

[Qatar emir visits Iran amid regional crisis](#)

Sun, 2020-01-12 12:44

DOHA: Qatar's ruler, Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, said during a visit to Iran on Sunday that de-escalation and dialogue were needed to resolve regional crises at a "sensitive" time.

He was speaking in a televised news conference with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani during a visit to Tehran at a time of heightened US-Iranian tensions that threaten to destabilize the region.

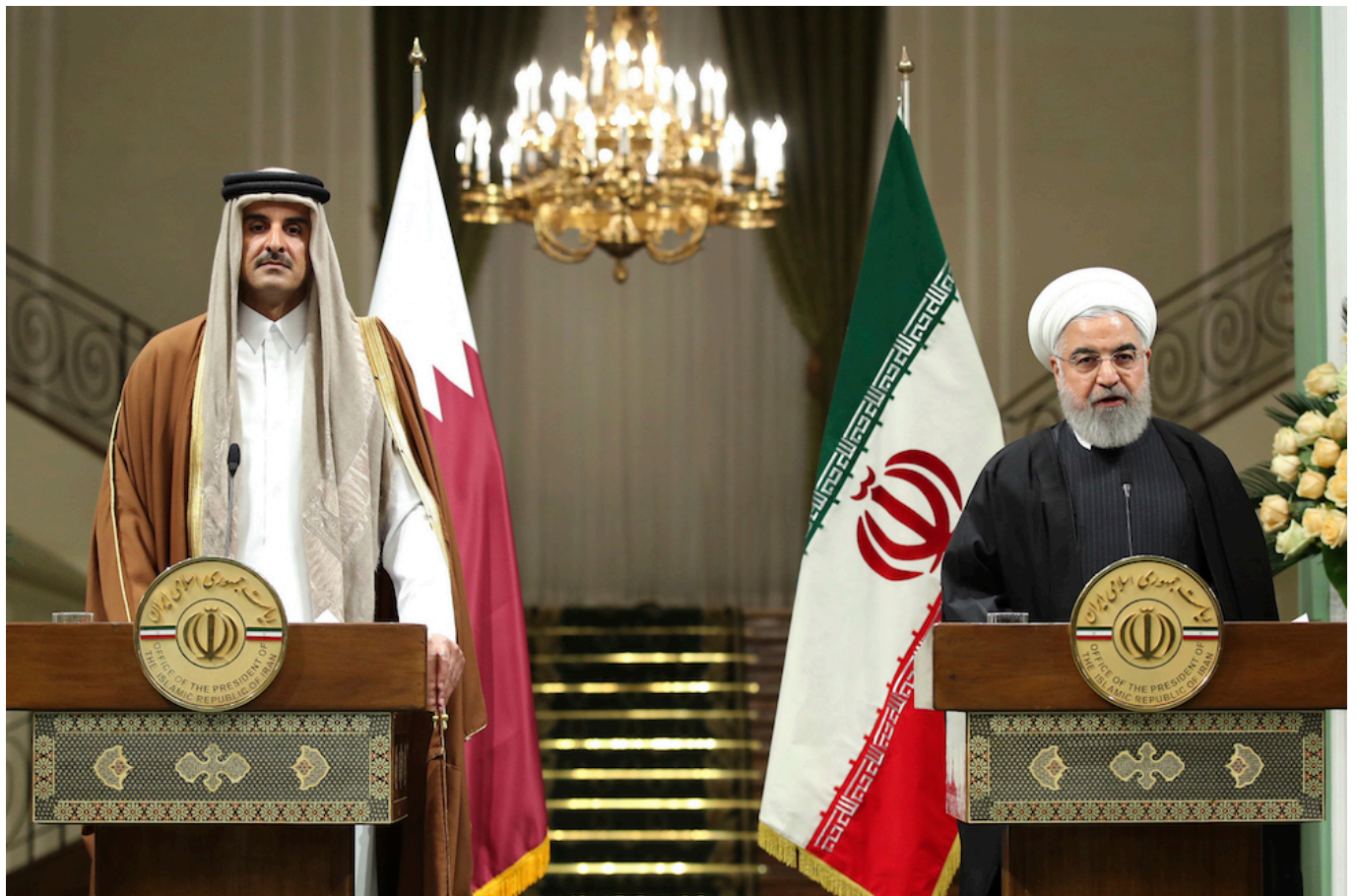
In a meeting between Iran's President Hassan Rouhani and the visiting emir of Qatar, both sides agreed de-escalation is the "only solution" to the regional crisis, the emirate's ruler said.

Qatar hosts the largest US military base in the region but also enjoys strong ties with Iran, with which it shares the world's largest gas field.

"This visit comes at a critical time in the region," Sheikh Tamim said on what was believed to be his first official visit to Iran.

