

Pompeo arrives in Saudi Arabia to discuss response to attack as tensions rise



Riyadh, September 18 (RHC)-- U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is now in Saudi Arabia, where he is due to hold talks over a response to an assault on two major oil facilities in the kingdom, as Iran denied any role in the attacks that crippled the world's top oil exporter.

Saturday's attack on Abqaiq, the world's largest oil processing facility, and the Khurais oil field knocked out five percent of the global oil supply and cut output by 5.7 million barrels per day. Saudi Arabia's energy minister said on Tuesday that normal oil production would resume within weeks, rather than months.

While the Houthi rebel group in Yemen claimed responsibility and said it launched 10 drone attacks on the oil plants, a senior US official said one installation was hit "at least 17 times" and another was hit twice by "precision-guided munitions."

Neither the type of drone "nor the cruise missiles employed in the attack can reach the facilities from Yemen," the official told AFP news agency on condition of anonymity. "It's not possible." The official said the United States will present evidence at the United Nations General Assembly next week that the attack

involved cruise missiles from Iran.

In the immediate aftermath of the attack, Pompeo was quick to blame Tehran by accusing it of "an unprecedented attack on the world's energy supply". U.S. President Donald Trump hinted at possible military action by tweeting that Washington was "locked and loaded" -- but without mentioning Iran by name.

Trump appears to have no timetable for action. Instead, he has sent Pompeo to Saudi Arabia to consult with de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) and to see the results of investigations into the attack after France said on Wednesday that it was sending experts, at Riyadh's request, to Saudi Arabia to investigate who carried out the attacks and how they did it.

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