

After Saudi Aramco attack, UK's Boris Johnson proposes new negotiation on Iran nuclear deal

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NEW YORK: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson pushed for a new negotiation beyond a 2015 nuclear between Iran and world powers after attacks on Saudi Arabia's oil facilities, bringing his country closer to US calls for a tougher deal with Tehran.

European leaders have struggled to dampen a brewing confrontation between Tehran and Washington since US President Donald Trump pulled out more than a year ago from a deal that assures Iran access to world trade in return for curbs on its nuclear program.

The US reimposed sanctions on Iran last year and tightened them sharply this year. Iran has responded by breaching some of the limits on nuclear material in the deal and has set an October deadline to reduce its nuclear commitments further unless the Europeans keep their promises to salvage the pact.

The European powers party to the deal – France, Britain and Germany – have until now remained united despite pressure from Washington. But an attack on Saudi Arabia's oil facilities on Sept. 14, which Riyadh and Washington have blamed on Iran, is testing that unity. Iran denies responsibility for the attack on Saudi Arabia.

Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi movement, which has been battling a Saudi-led military coalition that includes the UAE, has claimed responsibility for the strikes.

"How do we respond to what the Iranians plainly did? What the UK is doing is trying to bring people together and de-escalate tensions," Johnson told Sky News as world leaders gathered at the United Nations in New York.

"Whatever your objections to the old nuclear deal with Iran, it's time now to move forward and do a new deal."

A government spokesman later clarified that Johnson still supported the 2015 pact and wanted to find a way to bring Tehran into compliance.

Johnson was already at odds on Monday morning with French President Emmanuel Macron over who to blame for the attack, blaming Tehran directly.

Those words were in stark contrast to Macron, who has been extremely cautious not to point the finger directly at Tehran, fearing that it could increase

tensions.

Macron has led a European push over the summer to find a compromise between Washington and Tehran and wants to use the UN meeting as an opportunity to revive diplomacy.

His efforts have stalled in recent weeks, with Iran reducing its commitments to the nuclear accord, and the United States refusing to ease sanctions that have strangled its oil exports, a mainstay of the Iranian economy.

Slim hopes for diplomacy

The attack on Saudi oil facilities has complicated matters. Hopes at the end of August that Trump and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani could meet at the United Nations now seem slim.

“We haven’t received any requests this time, yet, for a meeting and we have made it clear a request alone will not do the job,” Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif told reporters in New York. “A negotiation has to be for a reason, for an outcome, not just for a handshake.”

He said there are prerequisites for a meeting – Iran has demanded the United States lift all sanctions – and then there could be a meeting between Iran, the United States, France, Britain, Germany, Russia and China – the original parties to the nuclear deal – but there would be no bilateral meeting. Macron on Monday also appeared to distance himself from the nuclear deal saying he was not “obsessed” with it.

“France is trying to put together proposals to avoid an escalation,” he told reporters.

He reiterated previous ideas that any framework for future negotiations needed to focus on keeping a system in place to monitor Iran’s current nuclear program, discuss Iran’s post-2025 nuclear activities, its ballistic missile program and its regional influence.

“We need with our allies, regional actors and Iran to sit round the table and advance on these four points,” Macron said.

Trump has criticized the earlier deal, negotiated under then-US President Barack Obama, for “sunset” clauses under which some of its provisions expired as well as for its failure to address Iran’s missile program and regional activities.

“He does want a new deal because the other deal was ready to expire – very short number of years left,” Trump said in response to Johnson’s comments.

A senior Iranian official told Reuters that demands to change nuclear deal with world powers were unacceptable and if the US wanted to ease tensions, it should lift sanctions.

Macron, Johnson and Angela Merkel are due to meet on Monday to coordinate their Iran strategy ahead of likely meetings with Trump and Rouhani.

A senior Gulf official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Gulf countries, the United States, the Europeans and others needed to engage in “collective diplomacy” to defuse tensions.



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Merkel urges return to Iran nuclear deal to defuse Middle East tensions
Iran's chief envoy defends planned new steps away from nuclear deal

[Iran claims legal steps for British tanker's release completed](#)

Author:

Mon, 2019-09-23 23:06

DUBAI: An Iranian government spokesman said on Monday that all legal steps had been completed for the release of the detained British-flagged tanker Stena Impero but that he did not know when the vessel would be released, Iranian media reported.

The July 19 seizure of the ship, two weeks after Britain detained an Iranian tanker off Gibraltar, cranking up tensions in the region in the wake of attacks on other merchant vessels that Washington blamed on Tehran.

Iran denied responsibility for those attacks, which took place along a vital international oil shipping route.

“The legal work and administrative procedures for the release of the English tanker have been completed but I have no information on the time of the release,” said government spokesman Ali Rabiei, according to semi-official news agency ILNA.

The semi-official Fars news agency quoted Rabiei as saying: “The legal work for the oil tanker is over ... and the oil tanker can move, and the decisions indicate the end of the detention.”

