

Key JCPOA Negotiator Talks Prospects for New Deal

By Phil Chaffee

Last month's Israeli and US strikes on three key Iranian nuclear sites "did not eliminate [Iran's] nuclear weapons program, if they choose to have one," former US Energy Secretary Ernie Moniz, a key negotiator of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, has warned.

Should Washington and Tehran strike a new deal, it will have to provide Tehran both "security of nuclear fuel supply" and investment in a peaceful nuclear program. It will also need to give Washington and its allies "a very high degree of confidence that there is no covert program to develop military applications of that technology," Moniz told Energy Intelligence [in an exclusive interview](#).

Reluctance to Talk

The former US official's comments come as Tehran sends mixed signals as to whether it will pursue new talks with Washington after the US used "bunker-buster" bombs on Iranian nuclear sites at Fordow and Natanz buried deep into mountains.

While Iran's parliament is [reportedly](#) pushing for Tehran to halt any talks until preconditions are established and met, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi wrote in a [Jul. 9 article](#) in the UK's *Financial Times* that Iran "remains interested in diplomacy, but we have good reason to have doubts about further dialogue." Washington has its own doubts. "They would like to talk," US President Donald Trump said in [Jul. 15 remarks](#), but "I'm in no rush to talk because we obliterated their site. They'd have to start all over. In fact, it's obliterated to the point that it's not usable anymore. They'd have to pick a different mountain."

Capacities Remain

Alongside [many other nuclear experts](#), Moniz does not agree with that assessment of the fallout from the US strikes. "Assuming that they still

retain a fair amount, if not all," of the more than 400 kilograms of stockpiled uranium enriched up to 60% U-235, "then, frankly, they already possess weapons-usable material," said the former US official.

Weaponized highly enriched uranium is typically enriched to over 90% U-235, but Moniz pointed out that 60% is usable for nuclear bombs and that weaponization is not too difficult. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio has argued that the Israeli and

US strikes on surface infrastructure at Iran's Isfahan nuclear site have eliminated any possibility of converting Iran's stockpiles of enriched uranium into a metal — something essential for weaponization.

Moniz argued that this is not the case. "If they don't already have duplicate facilities, reproducing that is not a major effort, and I think there's little doubt that in the past they have performed all of the individual activities needed to weaponize enriched uranium," he said. "Maybe it's not the most efficient bomb. Maybe it's not deliverable on a missile. But it's certainly a major nuclear explosive." Moniz was quick to note that Iran would never have produced this amount of enriched uranium if the 2015 Iran deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), was still in force. Under the JCPOA, "Not only was Iran required to dial back very significantly in their capacity to enrich, but for 15 years, which would not expire until early in 2031, Iran was also restricted to no more than 300 kilograms of uranium enriched to no more than 3.67% U-235, said Moniz. "That's a hell of a long way from where they were prior to the Israeli and American military strikes."

Former US energy secretary Ernest J. Moniz is founder and CEO of the Energy Futures Initiative.

[[Key JCPOA Negotiator Talks Prospects for New Iran Deal | Energy Intelligence](#)]