



By: TA | AP Brief

Europeans seek space for diplomacy in the Middle East crisis



European nations worked to keep diplomatic **efforts** to curb the Israel-Iran war alive as the two countries traded strikes following the United States' weekend **attack** on Iran's nuclear program, followed by a retaliatory Iranian missile strike Monday on a U.S. base in Qatar.

Calls for Tehran to enter talks with Washington appeared to fall on deaf ears as it reached out to ally Russia for support instead.

The crisis topped the agenda for European Union foreign ministers meeting Monday in Brussels, where diplomats agonized about the potential for Iranian retaliation to spark a wider war and global economic instability.

Iran launched missile attacks Monday on a U.S. military base in Qatar. Qatar condemned the attack on Al Udeid Air Base, and said it successfully intercepted the short- and medium-range ballistic missiles.

Before that attack, EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said "the concerns of retaliation and this war escalating are huge."

Kallas said any attempt by Iran to close the Strait of Hormuz, a key route for global shipping, would be "extremely dangerous and not good for anybody."

Europe seeks more talks

Along with the EU, the "E3" of Britain, France and Germany have led efforts to find a diplomatic solution, holding a tense seven-hour meeting in Geneva on Friday with Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi.

A day after those talks ended with a vague promise to "meet again in the future," U.S. bombers struck three Iranian nuclear and military sites.

No further E3 talks with Iran are currently planned, a European diplomatic official said on condition of anonymity to discuss the negotiations.

Still, U.K. Foreign Secretary David Lammy urged Iran to meet the E3 again, and to open negotiations with the United States. Planned U.S.-Iran talks in Oman were scuttled after Israel began attacking Iran's nuclear facilities on June 13. Iran has since ruled out negotiating while it is under attack.

"Take the off-ramp, dial this thing down and negotiate with the United States immediately and seriously," said Lammy, who spoke to both Araghchi and U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Sunday.

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German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul said Europe had a role to play, but that "a real precondition for a settlement to the conflict is that Iran be ready to negotiate directly with the U.S."

Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani told reporters in Brussels that he was proposing a meeting between the United States and Iran in Rome.

Iran's envoy visits Russia

It was Moscow that Iran reached out to Monday, though, sending Araghchi to meet President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin. Putin condemned the United States' "unprovoked aggression" against Iran and said Russia would help the Iranian people.

Putin said he saw the visit as a chance to explore "how we can get out of today's situation." Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia had offered to mediate.

European diplomatic efforts were complicated by a lack of foreknowledge of the Trump administration's moves. Some countries had no advance notice of the strikes. Britain was notified, but only shortly before bombs fell.

We reject all attempts to organize a change of regime by force - Jean-Noël Barrot

Another hurdle was Trump's post on social media late Sunday musing about the potential for "regime change" in Iran, despite U.S. officials' insistence that Washington is not seeking to change the government in Tehran.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot stressed Monday that "we reject all attempts to organize a change of regime by force."

"It would be illusory and dangerous to think that such a change can be provoked through force and bombs," he said.

Iran insists its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only, and U.S. intelligence agencies have assessed that Tehran is not actively pursuing a bomb. However, Trump and Israeli leaders have argued that Iran could quickly assemble a nuclear weapon, making it an imminent threat.

Mixed emotions among US allies

The U.S. strikes have brought mixed emotions in European capitals. Amid alarm at the potential for a wider war and calls for de-escalation, some American allies expressed relief that Iran's nuclear program had been set back.

"We can't pretend that the prevention of Iran getting nuclear weapons isn't a good thing for this country. But we're prioritizing diplomacy as the way forward," said Tom Wells, a spokesman for British leader Starmer. "The prime minister's priority is getting parties back around the table to negotiate a lasting settlement."



No reason to criticize what Israel began a week ago, and also no reason to criticize what America did last weekend - Friedrich Merz

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, whose country is a particularly staunch ally of Israel, said he saw "no reason to criticize what Israel began a week ago, and also no reason to criticize what America did last weekend."

He acknowledged "it is not without risk, but leaving things the way they were was also not an option."

Merz said he was "somewhat optimistic" that the conflict would not widen. He said Iran's response so far has been far short "of what we had to fear," and that Iran's regional proxies had shown "relatively little" reaction so far.

But he cautioned that "it doesn't have to stay that way."