

'Unacceptable' to lump Iran together with ISIS as Middle East's 'chief security threat' – Moscow

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It's wrong to label Iran as the main threat to the Middle East, Russia's senior security official warned, while stressing that data produced by Washington is not enough to blame the Iranians for recent tanker attacks.

"Iran was and remains our ally and partner," Secretary of Russia's Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, said on Tuesday.

In that sense, any attempts to portray Tehran as the chief threat to regional security, let alone lump it together with ISIS and other terrorist organizations, are unacceptable to us.

The senior official made his remarks in Jerusalem following a meeting with President Donald Trump's national security adviser, John Bolton, and his Israeli counterpart, Meir Ben-Shabbat, both of whom clashed with the Russians over their views on Iran.

The US has been blaming Tehran for attacking two oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman on June 13 (which Iran denies), and announced new sanctions in response to Iran downing a US drone they say violated their airspace last week.

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Bolton accused the Islamic Republic of a *"round of violent provocations"* abroad, including *"threatening global oil supplies."* Iran is *"a source of belligerence and aggression in the Middle East,"* he said. The same stance was voiced by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who

said that Iran had *"intensified"* attacks on Tel Aviv and Washington.

As evidence of the alleged Iranian involvement in the attacks on the tanker, the Pentagon shared a grainy video of what it said were Iranian sailors removing a malfunctioning limpet mine from the ship's hull. Nikolai Patrushev dismissed the footage as *"low-grade information"* that in itself *"doesn't allow for any decisions to be made."*

There must be an objective investigation, and not just pinning the blame on anybody, but actually figuring out what happened.

Moscow has long called for all sides to show restraint and have a level-headed approach to the conflict, without threats and sanctions. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that the new round of restrictions by the US on Iran *"sends a signal that the situation is moving towards a very bad scenario."*

Lavrov said that the current situation *"reminds"* him of early 2003, when the US tried to build a case for invading Iraq. Back then, Washington claimed that Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein was stockpiling weapons of mass destruction, which was proven false post-invasion.

We all remember how that ended.

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