

Macron warns Tehran against further nuclear deal breaches

Author:

Reuters

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PARIS/DUBAI: France urged Iran on Tuesday to reverse its first major breach of a nuclear pact with world powers as European states signalled they would not seek to reimpose UN sanctions – for now.

The UN nuclear watchdog confirmed on Monday Iran had amassed more low-enriched uranium than permitted under the 2015 deal, a move that prompted US President Donald Trump to say Iran was “playing with fire.”

Exceeding the limit could culminate in the return of all international sanctions on Tehran but one European diplomat, asked if Europe would trigger the dispute resolution mechanism enshrined in the accord, said:

“Not for now. We want to defuse the crisis.”

A second diplomat said Britain, France and Germany would focus on bringing Iran back into compliance and that they wanted to gain more time for dialogue.

“In the immediate term, Iran must return to its obligations. There is room for dialogue,” a French diplomatic source added.

Tensions with Iran have escalated since Trump pulled the United States out of the pact last year and moved to bar all international sales of Iranian oil. Washington also blames Iran for bomb attacks on ships in the Gulf, something Tehran denies.

In a joint statement Tuesday, the foreign ministers of Germany, France, the UK as well as the European Union’s foreign policy chief said that “we have been consistent and clear that our commitment to the nuclear deal depends on full compliance by Iran.” They called for Iran to reverse the move “and to refrain from further measures that undermine the nuclear deal.”

They added that they “are urgently considering next steps” under the terms of the agreement in close coordination with other signatories.

The three European countries, Russia and China remained on board the 2015 deal meant to curb Iran’s nuclear ambitions after the United States withdrew last year.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

European signatories to the nuclear accord have sought to pull back the longstanding foes from direct confrontation, fearing a mistake could lead to war accidentally.

At the same time they are under US pressure to reimpose their own sanctions to force Iran to comply with an agreement Washington abandoned against Europe's advice.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif denies Iran is in violation of the accord, saying Iran is exercising its right to respond following the US pullout.

China, like France a signatory to the deal, said it regretted Iran's move but urged all parties to exercise restraint and said the US policy of increasing pressure on Iran was the "root cause of the current tensions."

The nuclear deal lifted most international sanctions against Iran in return for curbs on its nuclear work. It aimed to extend the time Tehran would need to produce a nuclear bomb, if it chose to, from roughly 2-3 months to a year. Iran's main demand – in talks with the European parties to the deal and as a precondition to any talks with the United States – is to be allowed to sell its oil at the levels before Washington pulled out of the deal and restored sanctions.

Iranian crude exports were around 300,000 barrels per day (bpd) or less in late June, industry sources said, a fraction of the more than 2.5 million bpd Iran shipped in April 2018, the month before Trump withdrew from the nuclear deal.

Iran says it will breach the deal's nuclear curbs one by one until it is able to sell that amount of oil, saying this is the least it should be able to expect from an accord that offered economic gains in exchange for nuclear restrictions.

In a statement, French President Emmanuel Macron urged Iran to fully abide by all terms of the accord and "reverse without delay this excess, as well as to avoid all extra measures that would put into question its nuclear commitments."

Iran's semi-official Fars news agency reported that the country's enriched uranium stockpile had passed the 300kg limit allowed under the deal.

"We have NOT violated the #JCPOA," Zarif wrote on Twitter, referring to the deal by the abbreviation of its formal title, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

He referred to a paragraph of the accord dealing with the dispute resolution mechanism.

Iran's parliament speaker Ali Larijani accused Trump of trying to bully Tehran with his remark about playing with fire, and said such language would only made Iran stronger.

Zarif reacted with exasperation to a White House accusation that Tehran had long violated the terms of the deal.

"Seriously?" he said in a one-word message on Twitter, after White House press secretary Stephanie Grisham said in a statement that "there is little

doubt that even before the deal's existence, Iran was violating its terms." Her comment contrasted with CIA Director Gina Haspel's testimony in January to the Senate Intelligence Committee that "at the moment, technically, they are in compliance."

Daryl Kimball, the executive director of the Arms Control Association, said the White House charge was illogical.

He said that at the time the nuclear deal was concluded, Tehran and the IAEA agreed on a roadmap through which Iran was addressing the nuclear watchdog's unanswered questions about the nuclear weapons research program that the IAEA and the US intelligence community assessed ended in 2003.

"The process is still underway," he said.



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Iraq PM curbs powers of Iran-backed armed groups
Mossad chief says Iran carried out Gulf attacks, Tehran offers bullish response

[Son of UAE's Sharjah ruler dies in London aged 39](#)

Tue, 2019-07-02 16:20

DUBAI: Sheikh Khalid bin Sultan Al-Qasimi, the son of the ruler of Sharjah, died in London on Monday, UAE state news agency WAM reported.

Sharjah Media Office confirmed in a tweet that Al-Qasimi, who was 39, had died, without giving any further details.

He served on a number of governing bodies including the Sharjah Urban Planning Council, which he chaired and he led work on the Sharjah Architecture Triennial exhibition.