"We agreed... that the only solution to these crises is de-escalation from everyone and dialogue."

For his part, Rouhani said: "Given the importance of security of the region... we've decided to have more consultations and cooperation for the security of the entire region."



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How Iranian, Qatari media glorified Qassem Soleimani

[Iran summons UK ambassador over Ukrainian airline rally](#)

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Sun, 2020-01-12 08:42

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and German Chancellor Angela Merkel condemned the arrest of Britain's ambassador to Tehran, a spokesman from Johnson's office said in a statement issued after the two leaders spoke on Sunday.

"On Iran, they discussed the tragic loss of life on the Ukraine International Airlines passenger jet. They condemned Iran's arrest of the UK Ambassador to Tehran as a violation of international law," the spokesman said.

"The leaders also discussed our shared interests in ensuring Iran never acquires a nuclear weapon, and reaffirmed their continued commitment to preserving the JCPOA (Iran nuclear deal)."

Iran summoned the UK envoy on Sunday to complain about his attendance at an "illegal" rally in Tehran to commemorate those killed in a Ukrainian airliner mistakenly downed by the country's military forces.

"Today, Rob Macaire was summoned because of his unconventional behaviour of attending an illegal rally on Saturday," the Iranian foreign ministry's website reported.

Britain said earlier that its ambassador in Iran had been briefly detained on Saturday, which Iranian media said was because he was inciting anti-government protests.

Macaire denied Sunday that he took part in a demonstration that broke out at a memorial for the 176 people killed when a plane was shot down.

"Can confirm I wasn't taking part in any demonstrations! Went to an event advertised as a vigil for victims of #PS752 tragedy," Macaire said on Twitter, adding he had been detained for half an hour.

Detained half an hour after leaving the area. Arresting diplomats is of course illegal, in all countries. See comments by Foreign Secretary [@DominicRaab](#). <https://t.co/djpr99iSwI>

– Rob Macaire (@HMATehran) [January 12, 2020](#)

The EU's diplomatic chief criticized Iran on Sunday for briefly detaining the British ambassador to Tehran, calling for "de-escalation."

Very concerned about the temporary detention of the UK Ambassador [@HMATehran](#) in Iran. Full respect of the Vienna convention is a must. The EU calls for deescalation and space for diplomacy.

– Josep Borrell Fontelles (@JosepBorrellF) [January 12, 2020](#)

"Very concerned about the temporary detention of the UK Ambassador [@HMATehran](#) in Iran. Full respect of the Vienna convention is a must. The EU calls for de-escalation and space for diplomacy," Josep Borrell tweeted.

(With Agencies)



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British ambassador to Iran arrested amid protests against Khamenei over plane downing

Libya's GNA accepts cease-fire after rival Haftar's declaration

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Sun, 2020-01-12 07:37

TRIPOLI: Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA) agreed on Sunday to a cease-fire urged by Moscow and Ankara, several hours after rival strongman Khalifa Haftar announced a cessation of hostilities.

The head of the GNA, Fayez Al-Sarraj, announced in a statement "a cease-fire from (Sunday) January 12 at midnight (2200 GMT)," underlining however the "legitimate right" of GNA forces to "respond to any attack or aggression that may come from the other camp."

Sarraj said the cease-fire had been accepted in response to a call from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, who have emerged as key players in the Libyan arena.

Late Saturday, forces of the eastern Libya-based Haftar announced a cease-fire starting Sunday at midnight in his months-long battle to take the capital Tripoli from the UN-recognized GNA, but warned of a "severe" response to any violation by the "opposing camp."

Erdogan and Putin had called for a cease-fire at a meeting on Wednesday in Istanbul, and Turkey on Saturday asked Russia to convince Haftar to respect it. Haftar had initially vowed to fight on.

Europe and North Africa have launched a diplomatic offensive to try to prevent Libya, with the increased involvement of international players in its conflict, from turning into a "second Syria."

Artillery fire was heard a little after midnight from the center of Tripoli, seat of the GNA, before quiet settled over the southern Tripoli suburb where pro-GNA forces have been resisting Haftar's offensive launched April 4, 2019. Ankara deployed military support to the GNA in January, while Russia, despite denials, is strongly suspected of supporting pro-Haftar forces, which are also backed by the United Arab Emirates and Egypt.

The North African state has seen an escalation of the turmoil that erupted after a NATO-backed uprising killed dictator Muammar Qaddafi in 2011.



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Libyan forces loyal to commander Khalifa Haftar have declared
ceasefireLibya's Haftar rejects Ankara, Moscow's call for cease-fire

[Angry Iranians question authorities for hiding truth from public](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-01-12 02:01

DUBAI: Iran's statement on Saturday that a Ukrainian passenger plane was downed by a missile fired unintentionally followed growing pressure from abroad but also at home, and for some Iranians, the authorities' expressions of condolence were not enough.

