

Netanyahu turns up the volume as Iran deadline nears



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addresses a conference in Tel Aviv on March 27, 2018

JACK GUEZ (AFP)

The 2015 nuclear deal 'gives Iran a clear path to a nuclear arsenal' PM said

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made a fresh call Monday for an overhaul of the Iran nuclear deal as US President Donald Trump's deadline for further Iranian concessions edged closer.

Trump has threatened to tear up the 2015 agreement that lifted sanctions on Iran in exchange for curbs to its nuclear activity, unless it curbs its ballistic missile program by May 12.

"Israel will not allow regimes that seek our annihilation to acquire nuclear

weapons,” Netanyahu told an audience of diplomats in a speech in Jerusalem, at the Menachem Begin Heritage Center event marking Israel’s 70th anniversary.

“This is why this deal has to be either fully fixed or fully nixed,” he said in English.

Iran says it is ready to relaunch its nuclear program — which the West suspects is designed to produce a bomb — if Trump kills the deal.

Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif encouraged the European signatories to sign the deal on Monday, stating that there is no “plan B.”



US President Donald Trump has described North Korea’s pledge to halt nuclear and missile tests as “big progress”

JOE RAEDLE (GETTY IMAGES NORTH AMERICA/AFP/File)

“It is either all or nothing. European leaders should encourage Trump not just to stay in the nuclear deal, but more important to begin implementing his part of the bargain in good faith,” the foreign minister tweeted.

Netanyahu said the 2015 agreement leaves Iran able to quickly reboot its nuclear programme to enable military production.

“It gives Iran a clear path to a nuclear arsenal,” he said. “It allows, over a few years, unlimited enrichment of uranium, the core ingredient required to produce nuclear bombs - and nothing else - and it also does not deal with the ballistic missiles that can deliver this weapon to many, many countries.”

He explained that former Prime Minister Menachem Begin “exemplified for us the commitment to defend Israel’s security at all costs.” The Begin Doctrine called on the Jewish State to destroy any enemy country’s nuclear capabilities, in 1981 it order the destruction of Iraq’s nuclear reactor.

This comes to a background of rising tensions between Israel and Iran who have been engaged in a succession of verbal altercations since Israel’s alleged April 9 strike on an Iranian-operated air base in Syria’s Homs. The strike killed 14 people including reportedly 7 Iranian personnel.



Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif at an appearance in Karachi in March

ASIF HASSAN (AFP)

The United States delivered much the same message Monday, at a meeting of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in Geneva.

Christopher Ford, US Assistant Secretary for International Security and Nonproliferation, said the Islamic republic's nuclear programme remained "dangerously close to rapid weaponization".

Russia and China have agreed to work together to thwart any attempts to sabotage the nuclear deal with Iran, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov said in Beijing on Monday, weeks before US President Donald Trump is set to decide the fate of the accord.

Calling the Iran agreement "one of the biggest achievements in international diplomacy in recent times", Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that "revising this document is unacceptable".

Iran insists it never intended to build a nuclear weapon.