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Biden purposely unraveling all Trump legacies that healed Mid-East

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Israel not changing normalization deals; prepares for Biden review changes

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01.28.21
Biden purposely unraveling all Trump legacies that healed Mid-East

01.28.21
Biden targets Trump's tumultuous Mideast legacy
In depth: Despite being in the White House for one week, the new president has already rolled back some of his predecessor's biggest decisions; experts say, however, some of deals struck in the tail end of the Trump rule won't be easily overturned
AFP| Published: 01.28.21 , 23:46

Former U.S. President Donald Trump's mold-breaking approach has reshaped decades of Middle East diplomacy, but his legacy in the troubled region has quickly come under attack from his successor.

From unexpected normalization deals with Israel, to a "maximum pressure" campaign on rival Iran, the businessman-turned-president changed the face of the Middle East.

His close relations with autocratic heads of states and wealthy Gulf monarchies also personalized Washington's approach towards the strategic region which hosts thousands of U.S. troops.

Joe Biden promised to change all that.

In less than 10 days in the White House, the new president has already rolled back some of his predecessor's major moves, but analysts say many of the flurry of deals struck in the last weeks of the Trump administration won't - or shouldn't - be easily overturned.

Here is a look at what is at stake for Trump's Middle East legacy:

'Ping-ponging' Iran

On his first full day on the job, Secretary of State Antony Blinken confirmed the Biden administration wants to return to the 2015 nuclear deal trashed by Trump - but said it would only happen once Iran resumes its commitments.

Tehran has meanwhile called on Washington to first unconditionally lift sanctions, effectively dismantling the pressure campaign.

Observers say this ping-pong process exemplifies the difficulty in extricating the U.S. from Trump policies.

"The more the administration pursues the Iranians, the more the Iranians will pull back, in a bid to increase their leverage. Yet, the more the U.S. pulls back, the more the Iranians will try to force the U.S. to engage," said Jon B. Alterman from the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"We should not expect an easy return to negotiations, whatever the Biden team wants, and we should not anticipate that a supposedly wounded Iran will capitulate. Instead, we should anticipate a drawn-out process punctuated by crisis."

Arms sales

In a regional game-changer, the U.S. last year agreed to sell more than \$23 billion worth of top-of-the-line F-35 fighter jets and drones to the United Arab Emirates, to reward its diplomatic recognition of Israel.

Trump also backed arms sales to Saudi Arabia, despite lawmakers' objections which were centered on the kingdom's poor human rights record.

The Biden administration has said it is "temporarily" freezing the deals "to allow incoming leadership an opportunity to review".

Experts say a halt would raise questions about a potential impact on the normalization deal with Israel, which Trump saw as a key foreign policy achievement.

Israel ties

Trump's term saw a flurry of normalization deals between four Arab states and Israel. Most however were built on diplomatic quid pro quos, which makes them vulnerable in the Biden era.

Morocco's accord struck in December saw the U.S. back its rule over disputed Western Sahara. Despite hailing the peace deals, Biden has not committed to maintaining the recognition in the region, where tensions have simmered since the 1970s.

For its part, Sudan signed the deal less than a month after the U.S. removed it from its "state sponsors of terrorism" blacklist.

The Biden administration should not jeopardize these agreements and should "forge even more", said Dennis Ross and Juan Zarate in an article for the Washington Institute. "Although the instinct to make dramatic changes is understandable and sometimes correct, certain elements of Trump policy provide good opportunities for furthering Arab-Israeli engagement."

Bridging the Gulf

After a three-year diplomatic row between a Riyadh-led quartet and Qatar that veered from frosty to furious, Gulf leaders met in Saudi Arabia two weeks before Trump's exit and agreed to restore relations.

Washington had intensified pressure for a resolution, insisting Gulf unity is necessary to isolate Iran.

However, the accelerated agreement failed to address any of the quartet's conditions to restore relations with Doha, which was accused of being too close to Tehran and financing extremists.

As a result, "intra-Gulf rivalries could continue to stoke conflicts and political tensions in the Middle East and Africa," said Elham Fakhro of the International Crisis Group.

Yemen's fate

Trump's administration designated the Iran-backed Yemen Huthi rebels as a terrorist organization just one day before Biden's inauguration, a move that raised fears it could jeopardize aid operations and put millions of lives at risk.

Biden's administration on Monday froze the decision for one month.

