the talk - the media is currently discussing the impact that the elections will have on Iran's position in the deal. They may use the domestic situation to justify, or come to terms with, whatever conclusion the talks come to. But in reality, it won't change anything. The foreign policy isn't controlled by the President - it's controlled by Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, who has been in power since 1989. As such, Iran doesn't change its "overarching strategy abruptly, not even in accordance with the identity of a newly elected president." ([Source](#)) Their focus seems to be on the sanctions that they US placed on them- and their need to have them removed.

Yes, the US is pursuing its interests- it always has.

When reading the news reports and general political analysis, there's a suggestion that Iran and USA are enemies, with both states standing firm and pushing their individual agendas. What those reports don't discuss is how the USA is using Iran to push their agenda in the region, and the Iran Nuclear Deal, President Trump's subsequent withdrawal and the current Vienna talks are all taking place within that context.

For the past few years, the media and the political elite in the US have criticized Donald Trump, emphasizing how rash he is. They discussed the mistake he made when the USA pulled out of the Nuclear Deal. Ignoring the fact that he was still a part of the USA's political structure - the President of the US doesn't act as an individual, he works within the country's institutions, all of which are designed to support the state's national interests. So, when the USA pulled out of the Iran Nuclear Deal, and imposed the sanctions, it was because it was in their interest to do so.

This is apparent in numerous decisions that the USA made during Donald Trump's presidency - where they hid their more controversial decisions behind his personality and style. Examples include stopping migration, containing China, pulling US companies back into America. They even benefited from the high price of oil, which came when they put pressure on Iran, as it benefited American oil companies who rushed to produce more shale oil.

Currently, the USA and the media are encouraging an image that the USA is willing to play by the 'rules' of the international system; taking part in or pursuing agreements like the Paris Agreement, taking steps to rejoin the Human Rights Council and Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). So, it seems that Joe Biden is working within that context - the impact that this will have on the Vienna Talks remains to be seen. But the USA has always, and will continue to (explicitly or implicitly) pursue its interests in the region.

America's need for Iran has changed over time.... which led to changes in the USA's relationship with Iran.

In 2015, Iran signed a humiliating Nuclear Deal and in return America removed the sanctions that they had placed on the country. This anchored the Iran's open relationship with the USA. They continued to play a role in the region that allowed America to maintain its global dominance and lightened the superpower's burden while providing a cover for the political games that it played in the region.

Iran's role in backing various conflicts (such as those in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon) destabilized the region - a role which America needed them to play. The inflated threat of Iran's nuclear programme gave the USA the excuse that they needed to augment its military ties with 'Israel' and the Gulf countries. While also exploiting their pacts in the Middle east to control Middle Eastern oil.

Then, when US President Trump pulled out the deal, it was disguised as a mistake but that wasn't the case. By that point, Bashar Al-Assad's position had strengthened in Syria. They didn't need Iran to pursue a direct role in the region, and withdrawing from the deal allowed them to prepare for new conditions to reduce the Iranian role in the region while also pushing Iran to sign a new nuclear agreement, which would have benefited American companies by granting them significant access to Iranian markets.

It would seem that now, America will need Iran to continue to play a role in the region. But as they have yet to issue any reports on the decisions that are being made, how and in what capacity remains to be seen. As Joe Biden is pulling his troops out of the region - and looking for alternative ways to solidify America's influence, they will need to consider what role they need Iran to play.

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