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Iran warns UK against escalating tensions, says crew of seized ship safe

Zanganeh: Tanker incidents have not impacted oil exports

Labour: Britain should not become Trump's 'messengers' over Iran

International Desk

Iran's envoy to Britain warned against escalating tensions on Sunday as a UK official declined to rule out sanctions in response to Tehran's seizure of a British-flagged oil tanker.

Britain needs to contain "those domestic political forces who want to escalate existing tension between Iran and the UK well beyond the issue of ships," Iran's Ambassador to Britain Hamid Baedinejad said on Twitter. "This is quite dangerous and unwise at a sensitive time in the region," he said, adding that Iran "is firm and ready for different scenarios."

Iran has called Iran's capture of the Stena Impero in the Strait of Hormuz on Friday a "hostile act."

Tehran's seizure of the Stena Impero followed the July 4 capture by Royal Marines of the Grace I tanker carrying Iranian oil near Gibraltar.

Britain's Defence Secretary Tobias Ellwood reiterated calls for de-escalation on Sunday in an interview with Sky News.

"Well, firstly we need to try and de-escalate this. There has been a ratcheting-up of tensions in the Middle East," he said.

Ellwood also noted that the British Royal Navy "is too small to manage our interests across the globe."

He did not rule out the possibility of targeting Tehran with sanctions in response.

"Our first and most important responsibility is to make sure that we get a solution to the issue to do with the current ship, make sure other British-flagged ships are safe to operate in these waters and then look at the wider picture," Ellwood said.

Asked about the possibility of sanctions, he said, "We are going to be looking at a series of options... We will be speaking with our colleagues, our international allies, to see what can actually be done."

British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt on Saturday said Tehran's actions showed "worrying signs Iran may be choosing a dangerous path."

Hunt called it a "tit-for-tat" situation, as it came hours after a court in Gibraltar said it would extend by 30 days the detention of the Grace I.

In a letter to the UN Security Council, Britain said the Stena Impero was approached by Iranian forces in Omani territorial waters where it was exercising its lawful right of passage, and that the action "constitutes illegal interference."

London warned its ships to avoid the Strait of Hormuz, a chokepoint for about a third of the world's seaborne oil.

Britain called the seizure a



REUTERS

"dangerous" and summoned Iran's charge d'affaires on Saturday, urging Iran to de-escalate tensions and release the tanker.

British warship HMS Montrose radioed an Iranian patrol vessel to warn it against boarding the Stena Impero, according to radio messages provided by maritime security firm Dryad Global.

In the audio recording released Sunday, a British naval officer can be heard saying the transit of a British-flagged vessel through the Strait of Hormuz must not be impaired under international law as Iranian naval forces warn the vessel to change course.

The audio shows how the British Navy was unable to prevent the ship's seizure.

In the recording, an Iranian officer can be heard telling the Stena Impero to change course, saying, "You obey, you will be safe."

"Alter your course to 360 degrees immediately, over," the officer says, before saying the ship is wanted for security reasons.

A British naval officer from the HMS Montrose frigate patrolling the area around the Strait of Hormuz is heard telling the Stena Impero that its passage must be allowed.

"Sir, I reiterate that as you are conducting transit passage in a recognized international strait, under international law your passage must not be impaired, intruded, obstructed or hampered," the British officer says.



The British officer then tells an Iranian patrol boat, "Please confirm that you are not intending to violate international law by unlawfully attempting to board the MV Stena."

All crew safe

Iran said the seized tanker

"risked maritime safety."

"We are required by regulations to investigate the issue... the duration of the investigation depends on the level of cooperation by the involved parties," Alahmorad Afifpour, head of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization in Hormuzgan Province, said.

"God willing, we will make every effort to gather all the information as soon as possible," he added.

Afifpour added that all 23 crew members aboard the ship are "safe and in good health in Bandar Abbas port."

The vessel's Sweden-based owner, Stena Bulk, said it hoped to visit the crew, who are from India, Latvia, the Philippines and Russia. India has called on Iran to release the ship's 18 Indian crew members.

The vessel was taken with its 23 crew members to Bandar Abbas after the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps seized it in the Strait of Hormuz on Friday.

The IRGC on Saturday released video footage showing vessel being surrounded by speedboats before troops in balaclavas descend down a rope from a helicopter onto the ship.

Iran detained the oil tanker for failing to respond to distress calls and turning off its transponder after hitting a fishing boat.

The fishermen had issued a distress call after the collision and contacted the port authority when they "didn't receive any re-

sponse," said Afifpour.

Iran had vowed to give a proper response for the seizure of the Grace I tanker by British forces.

"The Britons hijacked [the tanker in Gibraltar], the IRGC responded to them," Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani told a Parliament session aired live on state radio.