Three days of mourning have been announced in the emirate, which will start when the sheikh's body arrives in Sharjah.

The funeral date will be announced later.

Sheikh Khalid was the co-owner of a London-based fashion label Qasimi. The company on Tuesday posted a tribute to its founder and creative director on Instagram.



[View this post on Instagram](#)

A post shared by QASIMI (@qasimi_official) on Jul 2, 2019 at 10:23am PDT

“Khalid was praised for his tenacious yet sensitive exploration of social-political issues, particularly those pertaining to the Middle East and its sometimes strained relationship with the West, a subject very close to his heart and his upbringing,” the statement said.

“His goal was to create a world full of beautifully crafted products infused with cultural, social and political undertones to inform and inspire.

“The design world has lost a great philosopher and artist, and we ask that the privacy of the family, team and brand are respected at this difficult time.”



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[Iraqi cleric plans 'slow coup to end corruption'](#)

Author:

Mon, 2019-07-01 23:51

BAGHDAD: The influential Iraqi Shiite cleric Muqtada Al-Sadr wants to replace senior government staff with independent professionals in a bid to improve services and fight corruption, according to supporters.

However, a prominent Sadrist leader told Arab News on Monday that Al-Sadr has

ruled out demonstrations to pressure Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi into accepting the changes.

Iraqi political factions are embroiled in a bitter struggle for control of thousands of top government jobs, including heads of independent security and inspecting bodies, deputy ministers, ambassadors, university heads, and military and security commanders.

Most of the positions have been run by proxy under the control of the Islamic Dawa Party, which has headed four out of the six governments formed since the 2003 US-led invasion.

Al-Sadr, who has millions of followers and controls the largest parliamentary bloc Sairoon, blames the Dawa party's appointments for financial and administrative corruption along with a decline in basic daily services.

He believes that "replacing all those senior employees by independent professional technocrats will improve government performance," the Sadrism leader said.

Al-Sadr also wants to "dismantle the mafia of financial and administrative corruption that controls the ministries and loots public money," he said.

"We can say that Al-Sadr is leading a peaceful and slow coup to correct the government," said the leader, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"The government has been wrongly built and this must be corrected. We are working to achieve change by changing the government decision-makers."

Under the 2019 general budget, Abdul Mahdi had to end the file of the special grades and the administration run by proxy by June 30.

However, negotiations on the sharing of positions between political factions and powerful parties, including Sairoon and the pro-Iranian parliamentary bloc of Al-Fatah, ended in deadlock.

The three presidencies – the president, speaker of the parliament and the prime minister – on Saturday agreed to extend the deadline until the end of October, political leaders told Arab News.

The Parliament on Sunday initiated voting to approve the extension which will allow senior officials who run their proxy sites to continue working until new staff are decided.

Abdul Mahdi and his government were the result of an agreement between the two largest parliamentary coalitions, Reform led by Al-Sadr and the pro-Iranian Construction led by Hadi Al-Amiri.

Lawmakers for both Al-Sadr and Al-Amiri have said repeatedly in recent months that they are working to dismantle what they called the "deep state," formed by Nouri Al-Maliki, former Iraqi prime minister.

"All the key players inside Iraq are convinced the situation will not change

unless the heart of the government is changed,” a key Sairoon negotiator told Arab News.

“The position of the minister is a political one, and the real power is in the hands of the deputies of ministers and general directors. If we change those, the performance of the government will change, and that is what Al-Sadr wants,” he added.

Demonstrators have taken to the streets in Iraq’s southern provinces over lack of basic services, including drinking water and electricity, and high unemployment.

While activists across the country have been counting on Al-Sadr’s support for the protests, Sadrist offices have not received any directives to join demonstrations in Basra, Nassiriyah and Diwaniyah.

“We have not received any instructions to participate in any demonstration,” Saad Al-Maliki, manager of the Sadr media office in Basra, said.

Protests backed by Al-Sadr have been an effective way of pressuring the government and key leaders since 2003, but often turn violent. At least 22 protesters and security staff were killed last summer in clashes outside government offices, including the Iranian consulate in Basra.

“If he (Abdul Mahdi) rejects Al-Sadr’s project, then the Parliament is there and demonstrations are there. The street is already boiling. It will revolt and the government will be overthrown in days,” the Sadrist leader said.



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Iraq says it deserves more global support in rebuilding Iraq must not be dragged into another regional war: president

[Mount Lebanon incident suspects arrested](#)

Author:

Mon, 2019-07-01 23:43

BEIRUT: Lebanese President Michel Aoun called for calm during a meeting of the Supreme Council of Defense on Monday, after the killing two members of Minister of State for Refugee Affairs Saleh Al-Gharib's entourage at Mount Lebanon on Sunday.

The council announced that security had been restored across the region in the immediate aftermath of the attack. Two other people were also wounded.

Political turmoil in Lebanon exploded on Sunday during the visit of Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil, the leader of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), to the western Shahhar region.

