

Iran wants resolution, not escalation: UK's Jeremy Hunt

Sat, 2019-07-13 18:53

LONDON: Iran wants to resolve the ongoing crisis involving the UK seizure of an Iranian tanker and was “not seeking to escalate tensions,” UK’s Foreign Minister Jeremy Hunt said after a conversation with his Iranian counterpart.

Speaking on Saturday, Hunt said Mohammad Javad Zarif had told him during their telephone conversation that Iran was seeking a resolution to the issue involving detained tanker Grace 1.

The UK’s foreign minister said he told Zarif that Britain would facilitate the release of the detained oil tanker if there were “guarantees” it would not go to Syria.

After what he called a “constructive call” with Zarif, Hunt tweeted that the UK would “facilitate release” if the British government received guarantees that the tanker would not dock in Syria, “following due process in Gibraltar courts.”

[#BREAKING](#): Iran wants to resolve the oil tanker issue and is not seeking to escalate the situation, Britain’s Foreign Secretary [@Jeremy_Hunt](#) said Saturday <https://t.co/r7fP0qrCdI> pic.twitter.com/IJrESW0bFR

– Arab News (@arabnews) [July 13, 2019](#)

US officials believed the tanker was destined for Syria to deliver oil, in violation of separate sets of EU and US sanctions.

Tehran had reacted angrily to the seizure, and Britain this week said Iranian military vessels had tried to “impede the passage” of a British oil tanker in the Strait of Hormuz.

Hunt said Gibraltar’s Chief Minister Fabian Picardo was doing an “excellent job co-ordinating issue and shares UK perspective on the way forward”.

Hunt also said he raised with Zarif the imprisonment of British-Iranian national Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, and Zarif “said he would continue to seek to find a solution”.



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Gibraltar police arrest captain, officer of detained Iran tanker Grace 1Iran
calls on Britain to immediately release its seized supertanker

[Military planes to fly fans to Egypt if Algeria reach final](#)

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Sat, 2019-07-13 12:38

ALGIERS: Algeria's hopes of winning their first Africa Cup of Nations for 29 years will be boosted by the arrival of another 600 fans on board military planes should they reach Friday's final.

The Ministry of Defence told AFP that six military planes will be used to shuttle supporters of the Desert Foxes to Cairo for the final if they beat Nigeria in Sunday's semi-final.

Ten Air Algeria planes will deliver 1,400 supporters for the semi-final. If Algeria beat Nigeria they will face either Senegal or Tunisia in the final.

According to a statement received by AFP, the Algerian Ministry of Defence said that, in that event, the army high command had taken the decision in conjunction with the Prime Minister Nouredine Bedoui to add the six military planes so that "600 Algerians supporters can cheer on and encourage the national team and motivate them to win this important continental trophy."





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Algerian football supporter runs over family in France, woman killed
Two shops near Champs-Elysees looted after Algeria football win

[US ambassador arrives in Turkey as Russian weapons system is delivered](#)

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Sat, 2019-07-13 14:02

ANKARA: At a critical junction in bilateral relations, the new US ambassador to Turkey, David Satterfield, arrived in Ankara on Wednesday just as S-400 Russian air defense systems were delivered to Turkey.

The American diplomat will now look to bring US-Turkey relations back on track, defusing complicated bilateral issues in Syria and derailing Russian-Turkish military cooperation.

The 65 year old envoy served as acting assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs from 2017.

During George W. Bush's presidency, he was the coordinator for Iraq and senior adviser to the secretary of state between 2006-2009.

As a fluent Arabic speaker, Satterfield also held top positions at US missions in Syria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Lebanon.

The ambassadorial post has been vacant since October 2017, mainly due to a visa crisis between Washington and Ankara, as well as Turkey's imprisonment of American Pastor Andrew Brunson on charges of terror propaganda.

Ali Cinar, a US-based foreign policy expert, said that having a US Ambassador in Ankara again is a positive step in the US-Turkey relations.

"The process of nominating an ambassador in the US is long and complicated.

During Trump's presidency, there have been a number of ambassador vacancies around the world, including Turkey. Despite the tension between two NATO allies, Ambassador Satterfield was able to be confirmed," Cinar said.

