

Angry Iranians question authorities for hiding truth from public

Author:

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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 @sadeq1367 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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[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

A military statement carried by state media said the plane was mistaken for a '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

[Sultan Qaboos ushered in Oman renaissance, quiet diplomacy](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-01-12 01:10

DUBAI: Sultan Qaboos bin Said, who died late on Friday, transformed Oman during his 49-year reign from a poverty-stricken country torn by dissent into a prosperous state and an internationally trusted mediator for some of the region's thorniest issues.

He became sultan in July 1970 in a palace coup with the aim of ending the country's isolation and using its oil revenue for modernization and development.

Qaboos, 79, never publicly named a successor but secretly recorded his choice in a sealed letter should the royal family disagree on the succession line. "I have already written down two names, in descending order, and put them in sealed envelopes in two different regions," he said in a 1997 interview.

His successor

State television said his cousin Haitham bin Tariq Al-Said was named sultan on Saturday after the high military council called on the ruling family council to choose a successor. The family had followed Qaboos' written recommendation, believing in "his wisdom and vision," a military council statement said.

State media did not disclose the cause of death. Qaboos, who has dominated decision making in the Gulf state for decades, had been ailing for years and was in Belgium in December for treatment.

"The immediate danger, perhaps, is that regional players may try to influence the outcome of succession or the chosen new leader," said Simon Henderson, director of the Bernstein Program on Gulf and Energy Policy at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

"Iran will likely be opportunistic in how it plays its cards."

Analysts worry about royal family discord, and a resurgence of tribal rivalries and political instability, now a new ruler was chosen at a time when young leaders have assumed power in neighboring Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Qaboos healed old rifts in a country long divided between a conservative tribal interior and seafaring coastal region. He became known to his countrymen as "the renaissance," investing billions of dollars of oil revenues in infrastructure and building one of the best-trained armed forces in the region.

While brooking no dissent at home, Qaboos charted an independent foreign policy, not taking sides in a Gulf rivalry.

Muscat kept ties with both Tehran and Baghdad during the 1980–88 Iran–Iraq War, and with Iran and the US after their diplomatic falling out in 1979. Oman helped to mediate secret US-Iran talks in 2013 that led to a historic international nuclear pact two years later.

SPEEDREAD

- Sultan Qaboos healed old rifts in a country long divided between a conservative tribal interior and seafaring coastal region.
- Qaboos, 79, never publicly named a successor but recorded his choice in a sealed letter.

The white-bearded Qaboos met Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in October 2018 on a rare visit to Oman. While other Gulf states have made overtures to Israel, none of their leaders have openly met with Netanyahu.

Al-Said dynasty

Qaboos, the eighth ruler of the Al-Said dynasty that governed Oman since 1744, was born on Nov. 18, 1940 in Dhofar.

In 1958, he headed to England to complete his education, strengthening historic ties between Britain and the Omani royal family. He studied for two years at the Royal Military Academy in Sandhurst and served six months in the British army in West Germany, returning to England in 1962 to study local

government.

When oil exports began in 1967, Sultan Said, accustomed to tight financial constraints, was reluctant to spend on development.

Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution directed Qaboos' attention to the Strait of Hormuz, through which almost a fifth of global oil passes. He pledged to keep the strait open and in 1980 signed a deal to let US forces use Omani facilities for emergencies. In 1981, Qaboos began widening political participation and free elections for an advisory council were held in 2003.

