EU and U.N. Criticize Iran Missile Tests But Take No Action

March 14, 2016

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The Wall Street Journal

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/eu-to-weigh-response-to-iran-missile-tests-1457953282>

The United Nations Security Council and the European Union criticized Iran’s [recent ballistic missile tests](http://www.wsj.com/articles/iran-launches-ballistic-missiles-in-military-exercise-1457438730) but didn’t take any punitive action, as many members of the international community look to improve ties with the Islamic Republic.

The Security Council said Monday that Iran’s tests, which were carried out on two occasions earlier this month, disrupted the “peaceful environment” and trust between world powers and Tehran that emerged in the wake of [last year’s comprehensive nuclear deal](http://www.wsj.com/articles/iran-completes-steps-to-implement-nuclear-accord-1452978143). But the council needed more technical information, it said, to determine whether or not Iran’s actions were a violation of a resolution that was approved after the nuclear deal was reached in July.

After a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels, the bloc’s foreign-policy chief, Federica Mogherini, said Monday evening that officials discussed the missile tests but there was no question of imposing sanctions for now. “This was an issue that was indeed raised not only by ministers but also by me,” Ms. Mogherini said. “When it comes to EU sanctions, the issue was not raised and no member state asked for or submitted proposals in this respect.”

Ms. Mogherini, who will lead a delegation of senior EU officials to Tehran in mid-April, said it was for the Security Council, not for the EU, to determine whether the missile tests did in fact breach U.N. resolutions.

The international community appears divided over how to respond to Iran, which has vowed to press ahead with its missile program despite U.S. pressure to curtail it. Russia and China, both of which have veto power on the Security Council, oppose new sanctions on Iran, while the U.S. and some of its allies push for some measure of punishment.

Iran meanwhile has remained defiant. “We have consistently said that we will continue to expand our military defense. These military equipment have nothing to do with nuclear weapons,” Foreign Minister Javad Zarif said Monday.

Many European countries, as well as Russia and China, are building closer ties with Tehran and signing lucrative contracts in a variety of sectors, such as energy and the auto industry.

Resolution 2231, which took effect in January, “calls on” Iran to refrain from ballistic missile activity. Some Security Council members, such as Russia, argue that the term “call on” isn’t legally binding upon Iran. The U.S. and Israel contend Iran is prohibited from testing ballistic missiles under the resolution and called for the council to take action.

“The Council needs to take its responsibility and Russia seems to be lawyering its way to look for reasons not to act rather than stepping up and being prepared to shoulder our collective responsibility,” said U.S. Ambassador Samantha Power on Monday.

Russian Ambassador Vitaly Churkin told reporters on Monday at the U.N. that “a call is different from a ban so legally you cannot violate a call, you can comply with a call or you can ignore the call.”

Iran test fired two types of medium-range ballistic missiles on March 9, extending a barrage of tests following vows by officials to press ahead with its missile program despite U.S. pressure to curtail it.

Since the missiles were launched, Iran’s Revolutionary Guards officials have said the tests were designed to target Israel. Israel’s Ambassador to the U.N., Danny Danon, called on the council to take Iran’s threat seriously. “We cannot bury our heads in the sand and hope that the Ayatollahs act responsibly,” he said.