

UK's Johnson, France's Macron reiterate commitment to Iran nuclear deal

Sun, 2020-01-19 16:47

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and French President Emmanuel Macron reiterated their commitment on Sunday to the Iran nuclear deal and agreed a long-term framework was needed, Downing Street said on Sunday. "On Iran, the leaders reiterated their commitment to the JCPoA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) and also acknowledged the need to define a long-term framework to prevent Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon," a Downing Street spokeswoman said in a statement after the two met on the sidelines of a Libya summit in Berlin.

"They agreed on the importance of de-escalation and of working with international partners to find a diplomatic way through the current tensions."



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Iran says it is preparing for satellite launch Trump tells Iran's supreme leader to be 'careful with his words'

Libya players agree to respect arms embargo, push cease-fire

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Sun, 2020-01-19 12:55

BERLIN: Countries with interests in Libya's long-running civil war agreed Sunday to respect a much-violated arms embargo, hold off on military support to the warring parties and push them to reach a full cease-fire, German and UN leaders said.

The agreement came after about four hours of talks at the chancellery in Berlin. German Chancellor Angela Merkel hosted leaders of 11 countries involved in the conflict, with Libya's two main rival leaders also in the German capital but not at the main conference table.

Organizers knew that "we had to succeed in getting all the parties that connected in any way with the Libya conflict to speak with one voice ... because then the parties inside Libya will also understand that there is only a non-military way to a solution," Merkel said. "We achieved this result here."

Among those who attended were Russian President Vladimir Putin, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, French President Emmanuel Macron, Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

The participants agreed that "we want to respect the arms embargo, and that the arms embargo will be more strongly controlled than was the case in the past," she said. She added that the results of the conference should be endorsed by the UN Security Council.

Libya's two main rival leaders, Prime Minister Fayez Sarraj and Gen. Khalifa Haftar, said the two men named members of a military committee that will represent them at talks on a more permanent cease-fire, Merkel.

UN Secretary-General Guterres said that the committee would be convened "in Geneva in the coming days."

Merkel said the summit participants agreed that they will give no further support to the warring parties in Libya ahead of the committee's meeting and "cease operations as long as the cease-fire holds."

Guterres said the Berlin conference had succeed in fending off “the risk of a true regional escalation.”

“That risk was averted in Berlin – provided, of course, that it is possible to maintain the truce and then to move into a cease-fire,” he said.

Guterres underlined the urgency of that next step, saying all the participants committed to “put pressure on the parties for a full cease-fire to be reached.”

“We cannot monitor something that doesn’t exist,” Guterres said. “We have a truce.”

Merkel added that the participants would continue to hold regular further meetings to ensure the process continues “so the people in Libya get their right to a peaceful life.”

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said that “we know that today’s signatures aren’t enough.”

He said countries that weren’t invited Sunday will be given the opportunity to participate in future meetings of the four committees dealing with various aspects of the crisis, among them military issues and the economy.

“We know that the work has only just started,” Maas said, but praised the “spirit of cooperation” seen in Berlin.

Meanwhile, Macron hit out against foreign troop deployments in Libya, saying such intervention only serves to fuel the conflict and create new risks for everyone.

Voicing his “acute concerns over the arrival of Syrian and foreign fighters in the city of Tripoli,” Macron told the Berlin summit that “that must end.”

Ankara has been accused of sending hundreds of Syrian fighters into Tripoli to back up Sarraj’s government.

Libya has sunk further into chaos since the 2011 ouster and killing of its longtime dictator, Muammar Qaddafi. It is now divided into rival administrations, each backed by different nations: the weak UN-recognized government based in Tripoli, headed by Sarraj, and one based in the country’s east, supported by Hafter’s forces.

Hafter’s forces are backed by Egypt, Russia and the United Arab Emirates, while the Tripoli government has turned to Turkey for troops and weapons.



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Erdogan issues new terror warning to Europe over conflict in LibyaUN Libya mission 'deeply concerned' over disruption in oil production, urges restraint

[Iraq protests swell with youth angry at slow pace of reform](#)

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Sun, 2020-01-19 12:06

BAGHDAD: Iraqi youth angry at their government's glacial pace of reform ramped up their protests on Sunday, sealing streets with burning tires and threatening further escalation unless their demands are met.

The rallies demanding an overhaul of the ruling system have rocked Shiite-majority parts of Iraq since October, but had thinned out in recent weeks amid rising Iran-US tensions.

Protesters had feared Iraq would be caught in the middle of the geopolitical storm and last Monday gave the government one week to make progress on reform pledges.

A day before the deadline expires, hundreds of angry young people descended on the main protest camp in Baghdad's Tahrir Square as well as nearby Tayaran Square.

They burned tires to block highways and bridges, turning back cars and causing traffic jams across the city.

At least 10 people including police officers were wounded when security forces tried to clear the sit-ins with tear gas and protesters responded by throwing rocks, medical and security sources said.

"This is only the first escalation," one protester with a scarf wrapped around his face said, as smoke from the tires turned the sky behind him a charcoal grey.