Supporters of the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), headed by Walid Jumblatt, protested Bassil's visit and clashed with the convoy of Minister Al-Gharib, who is loyal to the Lebanese Democratic Party, led by Talal Arslan, an ally of Bassil and Jumblatt's rival.

Hezbollah announced on Sunday night their full solidarity with Arslan, to which Jumblatt responded: "I wish the upstarts in politics would understand the delicate balance (of) governing the mountain."

Interior Minister Raya Al-Hassan said on Monday that things were headed toward a de-escalation, in light of massive Lebanese army deployments to the area.

However, tension has continued, fueled by social media. A photo of Jumblatt's parliamentary bloc has reportedly been circulating online, with a caption stating: "We want to kill each one of you wherever you are."

In response to the photo, MP Marwan Hamadeh, a PSP official, wrote on Twitter: "We will investigate the matter. This kind of threat does not affect us, and this is not the security we want."

Arslan's rhetoric during a press conference held after receiving a presidential delegation urging him to de-escalate was defiant.

"What happened was an attempt to assassinate Minister Al-Gharib. His convoy was shot from several directions in a treacherous manner, and his vehicle was hit by about 19 bullets," he said.

Arslan accused Minister Akram Chehayeb – without naming him – of being "a man of strife who sits at the Cabinet table without respecting the simplest rules of coexistence."

Chehayeb had said that while the Sunday events unfolded, he had been making calls to prevent protests in the Mount Lebanon area.

Arslan also criticized Walid Jumblatt, and said: "The man who shed the blood of the Druze in Idlib, Jabal Al-Arab, Mount Hermon and Golan is not unlikely to shed our blood."

He criticized the Lebanese army and how it had dealt with the incident. He said he would inform the president of the names of those involved in the incident.

"If the state does not want to impose its prestige and existence, we know how to protect ourselves," he added.

Al-Akhbar, a pro-Hezbollah daily newspaper, accused Jumblatt on Monday of wanting to "continue to control the mountain while insisting on denying reality."

The media officer of the PSP, Rami Rayes, told Arab News: "The decision of the Supreme Council of Defense is unfair, but we have adopted a calm and reasonable stance and we believe that it is only respectful to bury the dead. We had buried our men who were killed during the Choueifat events a year ago, and Talal Arslan protected the man who was suspected of murdering them and smuggled him across the border into Syria. Justice here cannot be selective. We resort to justice and we abide by the law."



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Two shot dead in 'assassination attempt' on Druze minister in Mount Lebanon village
Lebanon forces Syrian refugees to tear down walls

[US officials inaugurated 'fake' archaeology project, says Saeb Erekat](#)

Author:

Mon, 2019-07-01 23:17

RAMALLAH: A senior Palestinian official has condemned the participation of US envoys in an event linked to Israeli settlers and scoffed at their account that it was for a new archaeology project.

US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman and White House adviser Jason Greenblatt were among US officials attending the event organized by the City of David Foundation on Sunday night in Israeli-annexed East Jerusalem.

They helped open what organizers say is an ancient pilgrimage road, now underground in a tunnel, leading to the second Jewish temple some 2,000 years ago.

The tunnel, located in a highly sensitive area next to Jerusalem's Old City, passes underneath homes in the Palestinian neighborhood of Silwan.

Palestinians and anti-occupation activists see it as another attempt by Israel to cement its control over mainly Palestinian East Jerusalem.

Saeb Erekat, the chief Palestinian negotiator, said he believed the tunnel was a project being used by Israeli right-wingers to further Israel's claim on East Jerusalem and advance settlement growth there.

"It has nothing to do with religion, it is fake," he told journalists at his office in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank.

He cited reports by two Israeli NGOs questioning the archaeological methods used.

One of the organizations, Peace Now, also says cracks emerged in multiple houses in Silwan after the digging began.

Erekat said: "It's a settlement project. It's based on a lie that has nothing to do with history.

"This is a disgrace to any diplomat, to undermine the two-state solution, to undermine the fact that there will never be peace without East Jerusalem being the capital of Palestine."

Israel occupied East Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War and later annexed it in a move never recognized by the international community.

It sees the entire city as its capital while the Palestinians see the eastern sector as the capital of their future state.

Jordan, custodian of Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, said "Israeli efforts to Judaize the Holy City... risk further inflaming tension."

The attendance of Greenblatt and Friedman was a further break with decades of protocol in the disputed city by US President Donald Trump's administration.

They described the archaeological project as historic and further testament to the ancient Jewish presence in Jerusalem.

Greenblatt also criticized Palestinian officials' criticism of the project, saying they should "stop pretending it isn't true."

Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank are viewed as illegal under international law and major obstacles to peace since they are located on land the Palestinians see as part of their future state.

Israel says Palestinian violence, incitement and the intransigence of their

leaders are the main reasons for the lack of progress in peace efforts.



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US officials attend Israeli settler-linked event in east Jerusalem
Palestine says US ambassador helps Israel to annex part of West Bank