Blinken said one of his top priorities is addressing the war in Yemen, where U.S. ally Saudi Arabia has been bombarding the Huthis since 2015.

Travel ban

One of Trump's first moves was to ban access to the United States to all travelers from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen, igniting international outrage and triggering domestic court battles.

On his first day, Biden lifted the measure, enabling many Middle Eastern families to visit their relatives for the first time in four years.

01.28.21

Israel not changing normalization deals; prepares for Biden review changes

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Israel plays down possible Biden administration review of arms for UAE

Netanyahu says that decision, which is typical during U.S. presidential handovers, will not change normalization deals; Abu Dhabi says it has anticipated move and is working closely with Washington

Reuters| Published: 01.28.21 , 18:58

Israeli leaders played down on Thursday a possible Biden administration review of U.S. arms sales to the United Arab Emirates that girded the Gulf power's rapprochement with Israel.

Washington said on Wednesday it had temporarily paused some pending arms sales to U.S. allies. The Trump administration, having brokered formal Israel-UAE ties in September, approved a first sale of F-35 warplanes and other weaponry for Abu Dhabi.

Reviews of this sort are typical after a U.S. presidential handover. The UAE said it had anticipated the move and would work closely with the Biden administration.

Israel is the only country in the region to have the F-35.

After initially voicing misgivings at its sale to the UAE, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Benny Gantz relented amid Trump administration assurances that Israeli military superiority would be preserved.

Asked by reporters if the review might set back Israel's efforts to build up relations with the UAE and other Arab countries, Netanyahu said: "I don't think so. I think we have passed the point of no-return."

"Everyone understands now after [Emirati Crown Prince] Mohammed bin Zayed and the King of Bahrain made this historic move, as well as the King of Morocco and Sunday. This is peace in exchange for peace. There are huge advantages here. I think it'll move ahead."

Gantz described the review as "routine".

Interviewed by Ynet TV, Gantz said he would speak to his U.S. counterpart, Lloyd Austin, on Thursday but did not elaborate.

01.28.21

Biden intends to restore \$806 million assistance to five million Palestinians

01.28.21

UN says U.S. aid for Palestinian refugees won't cover shortfall

UNRWA spokeswoman says even if Biden administration renews financial aid to the UN agency, it still faces possible collapse since 'improved income will not cover the huge liabilities that UNRWA already has'

AFP| Published: 01.28.21 , 17:31

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees expressed hope on Thursday that the United States will resume its funding, but said it still would not be enough to cover a shortfall.

Under former president Donald Trump, the United States halted its support for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, or UNRWA.

On Tuesday, Washington's interim UN envoy Richard Mills said President Joe Biden intends to "restore U.S. assistance programs that support economic development and humanitarian aid for the Palestinian people", without mentioning UNRWA.

"We welcome the Biden administration's decision to restore assistance to Palestinians and look forward to continuing conversation with them about resumption of aid to UNRWA," said the UN agency's spokeswoman, Tamara Alrifai.

Alrifai said the "2021 financial year looks very difficult".

"While the overall budget will remain at U.S. \$806 million, same as 2020, the income forecast in the best estimates will lead to an expected shortfall equivalent to three months of operations.

"We therefore expect a cashflow crisis as of March this year. More broadly, the expected deficit would be untenable and could lead to a financial collapse of the agency," Alrifai said.

"Our financial forecast takes into consideration the expected re-engagement of the U.S. administration, so we predict a bit more income than 2020 but this slightly improved income will not cover the huge liabilities that UNRWA already has."

The agency had entered 2021 with liabilities of \$75 million from the last financial year, and its annual deficit was expected to reach \$200 million in the current year, she added. Before it withdrew its support for UNRWA, the US was the largest contributor to the UN agency to the tune of \$365 million, or nearly 30 percent of its annual budget.

In November, UNRWA commissioner general Philippe Lazzarini said the agency faced a \$70 million funding shortfall that had jeopardized its ability to pay its staff full salaries in November and December.

UNRWA, whose 28,000 employees are mostly refugees, provides services such as education and healthcare to more than five million Palestinians in camps in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinian territories.

01.28.21

King of Jordan presses Israel to vaccinate PA; PA did not ask for assistance

01.28.21

Jordan presses Israel to vaccinate Palestinians

King Abdullah II tells World Economic Forum in Davos that Israel 'cannot vaccinate one part of your society and not the other'; PA did not ask for Israeli assistance and said they've ordered their own vaccine from Russia

AFP| Published: 01.28.21 , 16:37

Jordan's King Abdullah II said Thursday Israel's failure to provide vaccines to Palestinians in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip was counterproductive for the Jewish state.