Ships using the Strait of Hormuz also pass through Iranian waters, which are patrolled by Iran's IRGC.

Oil export not affected

Iran is reeling from the pressure of US sanctions imposed on its banks and oil exports by US President Donald Trump last year after he pulled the United States out of a 2015 international pact with Iran designed to curb Tehran's nuclear program.

US waivers which allowed eight countries to keep buying Iranian oil - China, Greece, India, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Turkey - expired on May 2.

"The export of oil is one of the issues in which we have limitations and the US and its allies have caused restrictions for us and we have to be sensitive," Iran's Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh said on Sunday.

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Zarif: US modern adventurism threatening global peace

FM: Bolton dragging UK into 'quagmire' after failing to lure Trump into war

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif slammed the United States for what he termed as America's "modern wave of adventurism," saying the policy is a serious threat to the global peace.

Addressing a meeting of top diplomats from the Non-Aligned Movement in Caracas, Venezuela, Zarif said Washington's modern wave of extremist, unilateral adventurism is the most significant challenge that almost all countries around the world are facing in a way or another, Press TV reported.

Zarif made the remarks in a clear reference to a raft of tough economic sanctions imposed by the US on countries like Iran and Venezuela over the past months.

The oil-exporting countries have been deprived of much of their normal revenues as US President Donald Trump continues to press buyers around the world to cut their crude imports from the two states to zero.

Coupled with punitive economic measures against countries like China and Russia and others in the European Union, the sanctions have represented a growing inclination toward unilateralism in the White House while prompting massive criticism around the world.

Zarif said such unilateral and protectionist view to the international affairs has posed a real threat to the global peace and stability.

He said that the challenge posed by new US policies is weakening the governance of law at the international level



while threatening the global peace and stability in various ways.

Zarif cited a decision by Trump in May last year to pull out of a 2015 agreement on Iran nuclear activities as a main example of Washington's recklessness for international law.

"The US administration is defeating the Iran nuclear deal, despite the investment the whole world made to bring it about," said Zarif, according to excerpts of remarks reported from Caracas.

"And in the process it has not only breached the relevant [UN] Security Council resolution, but also ironically sanctioned those who try to abide by it," he added.

Dragging UK into quagmire

In a tweet, Zarif also said US national security advisor John Bolton is trying to drag the United Kingdom into a quagmire after he failed to lure US president into war with Iran.

"Having failed to lure @realDonaldTrump into War

of the Century, and fearing collapse of his #B Team, @AmbJohnBolton is turning his venom against the UK in hopes of dragging it into a quagmire," Zarif tweeted on Sunday.

The hawkish group referred to as the "B-team" by Iran's foreign minister is comprised of Bolton, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

On Friday, Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps captured the British oil tanker, Stena Impero, for breaching international maritime law while crossing the Strait of Hormuz.

The seizure came weeks after the Gibraltar illegally seized the super tanker Grace I which was carrying Iran's oil.

Zarif added that under the current circumstances, "only prudence and foresight can thwart such ploys," warning the UK against making a mistake.

Tens of thousands march again in Hong Kong

Hong Kong witnessed another huge anti-government march on Sunday with seemingly no end in sight to the turmoil engulfing the finance hub.

The city has been plunged into its worst crisis in recent history by weeks of marches and sporadic violent confrontations between police and pockets of hardcore protesters. The initial protests were lit by a now-suspended bill that would have allowed extraditions to mainland China, AFP reported.

But they have since evolved into a wider movement calling for democratic reforms, universal suffrage and a halt to sliding freedoms in the territory.

Police have fired tear gas and rubber bullets, while the parliament has been trashed by protesters as Beijing's authority faces its most serious challenge since Hong Kong was handed back to China in 1997.

Sunday's rally is the seventh weekend in-a-row that residents have come out.

Security was tightened in the city center, with metal street fencing often used by

protesters to build barricades removed ahead of the march, and large water-filled barriers thrown up around the police headquarters.

At the end of the march protesters occupied a major road next to the city's parliament and a large crowd gathered outside the police headquarters, which has previously been

blocked twice before. Riot officers maintained little presence and the atmosphere was calm, although the police said they had closed down the emergency response room at the headquarters.

Under the 1997 handover deal with Britain, China promised to allow Hong Kong to keep key liberties such as its

independent judiciary and freedom of speech.

But many say those provisions are already being curtailed.

Authorities have also resisted calls for the city's leader to be directly elected by the people.

Protesters have vowed to keep their movement going until their core demands are met, such as the resignation of city leader Carrie Lam, an independent inquiry into police tactics, amnesty and a permanent withdrawal of the bill.



AFP