

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russia's Foreign Ministry said on Friday that Iran's latest move to scale back its commitments under the 2015 nuclear deal did not pose a threat to the non-proliferation regime, Interfax news agency reported.

Iran said on Thursday it had resumed uranium enrichment at its underground Fordow nuclear plant, stepping further away from its deal with world powers after the United States pulled out of it.

BEIRUT (Dispatches) -- Hezbollah will have a "proactive presence" in the future Lebanese government, said Sheikh Naim Qassem, the deputy secretary general of Lebanon's resistance movement, on Friday.

"Hezbollah will fulfill its role in following up with the demands of the people, implementing reform, and fighting corruption and will have a proactive presence in the future government," Lebanon's official National News Agency reported Qassem as saying during a meeting.

Viewpoint

Saudi-UAE Occupation Turns Southern Yemen Into Vassal State

Iran Discovers 70-Mile-Long Ancient Wall



Iran to Take on Iraq in Jordan as Neutral Venue for 2022 World Cup



Fresh Clashes Erupt in Iraq, Ayatollah Sistani Calls for Calm



Mersad Takes Out Intruding Foreign Drone

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Iran said Friday it shot down an intruding foreign drone near one of its Persian Gulf ports close to the Iraqi border as the U.S. launched a mission to purportedly carry out naval patrols in the region.

The Iranian army said on the Telegram messaging app that experts had collected debris from the unmanned aircraft at Bandar-e Mahshahr and would provide more information in the hours to come.

"The downed droned definitely belonged to a foreign country. Its wreckage has been recovered and is being investigated," the governor of Khuzestan, Gholamreza Shariati, said.

The drone was destroyed before it could reach sensitive locations, the commander of the army's air defense force, Brig. Gen. Alireza Sabahifard, was quoted as telling the Fars news agency.

The governor of Khuzestan province confirmed that a drone was shot down in the region, according to IRNA.

In June, Iran downed a U.S. Navy drone over the Persian Gulf, the most recent example of Tehran targeting foreign drones.

Officials said the army targeted the downed drone Friday using the domestically produced Mersad system, which became operational in 2018 and fires Shahin surface-to-air missiles. The incident would mark the first known use of the system in military action.

The incident came as a U.S.-led naval coalition officially launched operations in Bahrain Thursday to purportedly protect shipping in the waters of the Persian Gulf, a potentially provocative move likely to escalate tensions.

The coalition, aimed at warding off the perceived threat to the world's oil supply, has been in the making since June. Iran has put forward its own proposals for boosting Persian Gulf security that pointedly exclude outside powers.

Bahrain, which hosts the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, joined the so-called International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC) in August. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates followed suit in September. The three Arab countries have allied with the occupying regime of Israel to confront Iran.

Australia and Britain are the main Western countries to have agreed to send warships to escort Persian Gulf shipping. The newest member, Albania, joined on Friday.

vessels will be escorted through the Strait of Hormuz, the strategic chokepoint at the head of the Persian Gulf and the main artery for the transport of Middle East oil.

Vice Admiral Jim Malloy, commander of US Naval Forces in the Middle East, said while Operation Sentinel's "operational design is threat-based, it does not threaten".

Most European governments have declined to participate in the naval coalition, fearful of undermining their efforts to save a landmark 2015 nuclear accord with Iran, which was badly weakened by Washington's withdrawal last year.

Animosity between Tehran and Washington has soared since President Donald Trump unilaterally abandoned the deal and reimposed U.S. sanctions.

The provocative move comes nearly five months after Washington announced that it was seeking to form a "multinational maritime effort" in response to a series of mysterious explosions targeting vessels in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman earlier this year.

The U.S. and Saudi Arabia were quick to blame Iran for the incidents without providing conclusive evidence. Washington announced a deployment of 1,000 additional troops in the region following the attacks.

Iran has roundly rejected the accusations, emphasizing its commitment to regional maritime security and its importance in safeguarding international trade.

Tehran has said the attacks were part of a scenario orchestrated by Washington and its regional allies in a bid to rally international pressure against Iran.

Albania's decision to join the campaign raised eyebrows. The country is not known to have any apparent interests in the Persian Gulf and ranks among the countries with the lowest GDP in Europe.

Albania is also known to have a navy force limited to a small number of patrol vessels, but it hosts a sprawling camp for some 3,000 MKO terrorists.

Following two mysterious explosions targeting oil tankers in the Sea of Oman in June, an audio tape leaked from the MKO suggested that the group may have cooperated with Saudi Arabia in the incidents which were blamed on Iran.

Albania's participation raises further questions about the purpose of the mission, including whether the U.S. and Saudi

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Envoy Says New Step 'Wake-Up Call' to Europe

Iran Brings Fordow Back Online



A picture released by the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran on Nov. 4, 2019 shows organization head Ali Akbar Salehi (holding microphone) addressing workers during a visit at the Natanz nuclear power plant.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Iran resumed uranium enrichment at its underground Fordow plant south of Tehran Thursday in a new step back from its commitments under a landmark 2015 nuclear deal.

