

The UK Must Release the Iranian Tanker; The UAE's Mission to Tehran

By [Elijah J. Magnier](#)

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[Elijah J. Magnier](#) 14 July 2019

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Before Emmanuel Bonne, the special envoy of the French President Emmanuel Macron to Iran, [visited](#) President Hassan Rouhani, he promised to deal with the “[Grace I](#)” crisis between Iran and the UK. Iran considered the UK confiscation of its supertanker, loaded with two million barrels of oil, an act of [unlawful piracy](#) and threatened to [retaliate](#) for the British Navy attack on the Iranian tanker that had received permission to enter Gibraltar’s waters for provisions and spare parts. The French intervention led to the [release](#) of the captain and sailors. In exchange, Iranian diplomacy promised “not to attack any UK ship sailing in the waters of the Persian Gulf or the Gulf of Oman” pending release of the super tanker “Grace I” with permission to continue to its destination, as high-ranking sources in Tehran confirmed; if release and permission is not forthcoming, the UK can expect consequences.

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Navy patrols the waters of the Persian Gulf and carries out routine inspections of ships, without necessarily aiming to stop any ship or tanker. This routine activity was seen by the British as an attempt to kidnap a British ship and raised further concerns for the safety of free navigation in the Persian Gulf.

Sources within the IRGC said:

“If Iran were willing to hit British targets or ships, it would not take the form of a direct confrontation; the message would be conveyed in a more implicit way. This could happen if the UK doesn’t release our supertanker, detained in Gibraltar. The supertanker has the legal right to go anywhere. Europe has no leverage over Iran to dictate the destination of its oil production to any country in the world. We have the power to intercept and block any UK ship sailing and force an inspection. This sort of procedure could trigger a military confrontation that both countries would wish to avoid. It is time for the UK to behave as a European country and not as an American colony”.

Iranian officials are convinced that the US wanted to send a message to Iran when Trump’s administration prevailed on the UK government to detain “Grace I”. The US message is a response to Iran’s [downing](#) of the most sophisticated US drone over Iran. London may be better off not wedding itself to the unilateral, belligerent and unlawful US policy towards the Middle East, and in particular vis-à-vis Iran, and thus avoid vengeful retaliation from Iran. Already European officials are complaining to their Iranian counterparts about the independent and autarchic policy of the UK, which nevertheless remains part of the European Union.

"Iran has already directed many hits to the US: President Rouhani rejected 12 US requests to meet his US counterpart Donald Trump. Also, Leader Sayyed Ali Khamenei insulted Trump when he refused to open Trump's [letter](#) conveyed by the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Moreover, the IRGC, now on the US terrorism list, downed a US drone over the Gulf and the Americans were incapable of retaliating. Trump wanted to hit several Iranian unoccupied targets to save face. He was confronted by the Iranian determination to hit back by targeting US and Middle Eastern objectives, in particular, the countries hosting US bases", said the source.



"In addition, the sabotage of oil tankers at al-Fujairah and another hit in the Gulf of Oman, may trigger a concentration of US and [coalition naval forces](#) in the Gulf. If this takes place, it means US, EU and other naval forces will be patrolling the Gulf waters. That will be, for us, a blessing: instead of us targeting objectives that are far away from us, we shall have these naval targets a short distance from our missiles. For example, if a jet carrier is [dispatched](#) to our waters, it is in our view a floating coffin with thousands of men onboard. The missiles made in Iran can destroy any target in case of war waged on our country. Therefore, we do not fear the US coalition naval force because any mistake will trigger larger and more profound consequences", confirm the sources.

During recent weeks, high ranking officials from the United Arab Emirates visited Tehran to discuss with Iranian officials a new policy towards the Middle East. The Emirates have decided to alter their belligerent policy towards Yemen and Iran, and wish like to avoid to seeing their country targeted.

"The UAE would like to avoid seeing their country transformed into a battlefield between the US and Iran in case of war, particularly if Trump is re-elected. The Emirates officials noted that the US did not respond to Iran's retaliation in the Gulf and in particularly when the US drone was downed. This indicates that Iran is prepared for confrontation and will implement its explicit menace, to hit any country from which the US carries out their attacks on Iran. We want to be out of all this", an Emirates official told his Iranian counterpart in Tehran.

Iran promised to talk to the Yemeni officials to avoid hitting targets in Dubai and Abu Dhabi as long as the UAE pulls out its forces from the Yemen and stops this useless war. Saudi Crown Prime Mohammad Bin Salman is finding himself without his main Emirates ally, caught in a war that is unwinnable for the Saudi regime. The Yemeni Houthis have taken the initiative, hitting several Saudi strategic targets. Saudi Arabia has no realistic objectives and seems to have lost the appetite to continue the war in Yemen.

But the Saudis are not the only ones struggling: Europe is itself divided on the best policy to adopt towards Iran. The British government claims to oppose the US unilateral and unlawful withdrawal from the JCPOA nuclear deal, but is acting as a US vassal in the case of the Grace I super tanker. The French and the Germans are against this British behaviour and would like to see Iran comply with the nuclear deal; they want to offer an effective financial channel "INSTEX" which will particularly distance themselves from the US.

Iran is exporting its oil, unworried by US threats and sanctions. Russia has [promised](#) to step in if Europe fails to satisfy Iran with its INSTEX system. China is buying oil from Iran, kicking US sanctions in the teeth. Emirates are now asking for Iran's protection, or at least for a no-war deal. Trump will have to face up to exactly what Obama's administration realised: sanctions never worked, Iran survived regardless of them. Even if Trump's motive is to challenge any deal [signed](#) by Obama, he will soon find out that his "[maximum pressure](#)" is unworkable, it won't bring Iran to the table. It is a very hurtful and damaging outcome that will definitely be used against Trump by his political opponents in the 2020 electoral campaign. Trump has committed himself to a lost war, and will not come out of this situation undamaged even if re-elected.

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