

PM meeting with President Rouhani: 25 September 2019



The Prime Minister met President Rouhani of Iran at the UN General Assembly in New York today.

The Prime Minister called again for the immediate release of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and other dual nationals illegally imprisoned in Iran.

He raised our deep concern about Iran's destabilising activity in the region, including the attacks on the Aramco oil facilities, and insisted this must stop.

The Prime Minister confirmed our continuing support for the JCPoA and stressed the need for dialogue, including on a comprehensive successor deal.

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UN Human Rights Council 42 – Interactive Dialogue with the Independent Expert on Sudan

The United Kingdom thanks the Independent Expert for his report, covering a significant moment in Sudan's history. We commend the recent positive steps towards a democratic Sudan, including the appointment of civilian leadership.

The report details the violent response by security forces against peaceful protestors across Sudan. We welcome Prime Minister Hammond's announcement of the formation of an independent committee of inquiry to investigate crimes committed during the period of popular protests, including the events of 3 June. This is an initial step in seeking accountability for past violations

and we urge all parties to ensure that these investigations are independent and transparent.

The UK welcomes the Government of Sudan's commitment to respect human rights throughout the transitional period and beyond, and hopes that the civilian leadership will work constructively with all interested parties in Sudan and international partners to address long standing human rights challenges. Sudan's commitment to open an office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights in Khartoum, and field offices elsewhere, is a welcome first step.

Throughout the transitional period, and beyond, the Government must ensure in particular respect for the freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, and the media. These will be vital in securing Sudan's path towards democracy.

We will continue to discuss human rights challenges with the Government help them meet their international commitments and responsibilities, and deliver the change the Sudanese people called for.

Mr President,

We would welcome the Independent Expert's views on what further steps the Sudanese government can take to address longstanding human rights challenges.

Chief Digital and Information Officer Jacky Wright to leave HMRC

Jacky joined HMRC in 2017 under a two-year loan arrangement, and will now return as Microsoft US Chief Digital Officer.

During her time at HMRC, Jacky has overseen a wholesale transformation of CDIO Group, enabling business-led, technology-enabled services to be delivered in new, innovative ways for our customers.

Jacky has also radically changed the employee experience across HMRC, introducing new technologies enabling online collaborative working and totally changing the way employees work through video and messaging.

Under Jacky's leadership, HMRC has also embarked on a Cloud Migration, Network and Sourcing strategy. Her launch of a data strategy and governance model, positions the organisation to effectively develop a core capability for the future.

[Jacky Wright](#) said:

I am so proud of all that we have achieved in my two years with HMRC. The digital transformation we have introduced and the new

ways of working we have championed have built a solid foundation on which to continue, for both our colleagues and the customers we serve.

Outgoing Chief Executive, [Sir Jonathan Thompson](#), said:

I am very grateful to Jacky for her skills, expertise and leadership over the last two years. Jacky has been a superb leader, transforming our approach to technology, data and digital services. They have been a fundamental part of the changes we have delivered for colleagues and customers.

Jacky's consideration for the impact we have on society and for our responsibility to the customer is clear in all the programmes that she has introduced. We are stronger and more forward-focused as a result of her work. I would like to thank her for her massive contribution and wish her well in her return to Microsoft.

We will announce succession plans before Jacky leaves in October.

Foreign Secretary statement on Iran

The United Kingdom has always been clear-sighted about our engagement with Iran.

We want to see Iran come in from the cold. But that can only happen if Iran shows the respect required for the basic principles of the rules-based international system.

Iran's violations are not mere technical breaches of international rules.

They are serious and systemic, destabilising actions, which undermine the international rule of law.

And those actions must have consequences.

Take, first, the recent attacks on the Aramco facilities in Saudi Arabia.

On 14 September, 18 drones and seven cruise missiles hit an oil field and a processing facility.

As the UK government, we took our time to assess the facts carefully and independently.

We are now confident that Iran was responsible. The evidence is clear, and there is no plausible alternative explanation.

This conduct amounts to an armed attack on Saudi Arabia, a violation of one of the basic principles of international law under the United Nations Charter.

The attacks caused serious damage in Saudi Arabia, and affected 5% of the world's oil supply.

In these circumstances, the UK has sought, and will continue to seek, to de-escalate tensions.

But our response is also an acid test of our resolve.

We have condemned the attacks in coordination not just with Saudi Arabia and the US but also with our European partners.

And I draw the attention of the House to the E3 statement released yesterday after meetings in New York.

We will now continue to work with the widest international support to determine the most effective response.

At the same time, Iran's attacks on the Aramco facilities are a reminder of the importance of ensuring that Iran never gains access to nuclear weapons.

That's why the UK remains committed to the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, notwithstanding US withdrawal.

Equally, we have always recognised that it is not a perfect deal.

The JCPOA has its strengths – including its provisions granting the IAEA unfettered access to Iran's nuclear facilities.

But it also has limitations – its provisions are time limited, with some expiring next year.

And it was never designed to address our long-standing concerns about Iran's wider de-stabilising behaviour in the region.

