

U.S. DEPLOYS MORE TROOPS TO WEST ASIA

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China and Russia warned on Tuesday about escalating West Asian tensions after Washington said it would deploy 1,000 more troops to the region and renewed accusations that Iran was behind a tanker attack.

The U.S. moves came as Iran set a 10-day countdown for world powers to fulfil their commitments under a nuclear deal abandoned by Washington, saying it would otherwise surpass the uranium stockpile limit mandated by the accord.

“I have authorised approximately 1,000 additional troops for defensive purposes to address air, naval, and ground-based threats in the Middle East,” acting Pentagon chief Patrick Shanahan said in a statement. “The recent Iranian attacks validate the reliable, credible intelligence we have received on hostile behaviour by Iranian forces and their proxy groups that threaten U.S. personnel and interests across the region.”

Meanwhile, in an interview to Time magazine on Monday, Mr. Trump said he would order a U.S. military response if Iran had to be stopped getting nuclear arms, but he was not eager for war otherwise, downplaying the attacks on the oil tankers. He, though, accepted the U.S. intelligence assessment that Iran was behind the explosions.

“I would certainly go over nuclear weapons,” he said, “and I would keep the other a question mark.”

The U.S. has blamed Iran for last week’s attacks on two tankers in the Gulf of Oman, a charge Tehran denies as “baseless”. The Pentagon released new images on Monday that it said showed Iran was behind the attack on one of the ships. The U.S. argument centres on an unexploded limpet mine on the tanker ship *Kokuka Courageous* that it says was removed by Iranians on a patrol boat.

“Iran is responsible for the attack based on video evidence and the resources and proficiency needed to quickly remove the unexploded limpet mine,” the Pentagon said in a statement.

The U.S. released a grainy video last week it said showed the Iranians removing the mine. The images released on Monday show the site where the unexploded mine was allegedly attached, the Iranians on a patrol boat who are said to have removed it, and damage from another device that did explode.

‘Won’t wage war’

However, Iran President Hassan Rouhani insisted on Tuesday that Tehran would “not wage war against any nation.” “Despite all of the Americans’ efforts in the region and their desire to cut off our ties with all of the world and their desire to keep Iran secluded, they have been unsuccessful,” Mr. Rouhani said.

In Moscow, President Vladimir Putin’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov urged all sides “to show restraint.” “We would prefer not to see any steps that could introduce additional tensions in the already unstable region.”

China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi warned all sides “not to take any actions to provoke the

escalation of tension in the region, and not to open a Pandora's box." He urged Washington to "change its practice of extreme pressure" but also called on Tehran not to abandon the nuclear deal.

(With Reuters inputs)

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