"The Israelis have had a very successful rollout of the vaccine, however the Palestinians have not," Abdullah told the annual World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

"You cannot vaccinate one part of your society and not the other and think that you are going to be safe," he said via videoconference. "That is the number one lesson that COVID-19 taught us."

Israel launched its vaccination drive a month ago. Since then nearly 2.8 million of its nine-million population have received a first jab, with half of that number already getting the second dose too.

And although Jewish settlers in the West Bank are being inoculated, Palestinians are not, prompting sharp criticism from human rights groups and the Palestinians themselves. Earlier this month the Palestine Liberation Organisation urged the international community "to hold Israel to account" and ensure that it provides vaccines to "all Palestinians living under Israeli occupation."

However, under the terms of the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian Authority is responsible for the healthcare of its own population.

Ramallah also did not make an official request from Israel and has repeatedly said it is obtaining its own vaccines via a UN scheme and from Russia for its Sputnik V treatment. Abdullah said Thursday that the novel coronavirus "does not care about borders, the rich or the poor or whoever."

"We have got to look at the practicalities and the challenges that are ahead of us, to be able to communicate with each other and realize that we are one world, one small village," he said.

Some 2.8 million Palestinians live in the West Bank while two million others live in the Gaza Strip, which is blockaded by Israel and Egypt, citing security concerns.

In mid-January, under pressure from rights groups and Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit, the Israel Prison Service said it had begun vaccinating all its detainees, including the estimated 4,400 Palestinians held in its jails.

Jordan, which is home to Palestinian, Syrian and Iraqi refugees, launched its own vaccination campaign earlier this month.

It says it hopes to provide free vaccines to a quarter of the country's 10 million population, including foreign residents.

01.28.21

Israel wintry showers & snowy weekend with light heatwave expected Sunday

01.28.21

Israel braces for stormy weekend with local rains and chilly winds

Temperatures set to drop Thursday afternoon, accompanied by local **showers** which will intensify later in the day; Mount Hermon will be blanketed by thick layer of **snow**; light heatwave will reach Israel early **next week** and temperatures will **rise** considerably
Danny Rup, Ahiya Raved | Published: **01.28.21** , 11:24

Israel was bracing for the **return of the winter** weather Thursday, with **chilly spells** of local **rain** in northern and central Israel, which were expected to intensify in the afternoon hours.

Friday will be **wintery**, cold, rainy and occasionally stormy. The rain is expected to weaken in the evening.

Mount Hermon, Israel's northernmost point, was **expected** to be blanketed by a **thick** layer of **snow**.

Saturday will be **cool** and partly cloudy and **local rains** may fall in the country's **north** and along its **coastline**.

Early **next week**, a **light heatwave is expected** to reach Israel and temperatures will rise considerably.

Meanwhile, the Sea of Galilee's water level rose by half a centimeter (0.2 inches) in the past 24 hours, standing at 209.695 meters below sea level, the Government Water and Sewage Authority reported on Thursday.

The Sea of Galilee is 89.5 centimeters (2'11 feet) short of reaching its full capacity.

Predicted temperatures for Thursday and Thursday night: Eilat 10C-24C (50F-75F), Be'er Sheva 4C-20C (39F-68F), Haifa 11C-18C (52F-64F), Tiberias 12C-22C (54F-72F), Jerusalem 6C-14C (43-57F), Ashdod 9C-19C (48F-66F), Tel Aviv-Yafo 9C-20C (48F-68F).

01.28.21

Biden protocol snubs Israel PM as Congress critics put hold on Abraham Accords

01.28.21

Over week after taking office, Biden yet to call Netanyahu

Some argue **POTUS'** supposed **snubbing** of **PM** stems from new administration's **reluctance** to hand Israeli leader achievements that may **boost** his **reelection bid** in upcoming March polls; diplomats **claim Democrat simply follows protocol** and will contact Netanyahu soon

Itamar Eichner | Published: **01.28.21** , 09:46

Over a week after being inaugurated as the 46th president of the United States, Joe Biden has **yet to call** Prime Minister Benjamin **Netanyahu by Thursday morning**.