For days, Iran had denied Western accusations it was responsible for Wednesday's crash soon after takeoff from Tehran. Authorities said on Saturday that air defenses had been fired in error while on high alert

following Iranian missile strikes on US targets in Iraq. Expressions of condolence over the incident from supreme leader and President Hassan Rouhani failed to calm angry Iranians, who used social media to express their outrage against the establishment for concealing the truth. "It is a national tragedy. The way it was handled and it was announced by the authorities was even more tragic," said Ali Ansari, a moderate cleric, according to Iran's semi-official ILNA news agency. Many Iranians asked why authorities did not close down Tehran's airport and the country's airspace at a time when they would have been on alert for retaliation after the missile strikes. There were no fatalities in those strikes, launched to avenge the Jan. 3 US killing of top Iranian commander Qassem Soleimani in a drone strike in Baghdad. "They were so careful not to kill any American in their revenge for Soleimani. But they did not close the airport? This shows how much this regime cares for Iranians," said Mira Sedaghati in Tehran by telephone. An Iranian military statement carried by state media said the Ukrainian plane, which was headed for Kiev, was mistaken for a "hostile target" after it turned toward a sensitive military base of the elite Revolutionary Guards near Tehran, adding that it was a "human error and unintentional." "Unintentionally? What does it mean? They concealed this huge tragic news for days just to mourn for Soleimani. Shame on you," said Reza Ghadyani, in Tabriz city.

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Reza Ghadyani, Iranian in Tabriz city

The country held three days of funeral processions for Soleimani, who was head of the Revolutionary Guards' overseas Quds Force and a national hero. Hundreds of thousands of people participated across the country. Some Iranians called for resignation of officials, dismissing their apologies. "You took your revenge from Iranians," tweeted Ahmad Batebi on his @radiojibi Twitter account, in response to Rouhani's tweet saying that "The Islamic Republic of Iran deeply regrets this disastrous mistake." "Only resignation," tweeted Sadeq on his @sadeql367 account. In a Twitter message on Saturday, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif cast some of the blame for the plane disaster on what he called US adventurism. "It's the end line Mr. Minister! You ruined everything!," responded Bitarazaqi on @bitarazaqi.



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Iran police disperse student protestersWorld demands full account after Iran admits downing Ukraine jet

[World demands full account after Iran admits downing Ukraine jet](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-01-12 01:31

PARIS: Iran said on Saturday it had unintentionally shot down the Ukrainian airliner that crashed this week outside Tehran killing 176 people, calling it an “unforgivable mistake.”

The statement sparked some relief that at least the immediate cause of the disaster would not be concealed amid international calls for a full accounting and compensation for the victims.

Iran has invited the US, Ukraine, Canada and others to join the crash investigation. Herewith are some of the remarks made by top leaders in response to the Iranian statement on its responsibility for the crash. Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky demanded that Iran punish those responsible, pay compensation and apologize.

"We expect Iran ... to bring the guilty to the courts," the Ukrainian leader wrote on Facebook, calling for the "payment of compensation" and the return of remains.

"We hope the inquiry will be pursued without deliberate delay and without obstruction," Zelensky added. He also urged "total access" to the full inquiry for 45 Ukrainian experts and in a tweet also sought an "official apology."

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, with the country mourning the loss of many of its nationals, said closure and accountability were needed after Iran's announcement.

He demanded "transparency, and justice for the families and loved ones of the victims. "This is a national tragedy, and all Canadians are mourning together," Trudeau's office said in a statement. Iran must "learn lessons" from the disaster, the chairman of the Russian parliament's foreign affairs committee said.

"If decryption of the black boxes and the work of the investigation do not prove that the Iranian army did this intentionally, and there are no logical reasons for this, the incident must be closed. "Hoping that lessons will be learned and action taken by all parties," Konstantin Kosachev was quoted as saying by the Interfax news agency.

French Defense Minister Florence Parly said it was "important to seize this moment to give space to discussions and negotiations" on the Iran nuclear deal.

"The lessons that we should learn from the dramatic sequence of events that we have experienced ... is that we must put an end to this escalation," Parly told France Inter radio.

She reiterated the French position that everything must be done to salvage the landmark 2015 nuclear accord with Iran, which US President Donald Trump withdrew from in 2018.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said: "It was important that Iran brought clarity to this issue.

"Now Tehran needs to draw the right consequences in the continued appraisal of this dreadful catastrophe, and take measures to ensure that something like this cannot happen again," Maas told Funke media. The plane was shot down early on Wednesday, hours after Iran launched a ballistic missile attack on two military bases housing US troops in Iraq in retaliation for the killing of Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani in an American airstrike in Baghdad. No one was wounded in the attack on the bases.