"We want to send a message to the government: Stop procrastinating! The people know what you're doing," he said, adding ominously: "Tomorrow the deadline ends, and then things could get totally of control."

Protesters are demanding early elections based on a reformed voting law, a new prime minister to replace current caretaker premier Adel Abdel Mahdi and that officials deemed corrupt be held to account.

Abdel Mahdi resigned nearly two months ago, but political parties have thus far failed to agree on a successor and he has continued to run the government

as a caretaker.

Demonstrators have publicly rejected the names circulating as possible replacements and are furious that other sweeping reform measures have not been implemented.

"We began to escalate today because the government did not respond to our demands, notably forming an independent government that could save Iraq," said Haydar Kadhim, a demonstrator in the southern protest hotspot of Nasiriyah.

"Last Monday, we gave them a deadline of seven days. That deadline ends tonight," Kadhim said.

A fellow protester, 20-year-old university student Mohammad Kareem, said more escalation could come.

"We gave the government a timeframe to implement our demands, but it looks like it doesn't care one bit," he said.

"We will keep up our movement and keep escalating to confront this government, which continues to procrastinate," Kareem said.

Rallies also swelled in the cities of Kut, Diwaniyah and Amara, where most government offices, schools and universities have been shuttered for months. In the holy city of Najaf, youth wrapped in checkered black-and-white scarves and carrying Iraqi flags lit tires and began a sit-in on a main road leading to the capital.

Further the south in the oil-rich port city of Basra, students gathered in an ongoing strike in support of the rallies elsewhere.

The protests are the largest and bloodiest grassroots movement in Iraq in decades, with nearly 460 people dead and over 25,000 wounded since they erupted on October 1.

While the violence at the protests themselves has dropped slightly, activists say they face an escalating campaign of intimidation, kidnapping and assassination attempts.

Young protesters are also apprehensive about a rival protest on January 24 organized by firebrand cleric Moqtada Sadr in order to pressure US forces to leave.

Last week, Sadr urged Iraqis to hold "a million-strong, peaceful, unified demonstration to condemn the American presence and its violations."

Iraqi political figures have ramped up their calls for foreign forces – including some 5,200 US troops – to leave the country following a US drone strike that killed Iran's revered Quds Force chief Qassem Soleimani and top Iraqi military official Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis.

Both were key brokers in Iraq's political scene, which has been left reeling by their absence.

Iraq's parliament voted on January 5 in favor of ousting foreign forces but the legal procedure for doing so remains murky.

Bases where US forces are stationed have been under a steady stream of rocket attacks for several months that have killed one American contractor and one Iraqi soldier.



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Iraqi security forces kill one protester, wound 25
Influential Iraqi cleric Sadr calls for anti-US demonstrations

[Dozens killed in Houthi attack on camp in Yemen's Marib](#)

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Sat, 2020-01-18 19:17

MARIB, Yemen: Iranian-backed Houthi militia attacked a military training camp in the Yemeni city of Marib on Saturday, killing dozens of people, according to reports.

Medical sources in Yemen told Reuters nearly 30 military personnel had been killed.

The strike follows a similar attack in November last year, when Houthi militants fired a missile at the headquarters of the Arab coalition fighting to support the internationally-recognized government of Yemen, which killed seven Yemeni soldiers and injured at least 12.



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[Trump gives dramatic account of Soleimani's last minutes before death: CNN](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Sat, 2020-01-18 16:16

PALM BEACH, Florida: US President Donald Trump gave a minute-to-minute account of the US drone strikes that killed Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani in remarks to a Republican fund-raising dinner on Friday night, according to audio obtained by CNN.

With his typical dramatic flourish, Trump recounted the scene as he monitored the strikes from the White House Situation Room when Soleimani was killed.

The president spoke in a ballroom at his Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Florida, at a Republican event that raised \$10 million for Trump's 2020 re-election campaign and for the Republican National Committee.

Reporters were not allowed in for the event. CNN said it obtained an audio recording of Trump's remarks. The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Jan. 3 killing of Soleimani at Baghdad airport prompted Iran to retaliate with missile strikes against US forces in Iraq days later and almost triggered a broad war between the two countries.

"They're together sir," Trump said military officials told him. "Sir, they have two minutes and 11 seconds. No emotion. 'Two minutes and 11 seconds to live, sir. They're in the car, they're in an armored vehicle. Sir, they have approximately one minute to live, sir. Thirty seconds. Ten, 9, 8 ...' "

"Then all of a sudden, boom," he said. "'They're gone, sir. Cutting off.'"

"I said, where is this guy?" Trump continued. "That was the last I heard from him."

It was the most detailed account that Trump has given of the drone strike, which has drawn criticism from some US lawmakers because neither the president nor his advisers have provided public information to back up their statements that Soleimani presented an "imminent" threat to Americans in the region.

CNN said that in the audio, Trump did not repeat that Soleimani was an imminent threat. Trump said Soleimani was "saying bad things about our country" before the strike, which led to his decision to authorize his killing.



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Trump: US was facing imminent threat of attack from Soleimani Trump says he believes Soleimani was targeting 'four embassies'