

US-Iran envoy says Bahrain to host Gulf maritime security conference

Wed, 2019-07-17 19:11

LONDON: The US said Bahrain will host a maritime security conference to ensure freedom of navigation in the region's waters.

The comments come after Washington said last week it was seeking partners for a military coalition to protect the busy shipping lanes off Iran and Yemen.

Brian Hook, the special envoy to Iran, said 65 countries would attend the event, Al-Arabiya reported, which comes amid a heightened threat for shipping in the waters around the Arabian Peninsula.

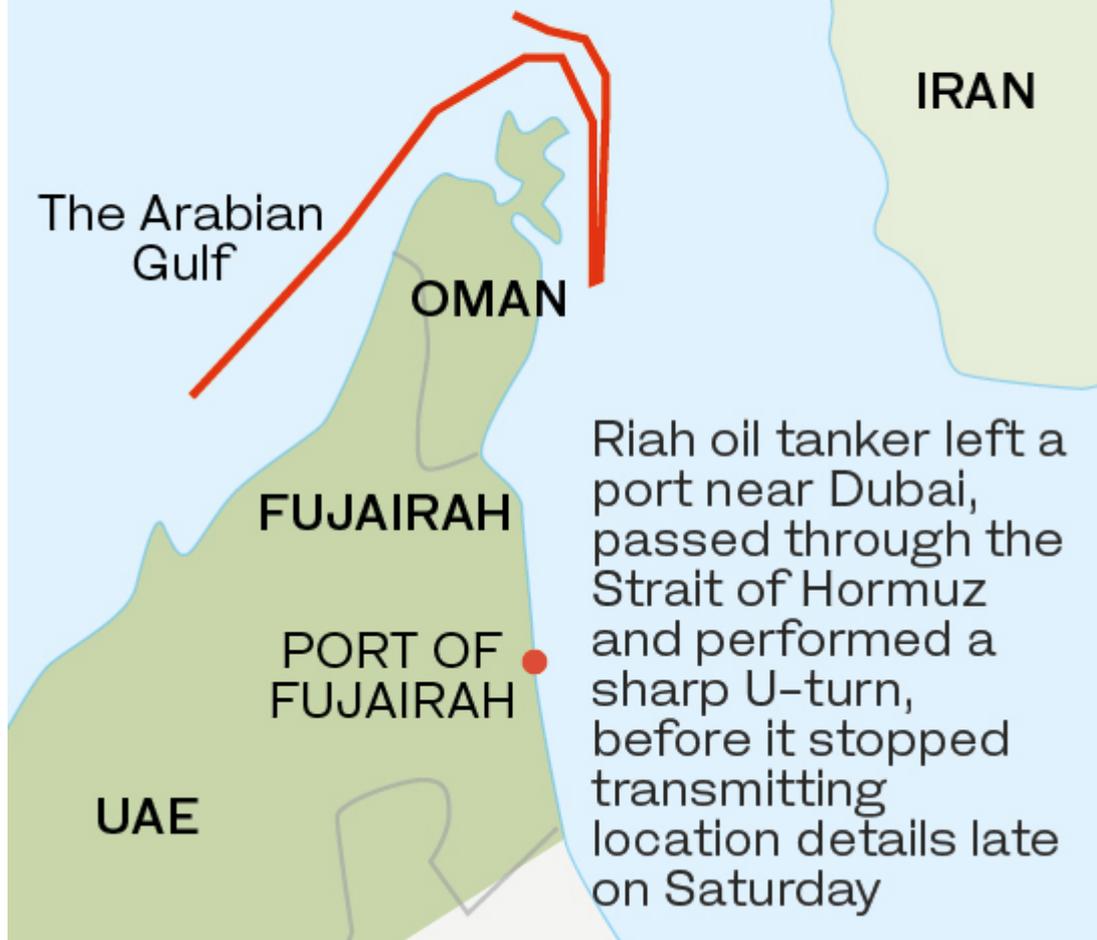
Several oil tankers have been attacked since May near the Strait of Hormuz – the narrow passage between the Arabian Sea and the Arabian Gulf, which serves as one of the world's main conduits for crude oil. Iran has been blamed for the attacks, which many view as a calculated response to increased economic and military pressure from the US over Tehran's nuclear program and destabilizing activities in the Middle East.

