

Britain expels two Iranian diplomats in tit-for-tat response

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Britain has ordered the expulsion of two Iranian diplomats, in tit-for-tat response to the expulsion of two British diplomats from Tehran yesterday.

The Iranian government said it was throwing out the two Britons, who have not been named, for “activities incompatible with their diplomatic status” – a claim [Gordon Brown](#) described as “unjustified”.

This morning, the Iranian ambassador to London, Rasoul Movahedian Attar, was summoned to be informed of Britain’s response by the permanent under-secretary at the Foreign Office, Sir Peter Ricketts. The Iranian diplomats, who have also not been identified, have been given a week to leave the country.

“I am disappointed that [Iran](#) has placed us in this position but we will continue to seek good relations with Iran and to call for the regime to respect the human rights and democratic freedoms of the Iranian people,” Brown told the House of Commons.

The prime minister said Britain expected Iran to “meet its obligations to the international community”, and said “the onus is on Iran to show the Iranian people” that the presidential elections this month were credible.

The Foreign Office said: “The government of Iran is seeking to blame the UK and other outsiders for what is an Iranian reaction to an Iranian issue. This has a potential impact on our staff’s safety and is unacceptable.”

The developments come as Iranian media reported that the president, [Mahmoud Ahmadinejad](#), [would be sworn in again by mid-August](#). IRNA, the official Iranian news agency, said Ahmadinejad, who won a “closely contested and disputed 10th presidential election”, would be sworn in before parliament between 26 July and 19 August.

The news will sharpen the dilemma for the defeated reformist candidate, [Mir Hossein Mousavi](#), who maintains that the 12 June vote was fraudulent and that he was the true winner. He must now decide whether to accept an apparent fait accompli or keep up the protest movement that has brought hundreds of thousands out on to the streets of Tehran.

The British embassy began evacuating staff family members yesterday, and this afternoon there was a short demonstration outside the embassy compound in Tehran by Ahmadinejad supporters, who threw eggs over the wall.

Tensions have been rising in recent days as Iranian officials singled out the British government and the BBC, accusing them of instigating and orchestrating election protests.

The parliamentary speaker, Ali Larijani, yesterday called for bilateral relations with the UK to be reviewed. Mahmoud Ahmadi, an Iranian parliamentarian, said Iran would temporarily recall its ambassador to London.

On Sunday, the Iranian foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, summoned European diplomats and accused their countries of fomenting unrest – an accusation quickly rejected by European governments, including Britain. However, allegations against Britain resonate in Iran because of a long history of distrust dating back to the colonial era, during which it took over the Iranian oil industry.

The Foreign Office said: “We have always been clear that we seek a constructive bilateral relationship with Iran based on mutual respect. Iran’s decision to try to turn what are internal matters for Iran into a conflict with the UK – and others – is deeply regrettable and without foundation in fact. Whether a constructive relationship is possible depends on Iran.”

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