

IAEA-IRAN – INTERNATIONAL RELATION

Iran says return of IAEA inspectors not full resumption of cooperation. Following a major conflict, IAEA inspectors have returned to Iran to resume nuclear monitoring. Iran is simultaneously pursuing diplomacy with European nations to prevent the re-imposition of crippling UN sanctions under the 2015 JCPOA nuclear deal.

IAEA Inspectors Return to Iran Amid Heightened Tensions

1. Current Diplomatic Situation

Resumption of Inspections – In a significant move towards de-escalation, inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) have returned to Iran. This is the first such visit since the military conflict with Israel and the US in June 2025.

Context of Suspension – Iran had previously suspended all cooperation with the IAEA. Tehran's official reason was the agency's failure to condemn the Israeli and US strikes on its nuclear facilities, which Iran viewed as a violation of its sovereignty and international law. This suspension created a critical gap in international oversight of Iran's nuclear activities.

Shift Towards Diplomacy – Facing the threat of further economic isolation and the immense cost of post-war reconstruction, Iran is now publicly urging a diplomatic resolution to the crisis.

2. Ongoing Negotiations in Geneva

Key Participants – High-stakes negotiations are underway in Geneva between Iran and the E3 nations (the United Kingdom, France, and Germany). These three European powers were original signatories to the 2015 nuclear deal and have been central to diplomatic efforts.

The "Snapback Sanctions" Threat – The E3 are leveraging a powerful tool – the threat of "snapback sanctions." This is a specific mechanism within the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Mechanism Explained – It allows any of the original parties to the deal to unilaterally trigger the re-imposition of all pre-2015 United Nations sanctions on Iran if they deem Iran to be in significant non-compliance with its commitments. This process cannot be vetoed by other members of the UN Security Council, making it a potent form of pressure.

3. Background of the Iranian Nuclear Issue

The JCPOA (2015 Nuclear Deal) – This landmark agreement was the culmination of years of diplomacy.

1. **Iran's Obligations** – Iran agreed to severely limit its uranium enrichment program, reduce its stockpile of enriched uranium, modify its heavy-water reactor to prevent plutonium production, and allow the IAEA the world's most intrusive inspections regime.
2. **International Concessions** – In return, crippling economic sanctions imposed by the UN, EU, and US were lifted, allowing Iran to re-enter the global economy, particularly its oil market.

US Withdrawal and "Maximum Pressure" (2018) – The Trump administration unilaterally withdrew the US from the JCPOA, calling it a "terrible deal." It then re-imposed severe sanctions as part of a "maximum pressure" campaign, aiming to force Iran back to the negotiating table for a more restrictive agreement. This move effectively nullified the economic benefits Iran was supposed to receive.

Israel's Security Concerns – Israel has long maintained that Iran's nuclear program is a cover for developing nuclear weapons, which it views as an existential threat. It has consistently advocated for a hardline stance and has been implicated in covert operations targeting Iran's nuclear infrastructure and scientists.

The June 2025 War – This recent conflict marked a dramatic escalation, with direct Israeli and US military strikes on Iranian nuclear sites. This event shattered the already fragile diplomatic framework and led directly to Iran's expulsion of IAEA inspectors.

4. Broader Strategic Implications

1. **For the IAEA** – The ability to return to Iran and resume inspections is crucial for the agency's credibility and mission. It allows the IAEA to re-establish a baseline of Iran's nuclear activities, ensure

that nuclear material has not been diverted for military purposes, and uphold the global non-proliferation regime.

2. **For Iran** – The primary goal is economic survival. Avoiding the snapback of UN sanctions is vital to stabilizing an economy already battered by US sanctions and recent war damage. Access to international markets is essential for reconstruction and preventing domestic unrest.
3. **For Global Politics** – The crisis has reignited the fundamental debate between the principles of non-proliferation and national sovereignty. It questions the right of a nation to pursue advanced technology versus the international community's collective interest in preventing the spread of nuclear weapons.
4. **For India** – India finds itself in a difficult strategic position.
 - i. **Balancing Relations** – India must carefully balance its ties with Iran, a key partner for projects like the **Chabahar Port** (which provides a crucial trade route to Afghanistan and Central Asia) and an important energy supplier, against its deep and growing strategic partnerships with the US and European nations.
 - ii. **Energy Security & Regional Stability** – As a major importer of oil, India is heavily dependent on the stability of West Asia. Any conflict or disruption in the Persian Gulf directly threatens India's energy security and can lead to significant economic repercussions.

About the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

Establishment – The IAEA was established as an autonomous organization in **1957**. Its creation was inspired by US President Dwight D. Eisenhower's famous "**Atoms for Peace**" speech to the UN in 1953, which proposed a body to control and promote the peaceful use of atomic energy.

Headquarters – Vienna, Austria.

Core Functions – The IAEA's work rests on three main pillars –

- i. **Safety & Security** – Promoting the safe and secure use of nuclear technology and protecting against radiological incidents or acts of nuclear terrorism.
- ii. **Peaceful Promotion** – Assisting member states in using nuclear science and technology for peaceful purposes, such as generating electricity (nuclear energy), treating cancer (nuclear medicine), improving crop yields, and managing water resources.
- iii. **Safeguards & Verification** – This is its most well-known role. The IAEA conducts on-site inspections and uses remote monitoring to verify that member states are honoring their commitments under non-proliferation agreements, primarily the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and that nuclear material is not used to build weapons.

Reporting Structure – It is not under direct UN control but reports to both the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council.

Recognition – The agency and its then Director General, Mohamed ElBaradei, were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005 for their efforts to prevent nuclear energy from being used for military purposes.

India and the IAEA

Founding Member – India has been an active member of the IAEA since its inception in 1957.

India-Specific Safeguards Agreement (2009) – This is a unique agreement crucial to India's foreign policy.

Background – Following the landmark US-India Civil Nuclear Deal of 2008, which recognized India as a responsible state with advanced nuclear technology, India signed this special agreement with the IAEA.

Significance – As India is not a signatory to the NPT, this agreement allowed it to separate its civilian and military nuclear facilities. It placed its civilian nuclear reactors under IAEA safeguards in perpetuity, which in turn opened the door for India to engage in international nuclear trade and import fuel and technology for its civilian program.

Source – <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/iran-says-return-of-iaea-inspectors-not-full-resumption-of-cooperation/article69983073.ece>