The 78-year-old Democrat had **already spoken to Canadian** President Justin Trudeau, **Mexican** President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, **British** Prime Minister Boris Johnson,

German Chancellor Angela Merkle, **French** President Emmanuel Macron and **Russian** President Vladimir Putin.

For comparison, Biden's Republican predecessor, former President Donald **Trump** - a close ally of the Likud leader, **called Netanyahu three days after** entering the White House in January 2017.

Some claim Biden's supposed snubbing of Netanyahu stems from the new administration's reluctance to hand the Israeli leader any achievements that may boost his reelection bid in the upcoming March elections, given past tensions between the premier and former U.S. President Barack Obama's administration in which Biden served as vice president.

The **rift between the parties** only seemed to have **grown after Israeli** officials **criticized** the **incoming administration's intentions** to revisit the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, also known as the **Iran nuclear deal** – an agreement struck between the Islamic Republic and world superpowers, **aiming to prevent** it from obtaining a **nuclear arsenal**. Trump withdrew from the agreement in 2018 due to what he deemed to be the agreement's failure to rein in Iran's nuclear aspirations and destabilizing effect on the region.

On the other hand, diplomats argue that **Biden** is simply following a U.S. foreign policy tradition to first call the Canadian leader, followed by Mexico, Britain and so on and expect him to call Netanyahu soon.

Biden's **Secretary of State** Anthony **Blinken did**, however, **call his Israeli counterpart**, Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi.

Ashkenazi congratulated Blinken on taking office and the two discussed regional strategic issues such as the expansion of peace agreements in the Middle East and the Iranian threat among other issues.

"The **United States is Israel's greatest friend and strategic partner** in the peace process, regional stability, and economic aspects. The U.S.-led peace agreements have created a broad coalition in the Middle East and we must all continue to work to expand the circle of peace and remove any threat that could undermine security stability in the region," Ashkenazi said, referring to a host of U.S.-brokered peace agreements between Israel and Arab countries, also **known as the Abraham Accords**.

"I am sure that together we will know how to act against global terrorism and any threat to our stability led by Iran and its cronies."

Both countries' top diplomats agreed to meet as soon as travel restrictions imposed due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic are eased.

Earlier this week, the new White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan spoke to his Israeli counterpart Meir Ben-Shabbat.

Meanwhile, **Jerusalem** was **surprised to learn the Biden** administration has put a temporary **hold on** several major foreign arms sales initiated by former President Donald Trump, with officials saying that includes a massive \$23 billion transfer of stealth F-35 fighter jets to the United **Arab Emirates**.

That sale and several other massive purchases of U.S. weaponry by Gulf Arab countries had been harshly criticized by Democrats in Congress. It also found opposition within Israel following reports that Prime Minister Netanyahu gave his secret assent to the sale as part of last year's normalization agreement between Jerusalem and Abu Dhabi.

In its waning months, the Trump administration authorized tens of billions of dollars in new arms sales, including announcing plans to send 50 F-35s to the UAE.

That announcement came shortly after Trump lost the Nov. 6 election to now-President Joe Biden and followed the signing of the Abraham Accords between Israel, Bahrain and the UAE, under which the Arab states agreed to normalize relations with Israel.

Congressional critics have expressed disapproval with such sales, including a major deal with Saudi Arabia, that then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo pushed through after bypassing lawmakers by declaring an emergency required it.

The critics have alleged the weapons could be used to prosecute Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen, which is the home of one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

Senators argued the sale of the defense equipment had unfolded too quickly and with too many questions. The administration has billed it as a way to deter Iran, but UAE would have become the first Arab nation - and only the second country in the Middle East, after Israel - to possess the stealth warplanes.

By its own laws, the U.S. must preserve what is known as Israel's qualitative military edge in the Middle East, essentially guaranteeing that the country surrounded by multiple larger enemy states has the advantage in weaponry.

Netanyahu's critics accused him of giving away this key military advantage in order to secure image-friendly agreements with countries that Israel had never fought in a war.

01.27.21

UAE & Bahrain urge Israel to unite in conference for US position on Iran

01.27.21

UAE, Bahrain urge Israel to unite on Iran position for U.S.

Speaking at annual INSS conference, Bahraini FM Al Zayani says the countries see eye to eye on the issue of Iranian expansion in the region and 'any future agreement with Tehran must reflect new reality in the Mideast'

i24NEWS| Published: 01.27.21 , 09:55

The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain on Tuesday urged Israel to join them in an outreach effort to the United States to make the countries' position on the Iranian threat in the region clear.