Tensions increased further when British forces helped seize an Iranian tanker off Gibraltar, which London said was attempting to deliver oil to Bashar Assad's Syrian regime.

Iran threatened to retaliate and last week a British warship had to aid a UK-owned tanker when Iranian vessels tried to block the ship as it passed through the Strait of Hormuz.

On Wednesday the UK's defense ministry said the reason it was deploying a third warship to the Gulf was "to protect UK interests and ensure freedom of navigation."

US 'SUSPECTS' IRAN SEIZED UAE-BASED OIL TANKER



Meanwhile, mystery continued to surround a UAE-based tanker, which stopped transmitting tracking data late on Saturday after passing through the Strait of Hormuz and which the US said is now located in Iranian waters.

Iran said late Tuesday that it towed a ship into its waters after the ship issued a distress call.

A US official said the Panamanian-flagged Riah was in Iranian territorial waters, but it was not clear whether that was because Iran had seized it or rescued it.

*With Reuters



US 'SUSPECTS' IRAN SEIZED UAE-BASED OIL TANKER



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[Iran tensions](#)

[Brian Hook](#)
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US 'suspects' Iran seized UAE-based oil tanker in Strait of Hormuz
Saudi Border Guards chief calls for global action plan to combat maritime terrorism

[Iran's foreign minister walks back from remark on missile talks](#)

Wed, 2019-07-17 17:36

TEHRAN: Iran's foreign minister said Wednesday that his country has no choice but to manufacture missiles for defense purposes – comments that reflect more backtracking after a remark by the top diplomat suggesting the missiles could be up for negotiations.

Mohammad Javad Zarif said in an interview with NBC News that aired earlier this week that if the US wants to talk about Iran's missiles, it needs "first to stop selling all these weapons, including missiles, to our region."

Iran has long rejected negotiations over its ballistic missile program, which remains under the control of the Iranian paramilitary Revolutionary Guard that answers only to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The foreign minister's remarks suggested a possible opening for talks as tensions remain high between Tehran and Washington.

But the Iranian mission to the United Nations promptly called Zarif's suggestion purely "hypothetical" and said the Iranian missiles were "absolutely and under no condition negotiable with anyone or any country, period."

In Tehran, the Foreign Ministry's spokesman, Abbas Mousavi, tweeted late on Tuesday that Zarif's comments meant to challenge Washington and "threw the ball into the US court while challenging America's arm sales" to its Mideast allies.

Zarif himself on Wednesday backpedaled on the missiles issue, saying Iran has no choice but to manufacture the missiles for its own defense.

He cited the 1980s Iran-Iraq war and tweeted that, "For 8 YEARS, Saddam (Hussein) showered our cities with missiles & bombs provided by East & West. Meanwhile, NO ONE sold Iran any means of defense. We had no choice but building our own. Now they complain."

"Instead of skirting the issue, US must end arms sales to Saddam's reincarnations," Zarif also said.

Tensions between Tehran and Washington have sharply escalated since President Donald Trump unilaterally last year withdrew America from the nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers and re-imposed sanctions on Iran, sending its economy into freefall.

America has also rushed thousands of additional troops, an aircraft carrier,

nuclear-capable B-52 bombers and advanced fighter jets to the Mideast amid unspecified threats from Iran.

Mysterious oil tanker blasts near the Strait of Hormuz, attacks by Iranian-backed rebels in Yemen on Saudi Arabia and Iran's shooting down of a U.S. military drone in the past months further raised fears of a wider conflict engulfing a region crucial to global energy supplies.

A compromise deal remains the best way to prevent Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon, British Prime Minister Theresa May said on Wednesday.

The UN nuclear watchdog has confirmed that Iran earlier this month violated the 2015 accord, and Iran's supreme leader on Tuesday said Tehran would keep removing restraints on its nuclear activity in the deal.

In her last major speech before stepping down next week, May said the nuclear deal must be protected "whatever its challenges".

"Whether we like it or not a compromise deal remains the best way to get the outcome we all still ultimately seek – to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, and to preserve the stability of the region," May said.