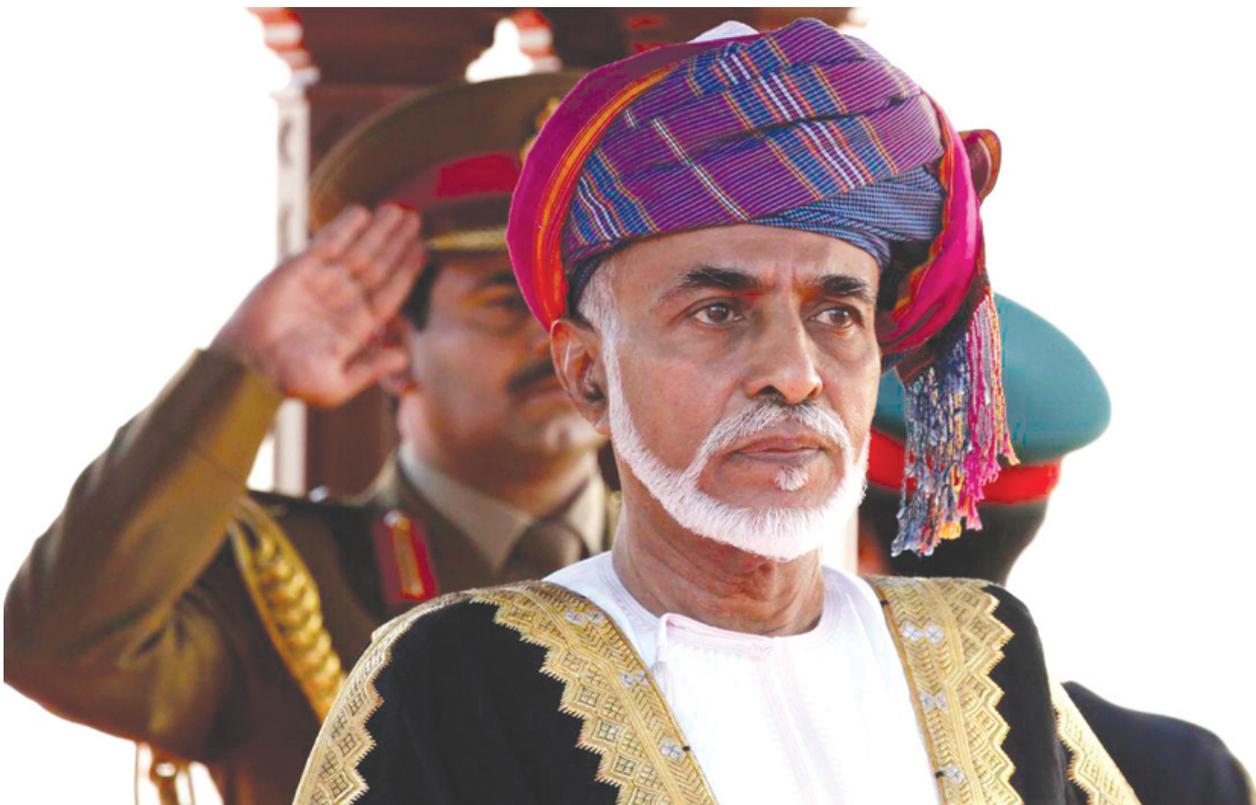
Charismatic authority

When the "Arab Spring" protests started to threaten – and eventually topple – the leaders of Tunisia and Egypt in 2011, Qaboos took note and defused his own potential bombshell as protests broke out in Oman with promises of jobs and reforms.

He sacked more than a third of the Cabinet, created thousands of public sector jobs and paid a dividend to the unemployed, which the IMF said amounted to a quarter of Omanis.

However domestic challenges remain with high unemployment and the state increasingly relying on external borrowing as oil prices fell, pushing its credit rating to junk status.

"Sultan Qaboos had such charismatic authority and became so synonymous with Oman as a modern nation-state that it will naturally be difficult for any successor to replicate that, at least at the beginning," Kristian Coates Ulrichsen of the Texas-based Rice University's Baker Institute told Reuters.



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Planes brought down by missiles since 1973

Sun, 2020-01-12 01:36

Here is a recap of planes hit by missiles over the past four decades:

- **July 17, 2014:** Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 is shot down over rebel-held eastern Ukraine en route to Kuala Lumpur from Amsterdam. All 298 people aboard the Boeing 777 are killed, including 193 Dutch nationals. The Kiev authorities and separatist pro-Russian rebels, who are battling for control of eastern Ukraine, accuse each other of firing the missile that downed the flight.
- **March 23, 2007:** An Ilyushin Il-76 cargo aircraft belonging to a Belarusian airline is shot down by a rocket shortly after takeoff from the Somalian capital Mogadishu, killing 11 people. The plane was transporting Belarusian engineers and technicians who had traveled to the country to repair another plane hit by a missile two weeks earlier.
- **Oct. 4, 2001:** 78 people, mostly Israelis, were killed when their Siberia Airlines Tupolev Tu-154, flying from Tel Aviv to Novosibirsk, exploded mid-flight over the Black Sea. The crash happened less than 300 km from the Crimean coast. A week later Kiev admitted that the disaster was due to the accidental firing of a Ukrainian missile.
- **July 3, 1988:** An Airbus A-300 belonging to Iran Air, flying from Bandar Abbas in Iran to Dubai in the UAE, was shot down in Iran's territorial waters in the Gulf shortly after takeoff by two missiles fired from a US frigate patrolling the Strait of Hormuz, apparently mistaking it for a fighter aircraft. The 290 passengers on board were killed. The US paid Iran \$101.8 million in compensation.
- **Sept. 1, 1983:** A Boeing 747 belonging to Korean Air (then called Korean Air Lines) was shot down by Soviet fighter jets over the island of Sakhalin, after veering off course. All 269 people on board were killed. Soviet officials acknowledged five days later that they had shot down the South Korean plane.
- **Feb. 21, 1973:** A Libyan Arab Airline Boeing 727 flying from Tripoli to Cairo was shot down by Israeli fighter jets over the Sinai Desert. All but four of the 112 people on board were killed. The Israeli air force intervened after the Boeing flew over military facilities in the Sinai, then occupied by Israel. Israeli authorities said fighters opened fire when the plane refused to land.



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World demands full account after Iran admits downing Ukraine jet

[Iran police disperse student protesters](#)

Sun, 2020-01-12 01:54

TEHRAN: Iranian police dispersed students chanting “radical” slogans during a Saturday gathering in Tehran to honor the 176 people killed when an airliner was mistakenly shot down, Fars news agency reported.