A military statement carried by state media said the plane was mistaken for a "hostile target." The military was at its "highest level of readiness," it said, amid the heightened tensions with the US.

"In such a condition, because of human error and in a unintentional way, the flight was hit," the military said. It apologized and said it would upgrade its systems to prevent future tragedies.

Those responsible for the strike on the plane would be prosecuted, the statement added.

FASTFACT

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'hostile target.'

Gen. Amir Ali Hajjizadeh, the head of the Guard's aerospace division, later said his unit accepts "full responsibility" for the shootdown. In an address broadcast by state TV, he said that when he learned about the downing of the plane, "I wished I were dead."

Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, expressed his "deep sympathy" to the families of the victims and called on the armed forces to "pursue probable shortcomings and guilt in the painful incident."

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskiy issued a statement saying the crash investigation should continue and the "perpetrators" should be brought to justice. He said Iran should compensate victims' families, and he requested "official apologies through diplomatic channels."

Iran's acknowledgement of responsibility for the crash was likely to inflame public sentiment against authorities after Iranians had rallied around their leaders in the wake of Soleimani's killing. Soleimani, the leader of the Guard's elite Quds Force and the architect of Iran's regional military interventions, was seen as a national icon, and hundreds of thousands of Iranians had turned out for funeral processions across the country.

The majority of the plane crash victims were Iranians or Iranian-Canadians. Iranian officials had repeatedly ruled out a missile strike, dismissing such allegations as Western propaganda that officials said was offensive to the victims.

The crash came just weeks after authorities quashed nationwide protests ignited by a hike in gasoline prices. Iran has been in the grip of a severe economic crisis since President Donald Trump withdrew the US from the 2015 nuclear deal and imposed crippling sanctions.

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani blamed the shoot-down of the plane in part on "threats and bullying" by the US after the killing of Soleimani. He expressed condolences to families of the victims, and he called for a "full investigation" and the prosecution of those responsible.

"A sad day," Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif tweeted. "Human error at time of crisis caused by US adventurism led to disaster. Our profound regrets, apologies and condolences to our people, to the families of all victims, and to other affected nations."

The jetliner, a Boeing 737 operated by Ukrainian International Airlines, went down on the outskirts of Tehran shortly after taking off from Imam Khomeini International Airport.

The US and Canada, citing intelligence, said they believed Iran shot down the aircraft with a surface-to-air missile, a conclusion supported by videos verified by The Associated Press.

The plane, en route to the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv, was carrying 167 passengers and nine crew members from several countries, including 82 Iranians, 57 Canadians and 11 Ukrainians, according to officials. The Canadian government had earlier lowered the nation's death toll from 63.

"This is the right step for the Iranian government to admit responsibility, and it gives people a step toward closure with this admission," said Payman Parseyan, a prominent Iranian-Canadian in western Canada who lost a number of friends in the crash.

"I think the investigation would have disclosed it whether they admitted it

or not. This will give them an opportunity to save face.”

Iran’s acknowledgement of responsibility was likely to renew questions of why authorities did not shut down the country’s main international airport and its airspace after the ballistic missile attack, when they feared US reprisals.

It also undermines the credibility of information provided by senior Iranian officials. As recently as Friday, Ali Abedzadeh, the head of the national aviation department, had told reporters “with certainty” that a missile had not caused the crash.

On Thursday, Cabinet spokesman Ali Rabiei dismissed reports of a missile, saying they “rub salt on a painful wound” for families of the victims.

Iran had also invited Ukraine, Canada, the US and France to take part in the investigation of the crash, in keeping with international norms. The Boeing 737 was built in the US and the engine was built by a US-French consortium. Ukraine’s president said its team of investigators, who are already on the ground in Iran, should continue their work with “full access and cooperation.”

The military statement, issued by the Joint Chiefs of the Armed Forces, said Guard officials had been ordered to “provide a detailed explanation” to the public.

The semi-official Fars news agency reported that the supreme leader on Friday morning had ordered top security officials to review the crash and announce the results.

Fars, which is close to the Guard, appeared to deflect blame.

“If some individuals, in any position, were aware of the issue but made statements contradicting the reality or hid the truth for any reason, they should be named and tried,” it said.

Others speculated that the security forces may have concealed information from civilian authorities.

“Concealing the truth from the administration is dreadful,” Mohammad Fazeli, a sociology professor in Tehran, wrote on social media. “If it had not been concealed, the head of civil aviation and the government spokesmen would not have persistently denied it.”



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South Korea summons Iran envoy over diplomatic threat
British ambassador to Iran arrested amid protests against Khamenei over plane downing