Speaking at a joint Israeli-Emirati-Bahraini panel during an annual conference of the Institute for National Security Studies, Bahrain's Foreign Minister Abdullatif ben Rashid Al Zayani said the country saw eye to eye on many aspects of the Iranian expansion in the region.

These included Iran's nuclear ambitions, ballistic missile program and support for regional terrorist groups.

"A common regional position on these issues will allow us to have greater influence over the United States," he said, stressing that the issues were of high importance for regional stability.

"Any future agreement with Iran must reflect the new reality in the region and be acceptable to all states in the region," he added.

UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash also pointed out that the original 2015 nuclear deal lacked a "common regional path."

The event also featured a speech by IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi, who stressed that Iran's recent advancements put it closer to the acquisition of a nuclear bomb. Kochavi said the military had already begun preparing blueprints for a possible attack in Iran, which would likely entail a massive military response from Tehran via Iranian-backed militias in the region, including Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

01.28.21

Pakistan court frees Islamist convicted of beheading US journalist Daniel Pearl

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Panel of three judges acquits main suspect in 2002 kidnapping and murder of Wall Street Journal reporter; Pearl family lawyer calls court decision 'a travesty of justice'

Reuters| Published: 01.28.21 , 12:44

Pakistan's Supreme Court on Thursday ordered the release of an Islamist convicted of beheading U.S. journalist Daniel Pearl, a decision that has left his family in "complete shock", lawyers said.

Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, who was the main suspect in the 2002 kidnapping and murder of Wall Street Journal reporter Pearl, was acquitted by a panel of three judges.

"By a majority of two to one, they have acquitted all the accused persons and ordered their release," a provincial advocate general, Salman Talibuddin, told Reuters.

Pearl, 38, was investigating Islamist militants in Karachi after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States when he was kidnapped.

His case grabbed headlines globally after a video of his beheading emerged weeks after he was abducted.

Sheikh and his co-accused are to be released immediately if they aren't required in any other case, the head of the court panel, Justice Mushir Alam, said in a short court order.

A high court last year commuted the death penalty of the British-born Sheikh into a life sentence and acquitted his three co-accused, citing lack of evidence.

The government and Pearl's parents challenged that decision and pleaded to the Supreme Court to reinstate the death penalty.

The Supreme Court turned down both pleas on Thursday.

The United States had said that it may seek to try Sheikh if efforts to keep him in prison failed.

The Pearl family was in "complete shock", the family's lawyer, Faisal Siddiqi, told Reuters, adding that the court decision was a travesty of justice.

"No amount of injustice will defeat our resolve to fight for justice for Daniel Pearl," he said.

01.27.21

Biden routine pauses foreign arms sales, including F-35s to UAE

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Biden pauses foreign arms sales, including F-35s to UAE

State Dept. calls move 'routine action' that most incoming administrations take on large-scale arms sales, declines to say if halt is permanent; sale of fighter jets had been criticized in Israel due to fears of erosion of regional military superiority

Associated Press, Ynet| Published: 01.27.21 , 21:58

The Biden administration has put a temporary hold on several major foreign arms sales initiated by former president Donald Trump, with officials saying that includes a massive \$23 billion transfer of stealth F-35 fighter jets to the United Arab Emirates.

That sale and several other massive purchases of U.S. weaponry by Gulf Arab countries had been harshly criticized by Democrats in Congress. It also found opposition within Israel following reports that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gave his secret assent to the sale as part of last year's normalization agreement between Jerusalem and Abu Dhabi.

The U.S. officials did not identify the other sales that had been temporarily halted.

The new administration is reviewing the sales but has not made any determination about whether they will actually go through, the State Department said.

It called the pause "a routine administrative action" that most incoming administrations take with large-scale arms sales.

"The department is temporarily pausing the implementation of some pending U.S. defense transfers and sales under Foreign Military Sales and Direct Commercial Sales to allow incoming leadership an opportunity to review," the department said.

"This is a routine administrative action typical to most any transition, and demonstrates the Administration's commitment to transparency and good governance, as well as ensuring U.S. arms sales meet our strategic objectives of building stronger, interoperable, and more capable security partners," it said.

In its waning months, the Trump administration authorized tens of billions of dollars in new arms sales, including announcing plans to send 50 F-35s to the UAE.