Relations between the US, its allies and Iran have been gradually more strained since Washington withdrew last year from a global pact aimed at reining in Tehran’s nuclear program and imposed sanctions on it aimed at shutting down Iranian oil exports.

As world leaders gathered in New York for the UN General Assembly, French President Emmanuel Macron held out hope of a breakthrough in the dispute between Iran and the US.

But Macron admitted that the attack – widely blamed on Iran – that hit a Saudi oil complex on September 14 had heightened instability in the Middle East.

Macron was expected to hold meetings with US President Donald Trump and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani in the coming days.

But a meeting between Trump and Rouhani appeared unlikely.

“If the US is ready to end sanctions and come back to the conditions of the nuclear agreement, the way would be open for us to make a decision,” Iranian government spokesman Ali Rabiei said on Monday.

“One of these decisions could be negotiations.”



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UK calls on Iran to immediately release ‘illegally seized’ tanker Stena

ImperoIran to release seven crew members of detained British tanker

[Palestinian jailed for life for murder of Israeli](#)

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Mon, 2019-09-23 17:52

JERUSALEM: An Israeli military court Monday sentenced a Palestinian to life imprisonment for a 2015 shooting in the occupied West Bank that killed an Israeli and wounded three others, the army said.

Fayiz Hamed was found guilty of voluntary homicide and attempted murders. The four Israelis were in a car when they came under fire at a crossroads near the settlement of Shvut Rachel on June 29, 2015, the army said in a statement.

The military accused the Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, of carrying out the gun attack.

Hamas praised the attack without claiming responsibility.



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Israel's Lieberman 'not backing anyone for PM' Israeli president Reuven Rivlin begins talks to form new government

[Aramco attacks solidify Iran's 'enemy' status among young Arabs](#)

Mon, 2019-09-23 20:31

LONDON: Tehran-backed attacks on Saudi Arabia's oil facilities will only add to the view among young Arabs that Iran is an "enemy," a panel of regional experts said on Monday.

According to the Arab Youth Survey, which was published in May by the PR consultancy ASDA'A BCW, 67 percent of the region's youth saw Iran as an enemy, as opposed to 32 percent who saw it as an ally.

However, members of a panel discussion at Chatham House, in London, said the attacks on the Saudi Aramco sites, as well as Iran's seizure of a UK-flagged oil tanker in the Strait of Hormuz, have solidified, if not increased, negative views of the country.

"I would imagine that the tensions demonstrate that the findings in the report hold. They may even have increased perceptions of Iran being an enemy," Dr. Simon Mabon, senior lecturer in international relations at Lancaster University, told Arab News.



CaptionTehran-backed attacks on Saudi Arabia's oil facilities will only add to the view among young Arabs that Iran is an "enemy," a panel of regional experts said on Monday. (AFP)

Iran denies involvement in the attacks, which initially halved oil output from Saudi Arabia. Responsibility was claimed by Yemen's Houthi militants, an Iranian-aligned militia fighting the Arab coalition in Yemen's civil war.

However, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said last week: "Amid all the calls for de-escalation, Iran has now launched an unprecedented attack on the world's energy supply...There is no evidence the attacks came from Yemen."

The survey's results also showed the US becoming perceived more and more as

an enemy rather than an ally since Donald Trump became president, with 59 percent of the youth seeing it as the former. This is a 27 percent rise in negative perception from 2016's survey result.

"This is where we see what's called the Trump effect...you don't have to look too far. Look at all the policies he made, the travel bans, and all those kinds of things," Sunil John, founder ASDA'A BCW, said.

Saudi Arabia featured prominently in the survey in several ways. When asked which countries had grown in prominence in regional and international affairs, 37 percent of young Arabs named the Kingdom as the biggest gainer in influence this year, with the UAE coming in second at 27 percent.

"We're moving from the power hubs of Baghdad and Cairo to those of Riyadh and Abu Dhabi," John added.

The eleventh annual survey is based on 3,300 face-to-face interviews with Arabs between the ages of 18-24, split equally between men and women, in January this year.



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King Salman calls Aramco attacks a 'cowardly act' aimed at destabilizing Saudi Arabia
Saudi Aramco has emerged from attacks 'stronger than ever' – CEO

[Suspected drones disrupt Dubai flights](#)

Sun, 2019-09-22 23:56

DUBAI: Flights at Dubai's international airport, one of the world's busiest, were briefly disrupted Sunday due to "suspected drone activity," officials said.

Two arriving flights had to be diverted, it said, while media reports said the planes had landed at a smaller airport in the neighbouring emirate of Sharjah.

"Dubai Airports can confirm that flight arrivals were briefly disrupted at Dubai International from 12:36 (0836 GMT) to 12:51 (0851 GMT) UAE local time this afternoon due to suspected drone activity," a spokesperson said in a statement Sunday.

Flights at the airport have been disrupted several times in recent years by recreational drones, with the last incident occurring in February



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airbaseSaudi Arabia's Defense Ministry displays Iranian drones, cruise
missiles used in Aramco attacks