Engineers began feeding uranium hexafluoride gas into the plant's mothballed enrichment centrifuges in "the first minutes of Thursday", the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran said. A UN official from the IAEA witnessed the injection.

The suspension of uranium enrichment at the long-secret plant was one of the restrictions on its nuclear program Iran had agreed to

in return for the lifting of sanctions.

The resumption of enrichment at Fordow is Iran's fourth step away from the agreement after the U.S. abandoned it last year and reimposed sanctions on Tehran, while other signatories failed to provide the Islamic Republic with anything which could convince the country into observing its obligations.

Iran is now enriching uranium to 4.5 percent, exceeding the 3.67 percent limit set by the 2015 deal but less than the 20 percent level it had previously operated to.

Tehran has emphasized that all of the steps it has taken are trans-

parent and swiftly reversible if the remaining parties to the agreement find a way to get around US sanctions.

"All these activities have been carried out under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency," the Iranian nuclear organization said.

IAEA Inspector Caught Red Handed

Tehran said on Thursday that it had withdrawn the credentials of one IAEA inspector last week after she tested positive for suspected traces of explosive nitrates.

"The detector's alarm went off

and it was signaling to a specific person," Iranian representative Kazem Gharib Abadi he said. "They have repeated this procedure again and again, and unfortunately, the results were the same all the way for only that specific inspector."

As they waited for a female employee to search the inspector, the woman went off to the bathroom. Gharib Abadi said when she came back, she no longer tested positive. He said the team took samples from the bathroom, as well as seized her handbag.

Gharib Abadi said he hoped further tests by Iran and the IAEA would explain what happened. Iran's nuclear industry has been targeted by sabotage and its scientists assassinated in the past.

"Needless to say that Iran, like all other members of the agency, cannot condone any behavior or action which may be against the safety and security of its nuclear installations, especially ... considering the past sabotage attempts in its nuclear facilities," Gharib Abadi said.

The IAEA said that it will "consult with Iran with a view to clarifying the situation." It did not elaborate.

Nitrates are a common fertilizer. However, when mixed with proper amounts of fuel, the material can become an explosive as powerful as TNT. Swab tests, common at airports and other secure facilities, can detect its presence on the skin or objects.

Jackie Wolcott, the U.S. representative to the IAEA, earlier called

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At Least Five People Killed in Mianeh Nation Goes Full Force to Help Quake Victims

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- A strong earthquake of magnitude 5.9 struck northwestern Iran on Friday, killing at least five people and injuring more than 300.

The quake hit the Tark county at 2:17 a.m. (2247 GMT) and was followed by more than 60 aftershocks, causing panic among residents who rushed out of their houses in the middle of the night.

"Rescue teams and helicopters have been dispatched to the quake-hit areas and hospitals are on full alert to help injured people. Unfortunately six people were killed and 345 were injured," Iran's emergency medical services chief Pirhussein Kolivand said.

The quake was felt in several towns and cities in Iran. The European-Mediterranean Seismological Centre (EMSC) said the quake was felt by some 20

million people.

It had a shallow depth of 10 km which hit the village of Varnakesh in Mianeh the hardest, where five people lost their lives and some 30 houses were destroyed, local officials said.

President Hassan Rouhani called the local governor, ordering to allocate all means and resources to deal with the emergency. He also sent his Minister of Industry, Mines and Business Reza Rahmani to the quake-hit areas to closely monitor the situation.

Volunteer Basij forces rushed to villages shortly after the quake hit and pulled many survivors from the rubble, commander of 31st Ashura Division of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) General Abedin Khorram said.

"Given that a drill was being

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Foreign Policy Magazine: Iran 'Doing Just Fine'

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- American news publication Foreign Policy has cast aspersions on U.S. claims that its sanctions were having a crippling effect on Tehran saying in a headline that "Iran is just doing fine".

The Trump administration kicked off what it called a "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran a year ago this week, reckoning that it would send Iran's economy into a "death spiral," leaving Tehran the choice to either surrender or collapse.

"Neither of these predictions came to pass," Foreign Policy wrote. "Rather, Iran now enters its second year under maximum pressure strikingly confident in its economic stability and regional position," it added.

According to the magazine, Iranian officials "are therefore likely to continue on their current course: Iran will go on tormenting the oil market while bolstering its non-oil

economy—and it will continue expanding its nuclear program while refusing to talk with Washington."

After the U.S. withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal, Iran expected that other signatories of the agreement would shore up its economy and sustain its oil exports. While the Europeans devised a financial mechanism to bypass U.S. sanctions, they could do only so much to support trade with Iran because their companies shunned trade with the country, owing to U.S. pressure.

The formative years after the most hard-hitting U.S. sanctions ever kicked in proved hard going as Iran's economy entered a recession, inflation soared and the currency lost 60 percent of its value.

While Trump and his aides tout these statistics as evidence of the sanctions' success, there are signs that Iran's economy is stabilizing.

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