Recently, British authorities intercepted the Iranian supertanker Grace 1, carrying 2.1 million barrels of light crude oil, and seized it with the help of British Royal Marines off the coast of Gibraltar.

They believed it to be violating European Union sanctions by carrying a shipment of Iranian crude oil to Syria. Spanish authorities said the seizure came at the request of the United States.

This is not the only issue between Iran and Britain.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, a British-Iranian woman imprisoned in Iran following her arrest in April 2016 on charges of plotting against the Iranian government, has been transferred to a hospital mental health facility, her husband said Wednesday.

Her family denies the allegations against her.

Her husband, Richard Ratcliffe, said in Britain that his wife has been moved to the mental health ward of Iman Khomeini hospital under the control of the Revolutionary Guard.

"Hopefully her transfer to hospital means that she is getting treatment and care, despite my distrust of just what pressures can happen behind closed doors. It is unnerving when we don't know what is going on," he said.

Iran does not recognize dual nationality.

British officials have urged Iranian officials to let her have contact with her family.



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Donald Trump tells Iran to 'get out of Yemen' US 'suspects' Iran seized UAE-based oil tanker in Strait of Hormuz

[Brother of 2017 Ariana Grande concert bomber extradited from Libya to Britain](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1563367859517319700

Wed, 2019-07-17 12:40

LONDON: Libya on Wednesday extradited to Britain the brother of a suicide bomber who attacked an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester in May 2017 and killed 22 people, officials said.

Salman Abedi's brother Hashem, who was arrested in Libya days after the bombing, was handed over to British officials and then flown to Britain where

he was arrested for murder, Greater Manchester Police said in a statement. "He has today been successfully extradited for offences relating to the Manchester Arena attack," it said.

Statement from [@CCIanHopkins](#) regarding Manchester Arena attack of 22nd May 2017 pic.twitter.com/wLY0eXgj97

– Greater Manchester Police (@gmpolice) [July 17, 2019](#)

Asked about the arrest, British Prime Minister Theresa May said it was "an important moment in the investigation.

"I hope it is a welcome step for the loved ones of all the victims," she said, condemning the "appalling" and "senseless" attack.

Manchester police said Abedi was also being arrested for attempted murder and "conspiracy to cause an explosion likely to endanger life".

He is expected to appear in a London court on Thursday.

A spokesman for the Libyan force which had held him earlier told AFP that Abedi was "in the plane headed for Britain".

Ahmed Ben Salem of the Special Deterrence Force (Radaa), an armed group which serves as the capital's police, said he was being extradited in line with a decision of the Libyan judiciary following a request from Britain.

According to Radaa, the brother has allegedly acknowledged that he was in Britain as the attack was being prepared and was "fully aware of the details".

Statement from [@CCIanHopkins](#) pic.twitter.com/1A4r7LTvKP

– Greater Manchester Police (@gmpolice) [July 17, 2019](#)

His father was also detained in Libya but released a few weeks later.

Salman Abedi carried out the bloodiest terror attack in Britain in more than a decade when he detonated a suicide bomb after a concert by Grande, leaving many children among the dead.

Libya's internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA), which is based in Tripoli, said in April that Hashem Abedi's case was being determined by the North African country's courts.

Libya has been mired in chaos since the ouster and killing of dictator Moamer Kadhafi in a NATO-backed uprising 2011.

Thanks to the Libyan authorities for their close cooperation on the successful extradition of Hashem Abedi. The Manchester attack was horrific; whoever is found responsible for this great evil must face justice. It is right that Abedi will now face criminal proceedings in the UK

– Jeremy Hunt (@Jeremy_Hunt) [July 17, 2019](#)

The Abedi family, originally from Libya, had fled to Britain during the dictatorship, but the brothers returned to the country along with their father when the uprising began in 2011.

There has been a surge in fighting since military strongman General Khalifa Haftar launched an offensive on Tripoli, seat of the GNA, on April 4.



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[Hashem Abedi](#)

[Salman Abedi](#)

Libya planning to extradite Manchester bomber's brother UK seeks arrest of Manchester bomber's brother, asks Libya to extradite him

Turkey clears RSF representative of 'terror propaganda'

Author:

AFP

ID:

1563361289126865300

Wed, 2019-07-17 10:47

ISTANBUL: The Turkey representative for Reporters Without Borders (RSF) was acquitted on Wednesday of the charge of making "terror propaganda" for Kurdish militants, in a case which triggered international alarm over press freedom in the country.