According to Cinar, Ambassador Satterfield's posting comes at a critical time, but his diplomatic skills should help to reconcile the troubled relationship.

"Turkey now has a direct channel through Ambassador Satterfield. Syria and the eastern Mediterranean crisis are the two issues that US and Turkey are facing," he said.

Washington recently voiced concern over Ankara's gas exploration activities in the Mediterranean Sea and called on the Turkish government to stop offshore drilling operations.

Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, Ankara office director of German Marshall Fund of the

United States, thinks that despite Satterfield's extensive experience, all he can be expected to do is to contain the potential damage that may be inflicted on the US-Turkey relationship in the near future and perhaps save it from total collapse.

The first batch of S-400 systems started to arrive at Mürted Air Base in Ankara on Friday. However, the US Department of Defense recently announced that it will remove Turkey from the F-35 joint strike fighter program – the most sensitive US aircraft – if Ankara accepts the Russian S-400s.

Acting US Defense Secretary Mark Esper recently met with his Turkish counterpart, Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, during a meeting of NATO defense ministers. Esper emphasized that Turkey will not receive the F-35 if it moves ahead with its S-400 purchase plan.

If enacted, the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act is expected to have a devastating effect on the Turkish economy and defense sector. The act will deny visas for Turkish officials or executives, freeze their assets in the US and block money transfers.

Unluhisarcikli noted that there has not been any significant convergence between the two allies in north-east Syria.

"The conflict between Turkey and the Republic of Cyprus, which Turkey doesn't recognize, over the exploitation of the energy resources off the coast of Cyprus is a growing source of tension in the US-Turkey relationship," he said.

Turkey has significantly reduced oil imports from its neighbors after US waivers expired in early May.

"While Turkey is complying with the Iran sanctions, it would likely not cooperate with the US in case there is armed conflict, which could add to the frustration in Washington," Unluhisarcikli said.



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Turkey begins second wave of operations against PKK in Iraq
Russia delivers more S-400 air defense equipment to Turkey

[Iraq's former prime minister Abadi hints at comeback](#)

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Sat, 2019-07-13 08:59

BAGHDAD: Iraqi ex-prime minister Haider Al-Abadi is eyeing a sequel to his turbulent single term, he hinted to AFP, warning a failure to tackle sectarianism and corruption risks seeing his country "fall apart."

As the government of incumbent Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi faces growing criticism over poor services, Abadi has been working in the wings to secure a second term, according to multiple sources.

"We have good intentions," he said coyly, when asked about his ambitions in a wide-ranging AFP interview at his home in Baghdad's "Green Zone."

The 67-year-old, who came to office in 2014 without an election as Iraq reeled from the Daesh group grabbing a third of the country, has sent out feelers to major political blocs who may help him win allies in parliament, a government source said.

"He may take advantage of a wave of summertime protests if they happen," said the source.

Soaring summer temperatures – paired with crippling electricity shortages, which restrict refrigeration and air conditioning – often provoke significant unrest in Iraq.

Abadi has even reached out to Iraq's powerful Shiite clerics, who can make or break a politician's career, said intermediaries close to the religious establishment.

The rumors of his return have gained so much traction that Abdel Mahdi has repeatedly had to deny allegations he was preparing to resign.

Abadi oversaw both the fight against the Daesh group and a tough response by Baghdad to an independence referendum by the country's Kurds, but his bloc fared poorly in national elections last year.

Abadi painted himself as an opposition figure who could help "guide" the current government.

The chief priority should be tackling corruption, he said, in a country ranked by Transparency International as the world's 12th most corrupt.

"There is a new kind of state corruption now – selling positions, which happened secretly in the past but now goes on in the open," Abadi told AFP. "Everything has a price."

Graft is endemic across Iraq, where parliament estimates that \$228 billion has vanished into the pockets of shady politicians and businessmen over the last 15 years.

Abadi himself was accused of failing to curb corruption during his term.

The ex-premier said the government should also tackle the spectre of sectarian violence, which ravaged Iraq's diverse communities over a decade ago.

"In the past, sectarianism was used as a weapon in the conflict between factions to divide up the spoils of war," he said.

"If Daesh (IS) or another terrorist group returns, or if a cocktail of terrorists and politicians is formed, it'll be so dangerous that everything will completely fall apart."

