

Turkey blocked from US F-35 program after Russian missile purchase

Wed, 2019-07-17 21:32

WASHINGTON: The United States said on Wednesday that it was removing Turkey from the F-35 fighter jet program, a move that had been long threatened and expected after Ankara began accepting delivery of an advanced Russian missile defense system last week.

The first parts of the S-400 air defense system were flown to the Murted military air base northwest of Ankara on Friday, sealing Turkey's deal with Russia, which Washington had struggled for months to prevent.

"The US and other F-35 partners are aligned in this decision to suspend Turkey from the program and initiate the process to formally remove Turkey from the program," said Ellen Lord, the under secretary of defense for acquisition and sustainment.

"The United States is spending between \$500 and \$600 million in non-recurring engineering in order to shift the supply chain," she said.

Used by NATO and other US allies, the F-35 stealth fighter jet is the world's most advanced jet fighter. Washington is concerned that deploying the S-400 with the F-35 would allow Russia to gain too much inside information of the stealth system.

"The F-35 cannot coexist with a Russian intelligence collection platform that will be used to learn about its advanced capabilities," the White House said in a statement earlier on Wednesday.

Washington has long said the acquisition may lead to Turkey's expulsion from the F-35 program.

The Pentagon had already laid out a plan to remove Turkey from the program, including halting any new training for Turkish pilots on the advanced aircraft.

"The situation with Turkey is a government-to-government matter and we'll comply with any guidance issued by the United States Government," said a spokesperson for Lockheed Martin Corp. , the prime contractor on the jet.



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[US-Iran envoy says Bahrain to host Gulf maritime security conference](#)

Wed, 2019-07-17 19:11

LONDON: The US said Bahrain will host a maritime security conference to ensure freedom of navigation in the region's waters.

The comments come after Washington said last week it was seeking partners for a military coalition to protect the busy shipping lanes off Iran and Yemen.

Brian Hook, the special envoy to Iran, said 65 countries would attend the event, Al-Arabiya reported, which comes amid a heightened threat for shipping in the waters around the Arabian Peninsula.

Several oil tankers have been attacked since May near the Strait of Hormuz – the narrow passage between the Arabian Sea and the Arabian Gulf, which serves as one of the world's main conduits for crude oil. Iran has been blamed for the attacks, which many view as a calculated response to increased economic and military pressure from the US over Tehran's nuclear program and destabilizing activities in the Middle East.

Tensions increased further when British forces helped seize an Iranian tanker off Gibraltar, which London said was attempting to deliver oil to Bashar Assad's Syrian regime.

Iran threatened to retaliate and last week a British warship had to aid a UK-owned tanker when Iranian vessels tried to block the ship as it passed through the Strait of Hormuz.

On Wednesday the UK's defense ministry said the reason it was deploying a third warship to the Gulf was "to protect UK interests and ensure freedom of navigation."



Meanwhile, mystery continued to surround a UAE-based tanker, which stopped transmitting tracking data late on Saturday after passing through the Strait of Hormuz and which the US said is now located in Iranian waters.

Iran said late Tuesday that it towed a ship into its waters after the ship issued a distress call.

A US official said the Panamanian-flagged Riah was in Iranian territorial waters, but it was not clear whether that was because Iran had seized it or rescued it.

*With Reuters



US 'SUSPECTS' IRAN SEIZED UAE-BASED OIL TANKER



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US 'suspects' Iran seized UAE-based oil tanker in Strait of Hormuz
Saudi Border Guards chief calls for global action plan to combat maritime terrorism

[Iran's foreign minister walks back from remark on missile talks](#)

Wed, 2019-07-17 17:36

TEHRAN: Iran's foreign minister said Wednesday that his country has no choice but to manufacture missiles for defense purposes – comments that reflect more backtracking after a remark by the top diplomat suggesting the missiles could be up for negotiations.

Mohammad Javad Zarif said in an interview with NBC News that aired earlier this week that if the US wants to talk about Iran's missiles, it needs "first to stop selling all these weapons, including missiles, to our region."

Iran has long rejected negotiations over its ballistic missile program, which remains under the control of the Iranian paramilitary Revolutionary Guard that answers only to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The foreign minister's remarks suggested a possible opening for talks as tensions remain high between Tehran and Washington.

