《伊朗示威者打砸英国大使馆》

TEHRAN - Iranian protesters stormed two British diplomatic compounds in Tehran on Tuesday, smashing windows, torching a car and burning the British flag in protest against new sanctions imposed by Londaon.

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The attacks come at a time of rising diplomatic tension between Iran and Western nations who last week imposed fresh sanctions over Tehran's nuclear program, which they believe is aimed at achieving the capability of making an atomic bomb.

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Iran, the world's fifth biggest oil exporter, says it only wants nuclear plants to generate electricity.

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The embassy storming is also a sign of deepening political infighting within Iran's ruling hardline elites, with the conservative-led parliament attempting to force the hand of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and expel the British ambassador.

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Several dozen protesters broke away from a crowd of a few hundred outside the main British embassy compound in downtown Tehran, scaled the gates, broke the locks and went inside.

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Protesters pulled down the British flag, burned it, and put up the Iranian flag, Iranian news agencies and news pictures showed. Inside, the demonstrators smashed windows of office and residential quarters and set a car ablaze, news pictures showed.

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One took a framed picture of Queen Elizabeth, state TV showed. Others carried the royal crest out through the embassy gate as police stood by, pictures carried by the semi-official Fars news agency showed.

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Another group of protesters broke into a second British compound at Qolhak in north Tehran, the IRNA state news agency said.

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An Iranian report said six British embassy staff had been briefly held by the protesters. British Foreign Secretary William Hague said the situation had been "confusing" and that he would not have called them "hostages."

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"Police freed the six people working for the British embassy in Qolhak garden," Iran's Fars news agency said.

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Britain said it was outraged and warned of "serious consequences." The U.N. Security Council condemned the attacks "in the strongest terms." President Barack Obama said he was disturbed by the incident and called on Iran to hold those responsible to task.

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The Iranian Foreign Ministry expressed "regret for certain unacceptable behaviour by a small number of protesters in spite of efforts by the police". "The relevant authorities have been asked to take the necessary measures and look into this issue immediately," it said.

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