Abadi himself declared IS defeated in December 2017 after a draining three-year military campaign, a moment that will likely define his legacy.

Several months earlier, he had ordered federal troops to retake disputed territories and adjacent oil fields from Kurdish forces after an independence referendum in the autonomous region that saw an overwhelming vote in favor of secession.

Abadi remains largely disliked by the autonomous Kurdish regional government

(KRG), led by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which he indirectly criticized.

“I have no problems with Kurdish citizens,” he said.

“But there is a problem with some of the parties which control the region, its wealth and its oil,” Abadi said.

He accused the KRG of exporting nearly double the agreed amount from their northern pipeline without federal authorization, asking: “Where are the revenues?”

Abadi’s poor ratings in the north notwithstanding, he is one of the rare figures in Iraq widely respected by both the country’s Shiite majority – from which he hails – and its Sunni minority.

And in the regional tug-of-war between the US and Iran, both allies of Iraq, Abadi has been seen as closer to Washington’s camp.

Tensions between the two countries have skyrocketed since the US reimposed tough sanctions on Iran last year, which Abadi had pledged to implement as prime minister.

That stance cost him his premiership, observers say, and parliament voted in Abdel Mahdi to replace him.

This month, Abdel Mahdi ordered the Hashed Al-Shaabi, a collection of mostly-Shiite, pro-Iran paramilitary units, to integrate into the state’s security forces by July 31.

Abadi, who issued a similar decision in 2017, told AFP the decision was too little, too late.

“I believe we lost a year and a half,” he said.



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Rival Iraqi factions make coalition deal and end Al-Abadi's prime minister hopes Al-Abadi rivals sabotage Iraq's power lines and fuel protests

[South Korea considers joining coalition to patrol waters off Iran](#)

Fri, 2019-07-12 22:22

SEOUL: The South Korean government is in discussions with the US over plans to join a multinational naval coalition to protect shipping in the Arabian Gulf in the face of alleged Iranian threats, Foreign Ministry officials revealed on Thursday.

The move came after Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated the US was holding talks with several nations to send ships to safeguard waters surrounding Iran and Yemen.

"The (South Korean) government is concerned about the escalation of tensions in the Middle East region," Foreign Ministry spokesman Kim In-chul said in a briefing.

"Our position is that freedom of navigation and commerce should not be put into jeopardy."

The spokesman said his ministry has yet to receive any formal request on the coalition matter.

"We'll keep discussing the issue with the US side," Kim said. "No details have been discussed yet about when, how and what we would do."

Washington is seeking to enlist its allies for a multinational coalition to operate in waters off Iran and Yemen to secure commercial shipping and prevent attacks that could harm the world's oil supply.



Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff. (AFP)

A fifth of the oil that is consumed globally passes through the Strait of Hormuz, connecting the Indian Ocean with the Gulf.

“We’re engaging now with a number of countries to see if we can put together a coalition that would ensure freedom of navigation both in the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab Al-Mandeb,” Dunford said on Tuesday.

“Probably over the next couple of weeks we’ll identify which nations have the political will to support that initiative and then we’ll work directly with the militaries to identify the special capabilities that will support that.”

He said the US military would provide “command and control” ships, while other coalition members should send ships to patrol waters between the American naval vessels.

South Korea has participated in previous US-led coalition operations, as the country has long been dependent on US military forces for protection against North Korea, with the two Koreas technically still at war.

In 2004, South Korea sent a 3,600-strong contingent to Iraq for humanitarian and rehabilitation operations. About 200 engineers and medics were also dispatched to Afghanistan in support of the US war on terrorism.

The South Korean Navy is a member of anti-piracy operations in the Somali waters.

The unit, called “Cheonghae,” has escorted thousands of South Korean and international vessels in and around the Gulf of Aden since 2009.

As of February, the Cheonghae Unit escorted 21,895 vessels and conducted 21 operations to counter piracy on the seas, according to the service.

The total sailing distance of the unit amounted to 1.95 million km.

It also takes part in the Combined Maritime Force, a multinational naval force dedicated to maintaining maritime safety and combating piracy, and conducts joint military drills with the EU’s maritime security operations.



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US, allies planning naval escort for Gulf tankers Britain to deploy second warship to the Gulf amid tensions with Iran