With dozens of journalists behind bars and on trial, activists claim the climate for the media has deteriorated under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Supporters erupted into applause after RSF representative Erol Onderoglu, rights activist Sebnem Korur Fincanci and journalist Ahmet Nesin were acquitted by an Istanbul court.

They were accused of making "terror propaganda" on behalf of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) after guest-editing the pro-Kurdish Turkish newspaper Ozgur Gundem, as well as "condoning crime" and "inciting crime." The three risked 14 years in jail in the trial which began in November 2016. Ozgur Gundem had invited guest editors to take control of the paper in a campaign of solidarity as it faced pressure from the Turkish authorities. The newspaper was raided and permanently shut down in August 2016, accused of links with the PKK which has waged an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984.

The three campaigners were detained for a short period in 2016, and can now apply for financial compensation for time spent in jail.

The acquittals are in stark contrast with the harsh verdicts handed down by Turkish courts to critical journalists in recent years, the most controversial of which was the case against opposition daily Cumhuriyet whose former staff have been sentenced to jail.

"I warmly thank all those who supported us during the trial," Onderoglu, who will return to Istanbul next week, said via text message.

But he added: "The fight continues for all our colleagues unjustly on trial or imprisoned."

RSF said on Twitter it was "deeply relieved" by the acquittals but called for another trial due to begin against Onderoglu later this year to be scrapped. Onderoglu faces the same accusation of making "terror propaganda" after supporting academics who signed a petition calling for peace and the end of security operations against militants in the Kurdish-majority southeast.

"Three years of absurd proceedings was already a form of unjust punishment.

AND a new trial against Erol will start on 7 November. These charges must be dropped!” RSF said.

Only Fincanci attended the hearing while Onderoglu and Nesin were abroad. Fincanci told AFP she was “very surprised” by the acquittal.



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Anadolu Agency: Turkey-Pakistan hold high level military meeting
Turkey: EU sanctions over gas drilling ‘worthless’

[UK to send third warship HMS Duncan to Gulf](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1563309213652138000

Tue, 2019-07-16 17:55

LONDON: Britain will send a third Royal Navy warship to the Gulf, the defense ministry announced Tuesday, while insisting that it did not "reflect an escalation" of tensions with Iran in the region.

Britain has already sent the HMS Duncan, an air defense destroyer, to cover for frigate HMS Montrose while it undergoes maintenance in nearby Bahrain, and will also send frigate HMS Kent "later this year."

Reports said it would head to the Gulf in mid-September.

HMS Montrose last week warned off three Iranian gunboats that UK officials said were trying to "impede" the progress of a British supertanker through the Strait of Hormuz in the Gulf.

The defense ministry said the HMS Kent would be "taking over" from HMS Duncan, but added that an "occasional overlap of ships when one deployment begins and another ends... is not uncommon," suggesting that all three could be in the region at some point.

The ministry said the deployments were "long-planned" to ensure "an unbroken presence" in the crucial waterway and "do not reflect an escalation in the UK posture in the region."

Iranian officials have denied last Wednesday's incident in the Strait of Hormuz ever happened.

The British government has in any case raised the alert level for ships traveling through Iranian waters to three on a three-point scale, indicating a "critical" threat.

HMS Duncan is an air defense destroyer that carries a set of heavy Harpoon anti-ship missiles and has a company and crew in excess of 280.

Tensions have been escalating in the region for weeks, with US President Donald Trump last month calling off at the last minute an air strike on Iran over its downing of a US spy drone.

The Strait of Hormuz episode occurred a week after UK Royal Marines helped the Gibraltar authorities detain an Iranian tanker that US officials believe was trying to deliver oil to Syria in violation of separate sets of EU and US sanctions.

Iran has bristled at the arrest and issued a series of increasingly ominous warnings to both the United States and Britain about its right to take unspecified actions in reprisal.

British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt sought to ease tensions on Monday by saying the tanker would be released if Tehran guaranteed it was not heading to Syria.



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