AFP correspondents said hundreds of students had gathered early in the evening at Amir Kabir University, in downtown Tehran, to pay respects to those killed in the air disaster.

The tribute later turned into an angry demonstration.

The students chanted slogans denouncing “liars” and demanded the resignation and prosecution of those responsible for downing the plane and allegedly covering up the accidental action.

Fars, which is close to conservatives, said the protesting students chanted “destructive” and “radical” slogans.

The news agency said some of the students tore down posters of Qassem Soleimani, the Iranian general killed on Jan. 3 in a US drone strike on Baghdad.

Fars published pictures of demonstrators gathered around a ring of candles during the tribute and a picture of a torn poster bearing the image of a smiling Soleimani.

It said that police “dispersed” them as they left the university and blocked streets, causing a traffic jam.

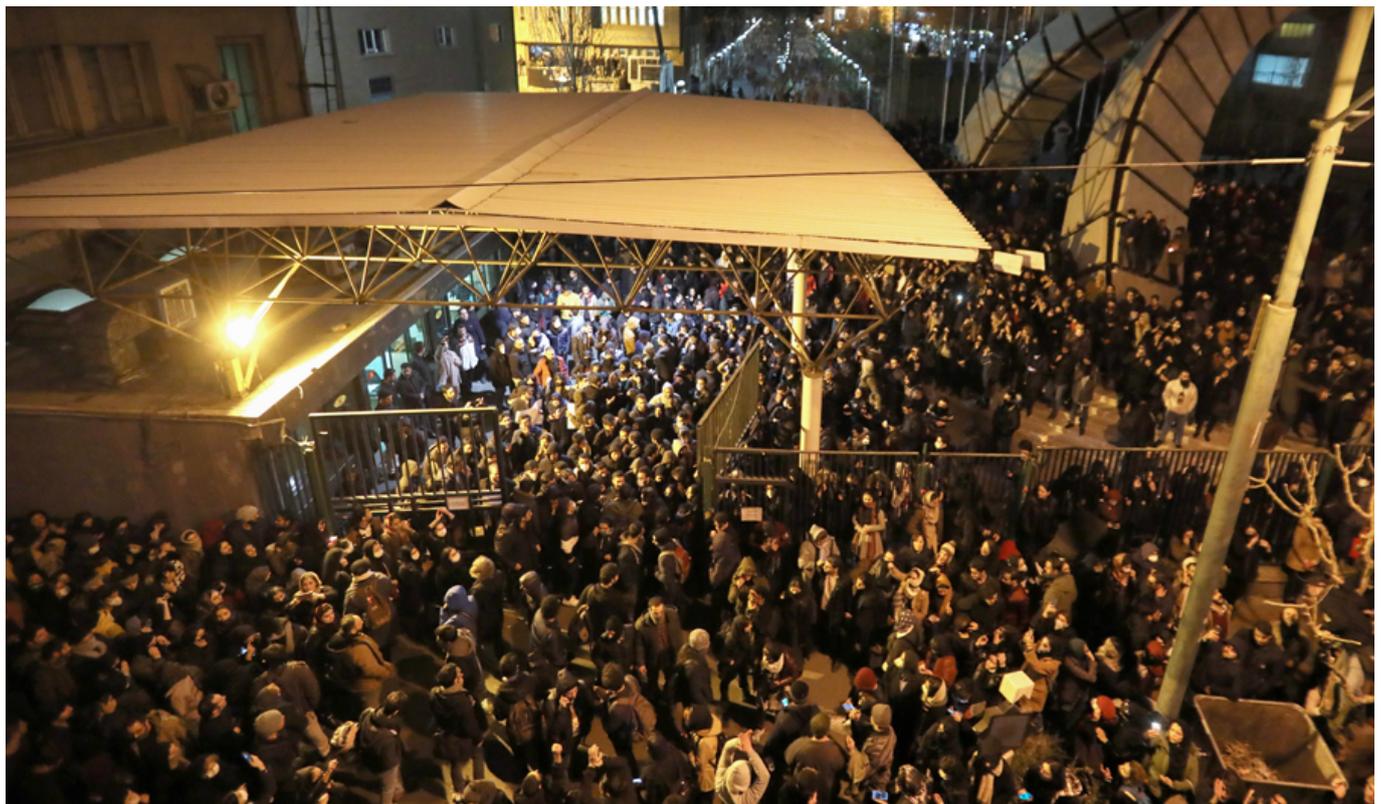
In an extremely unusual move, state television mentioned the protest, reporting that the students shouted “anti-regime” slogans.

A video purportedly of the protest circulated online Saturday evening showing police firing tear gas at protesters and a man getting up after apparently being hit in the leg by a projectile.

It was not possible to verify the location of the video, or when it was filmed.

Iran’s acknowledgement on Saturday that the plane had been shot down in error came after officials had for days categorically denied Western claims that it had been struck by a missile. The aerospace commander of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards accepted full responsibility.

But Brigadier General Amirali Hajizadeh said the missile operator acted independently, shooting down the Boeing 737 after mistaking it for a “cruise missile”.



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