But the Iranian mission to the United Nations promptly called Zarif's suggestion purely "hypothetical" and said the Iranian missiles were "absolutely and under no condition negotiable with anyone or any country, period."

In Tehran, the Foreign Ministry's spokesman, Abbas Mousavi, tweeted late on Tuesday that Zarif's comments meant to challenge Washington and "threw the ball into the US court while challenging America's arm sales" to its Mideast allies.

Zarif himself on Wednesday backpedaled on the missiles issue, saying Iran has no choice but to manufacture the missiles for its own defense.

He cited the 1980s Iran-Iraq war and tweeted that, "For 8 YEARS, Saddam (Hussein) showered our cities with missiles & bombs provided by East & West. Meanwhile, NO ONE sold Iran any means of defense. We had no choice but building our own. Now they complain."

"Instead of skirting the issue, US must end arms sales to Saddam's reincarnations," Zarif also said.

Tensions between Tehran and Washington have sharply escalated since President Donald Trump unilaterally last year withdrew America from the nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers and re-imposed sanctions on Iran, sending its

economy into freefall.

America has also rushed thousands of additional troops, an aircraft carrier, nuclear-capable B-52 bombers and advanced fighter jets to the Mideast amid unspecified threats from Iran.

Mysterious oil tanker blasts near the Strait of Hormuz, attacks by Iranian-backed rebels in Yemen on Saudi Arabia and Iran's shooting down of a U.S. military drone in the past months further raised fears of a wider conflict engulfing a region crucial to global energy supplies.

A compromise deal remains the best way to prevent Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon, British Prime Minister Theresa May said on Wednesday.

The UN nuclear watchdog has confirmed that Iran earlier this month violated the 2015 accord, and Iran's supreme leader on Tuesday said Tehran would keep removing restraints on its nuclear activity in the deal.

In her last major speech before stepping down next week, May said the nuclear deal must be protected "whatever its challenges".

"Whether we like it or not a compromise deal remains the best way to get the outcome we all still ultimately seek – to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, and to preserve the stability of the region," May said.

Recently, British authorities intercepted the Iranian supertanker Grace 1, carrying 2.1 million barrels of light crude oil, and seized it with the help of British Royal Marines off the coast of Gibraltar.

They believed it to be violating European Union sanctions by carrying a shipment of Iranian crude oil to Syria. Spanish authorities said the seizure came at the request of the United States.

This is not the only issue between Iran and Britain.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, a British-Iranian woman imprisoned in Iran following her arrest in April 2016 on charges of plotting against the Iranian government, has been transferred to a hospital mental health facility, her husband said Wednesday.

Her family denies the allegations against her.

Her husband, Richard Ratcliffe, said in Britain that his wife has been moved to the mental health ward of Iman Khomeini hospital under the control of the Revolutionary Guard.

"Hopefully her transfer to hospital means that she is getting treatment and care, despite my distrust of just what pressures can happen behind closed doors. It is unnerving when we don't know what is going on," he said.

Iran does not recognize dual nationality.

British officials have urged Iranian officials to let her have contact with her family.



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Donald Trump tells Iran to 'get out of Yemen' US 'suspects' Iran seized UAE-based oil tanker in Strait of Hormuz

[Brother of 2017 Ariana Grande concert bomber extradited from Libya to Britain](#)

Author:

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1563367859517319700

Wed, 2019-07-17 12:40

LONDON: Libya on Wednesday extradited to Britain the brother of a suicide bomber who attacked an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester in May 2017 and killed 22 people, officials said.

Salman Abedi's brother Hashem, who was arrested in Libya days after the bombing, was handed over to British officials and then flown to Britain where

he was arrested for murder, Greater Manchester Police said in a statement. "He has today been successfully extradited for offences relating to the Manchester Arena attack," it said.

Statement from [@CCIanHopkins](#) regarding Manchester Arena attack of 22nd May 2017 pic.twitter.com/wLY0eXgj97

– Greater Manchester Police (@gmpolice) [July 17, 2019](#)

Asked about the arrest, British Prime Minister Theresa May said it was "an important moment in the investigation.

