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■ Snapback Mechanism – JCPOA & UN Resolution 2231

◆ A. The Legal Foundation of the Snapback

1. UN Security Council Resolution 2231 (2015):

- Endorsed the JCPOA between Iran and the P5+1 (U.S., UK, France, Russia, China + Germany).
- Set a **timeline** for lifting multilateral sanctions **provided** Iran complied with nuclear obligations.
- Incorporated a **snapback mechanism** in **Annex B, paragraph 11–13**.

2. Snapback Process:

- Any “**JCPOA participant state**” (originally defined as the P5+1) can notify the Security Council of a “**significant non-performance**” by Iran.
- Upon notification:
 - A **30-day countdown** begins.
 - If no resolution is passed to **continue sanctions relief**, the **previous UN sanctions automatically resume** (snap back).
 - **No veto** can stop the snapback once triggered.

3. The U.S. vs. Europe Interpretation:

- After the U.S. **withdrew from JCPOA in 2018**, European nations (France, UK, Germany – E3) argued the U.S. **lost its right** to trigger snapback.
- However, **E3 still retains that right** as active JCPOA participants, and they have **hinted** at using it since Iran has expanded its enrichment levels and reduced IAEA cooperation.

◆ B. Why the Snapback Could Be Activated Now

1. Iran’s Ongoing Violations:

- Uranium enrichment above **60% purity**, far beyond JCPOA limits.
- **Advanced centrifuge use** and installation.
- **Non-cooperation** with the IAEA inspections, particularly since 2023.
- Accumulation of enriched uranium close to **weapons-grade** threshold.

2. European Strategic Shift:

- After **years of diplomacy and patience**, E3 are considering the snapback as a **last-resort legal instrument**.
- The failure of Iran to re-enter negotiations since the collapse of talks in 2022 has **shifted their posture**.
- With the 2024 U.S. elections now behind us and the new administration's Iran policy still taking shape, the E3 (France, Germany, UK) may choose to **establish an independent baseline of diplomatic pressure** on Iran. This would allow them to assert leadership within the JCPOA framework and send a clear signal of enforcement continuity, **regardless of Washington's position**.

3. Strategic Objectives of the Snapback:

- Reinstatement of **UN arms embargoes**, which expired in 2020–2023 under JCPOA sunset clauses.
- Prevent Iran from legally **importing/exporting missiles and drones**.
- Signal to Iran's proxies and regional rivals that Europe is **ready to escalate pressure** multilaterally.

◆ C. Implications if Snapback Is Triggered

1. UN Sanctions Revival:

- **All pre-JCPOA UN sanctions** on Iran would return, including:
 - Arms embargo.
 - Travel bans and asset freezes on individuals and entities.
 - Restrictions on nuclear and missile-related technologies.

2. Iran's Response:

- Likely **declaration of JCPOA death**.
- Possible withdrawal from the **NPT or IAEA** regime.
- Increased **rhetoric and regional destabilization**.

3. Regional and Global Impact:

- **Russia and China** may oppose snapback politically but **cannot block** it legally.
- Potential **further isolation** of Iran from the global financial system.
- Possible **escalation** in the Gulf and Red Sea, depending on Iran's military reaction.



Draft Talking Points

Topic: The Snapback Mechanism Under UNSCR 2231 and Europe's Next Move on Iran

1. Opening Statement (Background & Context)

The snapback mechanism is a legal tool embedded in **UN Security Council Resolution 2231**, which endorsed the 2015 **JCPOA nuclear agreement** between Iran and the international community. It allows any participant state to **reimpose UN sanctions** if Iran is found to be significantly non-compliant. This was designed to be automatic — and **immune from veto** by other permanent Security Council members.

2. Iran's Breaches & Grounds for Activation

Over the past several years, Iran has **consistently escalated its nuclear activity** well beyond JCPOA limits — enriching uranium above 60%, deploying advanced centrifuges, and reducing access to IAEA inspectors.

These actions constitute a clear **material breach** of the agreement, and the **European trio — France, Germany, and the UK — now face a critical decision**: whether to invoke the snapback clause to restore multilateral pressure.

3. Europe's Strategic Dilemma

For years, the E3 tried to preserve the JCPOA through dialogue and patience. But with diplomacy stalled and Iran's program advancing, they are now considering the **snapback as a necessary legal and strategic move**.

With the **U.S. presidential transition complete** and Washington reassessing its Iran policy, **Europe may act independently** to show resolve and leadership — not only to Tehran but also to their own domestic constituencies and regional partners.

4. What Snapback Would Mean in Practice

If triggered, the snapback would **restore all previous UN sanctions** — including arms embargoes, travel bans, and financial restrictions.

It would also **re-legitimize secondary sanctions** and reframe Iran's activities as violations of international law — not just bilateral disputes.

5. Likely Reaction from Iran & the Global Stage

Tehran may respond with further escalation or symbolic withdrawal from nonproliferation agreements.

However, the **legal clarity** of the snapback process would **box in** Russia and China, who could protest politically but **cannot block** its activation under Resolution 2231.

6. Conclusion / Key Message

This is not about punishing Iran — it's about **reaffirming the credibility of the international system**. If agreements like the JCPOA can be violated without consequences, then the entire global nonproliferation architecture is weakened.

The E3 has a narrow window to act. The snapback is not only legal — it may now be **necessary**.

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30-Second Version (TV Intro Clip)

The snapback mechanism under UN Security Council Resolution 2231 allows any JCPOA participant to reimpose UN sanctions if Iran violates the nuclear deal. Today, Iran is enriching uranium far beyond agreed limits and limiting IAEA inspections. The European powers — France, Germany, and the UK — may now trigger snapback to restore international pressure. This is about defending the rule of law and preserving nonproliferation — not just pressuring Iran.

2-Minute Version (Full Segment Answer)

The snapback mechanism was built into **UN Security Council Resolution 2231**, which endorsed the 2015 Iran nuclear deal — the JCPOA. It gives any original participant state the legal right to **trigger the return of all prior UN sanctions** if Iran is found to be in serious non-compliance. Importantly, once activated, it **cannot be blocked by a veto** — not even by Russia or China.

Iran today is **enriching uranium above 60%**, using **advanced centrifuges**, and **denying full access** to international inspectors. These steps clearly violate the JCPOA framework. While the United States left the deal in 2018, the European powers — **France, Germany, and the UK** — have remained committed. But their patience is running thin.

With the U.S. presidential transition behind us, the Europeans may now act independently to defend the international system. If they trigger the snapback, all UN sanctions — including **arms embargoes, asset freezes, and travel bans** — would automatically return.

This is not just about Iran. It's about whether the international community has the **political will to enforce its own agreements**. If violations are ignored, the entire nonproliferation regime is weakened.

In short, the snapback is not only **legally sound**, but it may also now be **strategically necessary**.