



## Developments in Iran: Escalating U.S.-Iranian Tensions; EU Committed to Nuclear Deal Despite Iranian Non-Compliance

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In one of a series of escalating encounters between the U.S. and Iran, on July 18, the President announced that the U.S. Navy had shot down an Iranian drone in the Strait of Hormuz when the drone allegedly came within around 1,000 yards of a Navy vessel. Also on July 18, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps of Iran (the IRGC) revealed that over the weekend it had seized a foreign oil tanker and its crew of 12. Iran asserted that the tanker was smuggling over 250,000 gallons of fuel in the Persian Gulf. The seized tanker bears the same name as an Emirati tanker that recently disappeared in the Gulf. The U.S. State Department condemned the IRGC's harassment of vessels and demanded the release of the tanker. One day later, British media announced that Iran had seized a British-flagged oil tanker and its crew of 23. The owner of the tanker stated that the vessel was approached by "unidentified small crafts and a helicopter" in the Strait of Hormuz. These developments come amid escalating tensions between the United States and Iran, following the shooting down of a U.S. military drone by Iran in the Strait of Hormuz back in June (Iranian officials claim that the drone violated Iranian airspace, while the United States asserts that the drone was in international airspace).

Amid these heightened tensions, Iran offered to ratify the agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency that would allow the Agency to conduct enhanced inspections of Iran's nuclear sites. In return, the United States would need to permanently lift sanctions. The United States, however, has been asking for more sweeping concessions from Iran, making it unlikely that the President will agree to Iran's modest proposal.

Meanwhile, the European Union appears to remain committed to the continued survival of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (the "JCPOA" or "Agreement"). In May 2018 the United States withdrew from the JCPOA, and Iran recently confirmed that it had breached the uranium-enrichment limit set by the deal. However, the EU foreign policy chief asserted that the remaining parties to the JCPOA (Russia, China, Germany, France, the UK, and the EU) will not trigger the JCPOA's dispute-resolution mechanism, an action which could further threaten the Agreement's survival. The remaining parties believe that Iran's conduct is a response to the April 2019 re-imposition of the virtual blockade on Iranian oil. Before this re-imposition, Iran had fully complied with the Agreement. In addition, because the violation is "reversible," the EU does not consider the violation a "case of significant noncompliance." EU High Representative Federica Mogherini further stated that "not having the JCPOA in place anymore would be a terrible option for everybody, including those that have decided to get out.

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