"I hope it is a welcome step for the loved ones of all the victims," she said, condemning the "appalling" and "senseless" attack.

Manchester police said Abedi was also being arrested for attempted murder and "conspiracy to cause an explosion likely to endanger life".

He is expected to appear in a London court on Thursday.

A spokesman for the Libyan force which had held him earlier told AFP that Abedi was "in the plane headed for Britain".

Ahmed Ben Salem of the Special Deterrence Force (Radaa), an armed group which serves as the capital's police, said he was being extradited in line with a decision of the Libyan judiciary following a request from Britain.

According to Radaa, the brother has allegedly acknowledged that he was in Britain as the attack was being prepared and was "fully aware of the details".

Statement from [@CCIanHopkins](#) pic.twitter.com/1A4r7LTvKP

– Greater Manchester Police (@gmpolice) [July 17, 2019](#)

His father was also detained in Libya but released a few weeks later.

Salman Abedi carried out the bloodiest terror attack in Britain in more than a decade when he detonated a suicide bomb after a concert by Grande, leaving many children among the dead.

Libya's internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA), which is based in Tripoli, said in April that Hashem Abedi's case was being determined by the North African country's courts.

Libya has been mired in chaos since the ouster and killing of dictator Moamer Kadhafi in a NATO-backed uprising 2011.

Thanks to the Libyan authorities for their close cooperation on the successful extradition of Hashem Abedi. The Manchester attack was horrific; whoever is found responsible for this great evil must face justice. It is right that Abedi will now face criminal proceedings in the UK

– Jeremy Hunt (@Jeremy_Hunt) [July 17, 2019](#)

The Abedi family, originally from Libya, had fled to Britain during the dictatorship, but the brothers returned to the country along with their father when the uprising began in 2011.

There has been a surge in fighting since military strongman General Khalifa Haftar launched an offensive on Tripoli, seat of the GNA, on April 4.



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[Hashem Abedi](#)

[Salman Abedi](#)

Libya planning to extradite Manchester bomber's brother UK seeks arrest of Manchester bomber's brother, asks Libya to extradite him

Turkey clears RSF representative of 'terror propaganda'

Author:

AFP

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1563361289126865300

Wed, 2019-07-17 10:47

ISTANBUL: The Turkey representative for Reporters Without Borders (RSF) was acquitted on Wednesday of the charge of making "terror propaganda" for Kurdish militants, in a case which triggered international alarm over press freedom in the country.

With dozens of journalists behind bars and on trial, activists claim the climate for the media has deteriorated under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Supporters erupted into applause after RSF representative Erol Onderoglu, rights activist Sebnem Korur Fincanci and journalist Ahmet Nesin were acquitted by an Istanbul court.

They were accused of making "terror propaganda" on behalf of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) after guest-editing the pro-Kurdish Turkish newspaper Ozgur Gundem, as well as "condoning crime" and "inciting crime." The three risked 14 years in jail in the trial which began in November 2016. Ozgur Gundem had invited guest editors to take control of the paper in a campaign of solidarity as it faced pressure from the Turkish authorities. The newspaper was raided and permanently shut down in August 2016, accused of links with the PKK which has waged an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984.

The three campaigners were detained for a short period in 2016, and can now apply for financial compensation for time spent in jail.

The acquittals are in stark contrast with the harsh verdicts handed down by Turkish courts to critical journalists in recent years, the most controversial of which was the case against opposition daily Cumhuriyet whose former staff have been sentenced to jail.

"I warmly thank all those who supported us during the trial," Onderoglu, who will return to Istanbul next week, said via text message.

But he added: "The fight continues for all our colleagues unjustly on trial or imprisoned."

RSF said on Twitter it was "deeply relieved" by the acquittals but called for another trial due to begin against Onderoglu later this year to be scrapped. Onderoglu faces the same accusation of making "terror propaganda" after supporting academics who signed a petition calling for peace and the end of security operations against militants in the Kurdish-majority southeast. "Three years of absurd proceedings was already a form of unjust punishment.

AND a new trial against Erol will start on 7 November. These charges must be dropped!” RSF said.

Only Fincanci attended the hearing while Onderoglu and Nesin were abroad. Fincanci told AFP she was “very surprised” by the acquittal.



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