That announcement came shortly after Trump lost the Nov. 6 election to now-President Joe Biden and followed the signing of the Abraham Accords between Israel, Bahrain and the UAE, under which the Arab states agreed to normalize relations with Israel. Congressional critics have expressed disapproval with such sales, including a major deal with Saudi Arabia, that then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo pushed through after bypassing lawmakers by declaring an emergency required it. The critics have alleged the weapons could be used to prosecute Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen, which is the home of one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. Less than a month after the Nov. 10 UAE sale was announced, an effort to block the deal fell short in the Senate, which failed to halt it.

Senators argued the sale of the defense equipment had unfolded too quickly and with too many questions. The administration has billed it as a way to deter Iran, but UAE would have become the first Arab nation - and only the second country in the Middle East, after Israel - to possess the stealth warplanes.

By its own laws, the U.S. must preserve what is known as Israel's qualitative military edge in the Middle East, essentially guaranteeing that the country surrounded by multiple larger enemy states has the advantage in weaponry.

Netanyahu's critics accused him of giving away this key military advantage in order to secure image-friendly agreements with countries that Israel had never fought in a war.

01.26.21

Iran expects swift sanction lift Biden pledged, yet no official stance announced

01.26.21

Iran says Biden won't have infinite time to rejoin nuclear deal

In a further step away from the 2015 agreement, Islamic Republic spokesman Ali Rabiei threatens Tehran will begin to blocking short-notice inspections of its nuclear facilities by the UN's atomic agency

Associated Press| Published: 01.26.21 , 15:30

Iran warned the Biden administration on Tuesday that it will not have an indefinite time period to rejoin the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers.

Iran also said it expects Washington to swiftly lift crippling economic sanctions that former President Donald Trump imposed on the country after pulling America out of the atomic accord in 2018, as part of what he called maximum pressure against Iran.

Trump cited Iran's ballistic missile program among other issues in withdrawing from the accord. And when the Trump administration increased sanctions, Iran gradually and publicly abandoned the deal's limits on its nuclear development.

The remarks Tuesday by Iran's Cabinet spokesman Ali Rabiei are part of pressure that Tehran is trying to exert on the U.S. as it seeks to increase its leverage and get the Biden administration to quickly return to the deal.

President Joe Biden has moved swiftly to dismantle Trump's legacy by signing a series of executive actions that reverse course on a wide range of issues, including climate change and immigration.

Though Biden has pledged to return to the nuclear deal, Rabiei said there has yet to be any communication between Iran and Biden on the subject.

"The U.S. will not have all the time in the world," Rabiei said. "We are waiting for the official announcement of their stance as well as the lifting of sanctions."

In the meantime, he added that Iran would take a step further away from the nuclear deal by imposing a "restriction" on inspections by the UN nuclear watchdog in late February. In December, Iran's parliament approved a law under which part of the inspections that the deal had provided for would be suspended in February if European signatories to the 2015 nuclear deal do not offer relief from oil and banking sanctions.

"The window of opportunity will not be open forever, either for the U.S. or the European members of the nuclear deal to fulfill their commitments," Rabiei added.

Tensions between Tehran and Washington have steadily increased. During Trump's final days as president, Tehran seized a South Korean oil tanker and begun enriching uranium closer to weapons-grade levels, while the U.S. has sent B-52 bombers, the USS Nimitz

Iran has also increased its military drills, including firing cruise missiles as part of a naval drill in the Gulf of Oman this month.

Iran has missile capability of up to 2,000 kilometers (1,250 miles), far enough to reach archenemy Israel and U.S. military bases in the region. Last January, after the U.S. killed a top Iranian general in Baghdad, Tehran retaliated by firing a barrage of ballistic missiles at two Iraqi bases housing U.S. troops, resulting in brain concussion injuries to dozens of American soldiers.

In a separate development Tuesday, Iranian state TV said Iran successfully tested sophisticated technology for light-based data transfer — known in science as entanglement-based secure quantum cryptography — at a distance of 1.6 kilometer (1 mile) in the capital, Tehran.

The technology is expected to allow for a secure way of sharing secret information between remote users.

The country's nuclear department chief, Ali Akbar Salehi, said Iranian experts embarked on the encryption technology, which only a few in the world have mastered so far, in 2018 and hope to use it in satellite communications by 2025.

Occasionally Iran announces technological achievements that cannot be independently verified.