Since May, Iran has gradually reduced its compliance with key aspects of the JCPOA putting the deal at risk.

So, before any wider progress is possible, Iran must reverse those steps and must come back into full compliance.

At the same time, as both President Trump and President Macron have said, we can improve upon the JCPOA. Ultimately, we need a longer-term framework that provides greater certainty over Iran's nuclear programme.

And, as the attack on Aramco demonstrates, we must also bring into scope Iran's wider destabilising activities.

That includes putting an end to Iran's violations of the freedom of navigation, which are disrupting shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, and undermining the international law of the sea.

Alongside our partners, the US, Australia, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, we remain committed to the International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC), to ensure freedom of navigation in the region.

And we also welcome the European-led initiatives to achieve the same goals. We want the widest international support to uphold the international rules-based order.

We must also see an end to Iran's interference in Yemen, which has stoked further conflict through support for the Houthi rebels and fuelled the greatest humanitarian crisis in the world today.

A political solution is the only viable way to bring peace to that terrible conflict. Iran must start to play a constructive instead of a destructive role in that conflict.

And, finally, when it comes to respecting international law, Iran's dire human rights record continues to be of serious concern to the UK, especially its practice of arbitrary detention of dual-nationals.

Today, there are a range of UK dual-nationals languishing in jail in Iran, typically arrested on spurious charges, denied due process and subject to mistreatment contrary to the basic tenets of international human rights law.

This practice causes great anguish and suffering not just to those detained, but also to their families.

Iran's behaviour is unlawful, cruel and it is totally unacceptable. I have raised all of these cases, along with Iran's wider conduct with Foreign Minister Zarif.

The Prime Minister raised the cases with President Rouhani yesterday in New York. And we will continue to press for their release.

So, Iran's record of respect for the basic rules of international law is woeful. And it is getting worse.

Let's be clear about this and the Iranian government's responsibility for the plight of its own people.

It is a matter of political choice. Their government's choice.

And yet even now, we retain the hope that we can work with Iran and our international partners to de-escalate tensions, to re-build confidence, and establish a clear path for Iran towards international respectability.

Iran is a proud nation. It has a rich history, and remarkable economic potential.

It is held back by a regime that fails to respect the fundamental tenets of the rules based international system.

So, Iran faces a choice.

It can double down on its approach, in which case international opposition to its behaviour will only intensify.

Or it can take immediate steps to de-escalate tensions and re-build international confidence, by respecting international law and reducing the range of threats it presents to its neighbours.

That is the only path to stability and prosperity – for Iran and the wider region.

And I commend this statement to the House.

British Army soldiers' skills mapped to the Scottish qualifications framework

Infantry soldiers across the UK and those who settle in Scotland will be able to more easily match their military training qualifications to employers' needs and study requirements in Scotland, thanks to a new resource launched today.

For the first time, British Army Infantry qualifications have been matched to their equivalent Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework level, used by learners, employers, colleges and universities. This Scottish initiative means that upon leaving the military, personnel will have the recognised skills for jobs with Scottish employers and access to courses with further education and training providers. It also ensures that personnel appreciate the value of skills when in the services, as they will now go on to be nationally recognised across Scotland.

Until now British Army infantry qualifications had been mapped to the Regulated Qualifications Framework – the framework that is used in England and Northern Ireland.

The initiative was launched today at an event at Redford Barracks in Edinburgh, attended by Aileen Ponton, the Chief Executive of the SCQF Partnership, Colonel Sandy Fitzpatrick, Deputy Commander of 51 Brigade & Army Headquarters Scotland and the Scottish Veterans Minister, Graeme Day.

Deputy Commander of 51 Brigade and Army Headquarters Scotland, Colonel Sandy

Fitzpatrick said:

The recognition of British Army Infantry qualifications by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework is an important step in helping our infantry service leavers and veterans demonstrate just how valuable they are to prospective employers across Scotland.

We believe that the high quality of these qualifications along with the many other benefits that veterans offer employers, such as their ability to problem solve, work as a team and their self-discipline makes them twice the citizen and employee.

This recognition will greatly improve soldiers' transition from military to civilian life and better demonstrate the high-quality training and qualifications provided to the infantry of the British Army.

The MOD worked in partnership with the SCQF Partnership, with funding from the Scottish Funding Council following a recommendation of the Scottish Veterans' Commissioner's report on Employability and Education.

Chief Executive of the SCQF, Aileen Ponton said:

The SCQF Partnership is delighted to be working with Scottish Government, Scottish Funding Council, the MOD and a wide range of partners to deliver greater recognition for the skills and qualifications held by services personnel.

We see this work as helping employers and educational institutions understand the range of skills and expertise that those leaving the forces have to offer, and in addition support individuals to articulate their skills clearly in order to find employment or education which will add value to them and improve Scotland's economic future.

The SCQF has been working with the Ministry of Defence to review a total of its 1,235 qualification matrices across all three of its armed services. It has been examining all qualifications as well as speaking to key awarding bodies to ensure as many of the British Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force qualifications are either mapped or where possible, officially recognised on the SCQF.