

MOSCOW (Dispatches) -- Tehran and Moscow will sign important documents during President Hassan Rouhani's visit to Russia in the near future, Iranian Ambassador to Moscow Mehdi Sanayee said.

"The Iranian and Russian presidents have met and held talks eight times over past three years and during the upcoming visit of President Rouhani to Moscow important documents will be signed," Sanayee said. He said a delegation of state officials and representatives of private sectors will accompany Rouhani in the visit.

TEHRAN (Press TV) -- Special envoy of Chinese government on Syria, Xie Xiaoyan, is to pay an official visit to Iran to hold talks with senior Iranian officials on ways to settle the nearly six-year crisis in the Arab country.

The Chinese diplomat is expected to arrive in Tehran on Tuesday. Xie visited Tehran in April 2016 and held talks with former Iranian deputy foreign minister for Arab and African affairs, Hussein Amir-Abdollahian.

Viewpoint

By Kayhan Int'l Staff Writer

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U.S. Lawmakers Plan New Sanctions on Iran

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- U.S. Republican senators plan to introduce legislation to impose further sanction on Iran, accusing it of violating UN Security Council resolutions by testing ballistic missiles and acting to "destabilize" the Middle East, a U.S. senator said Sunday.

"I think it is now time for the Congress to take Iran on directly in terms of what they've done outside the nuclear program," Senator Lindsey Graham, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, told the Munich Security Conference.

Graham said he and other Republicans would introduce measures to hold Iran accountable for its actions.

Tensions between Tehran and Washington have risen since U.S. President Donald Trump's administration imposed sanctions on individuals and entities linked to the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps following a missile test.

"Iran is a bad actor in the greatest sense of the word when it comes to the region. To Iran, I say, if you want us to treat you differently then stop building missiles, test-firing them in defiance of UN resolution and writing 'Death to Israel' on the missile. That's a mixed message," Graham said.

Contrary to Graham's allegations, the missile test does not defy the UN resolution – a fact which has been acknowledged even by White House spokesman Sean Spicer and other parties to a nuclear accord with Iran.

Senator Christopher Murphy, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, told the same panel there was nothing preventing Congress from imposing sanctions beyond those that were lifted as a result of the 2016 nuclear agreement with Iran.

Murphy, a Democrat, told the panel that he had backed the nuclear deal in the explicit understanding that it would not prevent Congress from taking actions against Iran outside the nuclear issue.

"There's going to be a conversation about what the proportional response is," Murphy said, referring to Iran's missile test. "But I don't necessarily think there's going to be partisan division over whether or not we have the ability as a Congress to speak on issues outside of the nuclear agreement."

Murphy said the United States needed to decide whether it wanted to take a broader role in the regional conflict.

Iranian Foreign Minister Muhammad Java Zarf told the conference earlier on Sunday that Iran did not respond well to sanctions or threats.

The Iranian ballistic missile test that prompted Trump's Feb. 2 resulted in renewed U.S. sanctions. They were imposed little more than a year after Iran's landmark nuclear deal with world powers went into effect. During the campaign, Trump called the nuclear accord "one of the dumbest deals ever" and said dismantling it would be a top priority.

International monitors report that Iran has stuck to its commitments and dramatically reduced its nuclear capacity.

Iran Proposes Building Persian Gulf Alliances



Iran Foreign Minister Muhammad Javad Zarif speaks on the last day of the Munich Security Conference in Munich, Feb. 18, 2017.

MUNICH (Dispatches) -- Iran's Foreign Minister Muhammad Javad Zarif on Sunday mocked being "put on notice" in a tweet by U.S. President Donald Trump and said his country is focused on building Persian Gulf alliances.

Zarif prompted laughter from a crowd of trans-Atlantic military and political officials at a global security conference here by observing that "tweet is now very fashionable" before answering whether his country was concerned about the possibility of more U.S. sanctions.

"We don't respond well to threats, we don't respond well to coercion and we don't respond well to sanctions but we respond very well to mutual respect. We respond very well to arrangements to reach mutually acceptable scenarios," Zarif told the conference.

"Iran is unmoved by threats," he said.

"Everybody tested us for many years — all threats and coercions were imposed on us," Zarif added.

He mocked "the concept of crippling sanctions," which he said didn't stop Iran acquiring thousands more centrifuges, used for enriching uranium, before talks with the U.S. on the nuclear agreement got underway.

"Crippling sanctions produced a net total of 19,800 centrifuges."

Iran has always said it has no interest in nuclear weapons. Asked how long it would take to make one if it did decide it wanted such weapons, Zarif replied: "We are not going to produce nuclear weapons, period. So it will take forever for Iran to produce nuclear weapons."

The U.S. and other Persian Gulf countries concerned with Iran's foreign policy have "misplaced anxieties," Zarif said. He said his country is ready to lead

regional security talks among "Islamic brothers" and that President Hassan Rouhani's visit to Oman last week was a step in that direction.

"Countries in the Persian Gulf region need to surmount the current state of division and tension and instead move in the direction of erecting realistic regional arrangements. It can perhaps start with a modest regional dialog forum," he said.

Zarif urged Arab states to work with Iran to address "anxieties" and violence across the region.

"On regional dialogue, I'm modest and I'm focusing on the Persian Gulf. We have enough problems in this region so we want to start a dialogue with

countries we call brothers in Islam," he said.

"We need to address common problems and perceptions that have given rise to anxieties and the level of violence in the region," he added, when asked whether Tehran would also consider a region-wide dialog.

Zarif earlier criticized four-decades of well financed "Takfiri" ideology which has its roots in Saudi Arabia and is followed by extremist groups such as Daesh, Al-Qaeda and Al-Nusra Front.

Saudi Arabia unilaterally severed ties with Iran last January after protesters in Tehran and Mashhad attacked its diplomatic premises following the kingdom's execution of prominent Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr. Some of Riyadh's allies followed suit and cut or downgraded their ties with Iran.

It was choosing regional enmity, Zarif said, that had in part spawned such extremist outfits such as Daesh and Al-Nusra Front.

"For nearly four decades, a well-financed global proliferation of Takfiri ideology based on division, hatred and rejection, which everybody would agree has nothing to do with Islam, has been sold as promoting a so-called 'moderate Islam' to confront an erroneously-framed 'radical Iran,' he noted.

The other contributors to the rise of such groups were "the endemic problem of foreign occupation and invasion," and their arming and financing by some states in the region, Zarif added.

Addressing other crises in the Middle East, the top Iranian diplomat said conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain "do not have military solutions," adding "each requires a political solution, where no genuine actor is excluded."

Saudis, Zionists Urge New Anti-Iran Push

MUNICH (Dispatches) -- Saudi Arabia and the occupying regime of Israel both called on Sunday for a new push against Iran, signaling a growing alignment in their interests.

Turkey also joined the de facto united front against Tehran as Saudi and Zionist ministers rejected an appeal from Iranian Foreign Minister Muhammad Javad Zarif for Persian Gulf Arab states to work with Tehran to reduce violence across the region.

While Saudi Arabia ostensibly remains at odds with Israel, their ministers demanded at the Munich Security Conference that Tehran be punished for aiding the Syrian government in its war on terrorists.

Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir called Tehran the main sponsor of global terrorism and a

destabilizing force in the Middle East even as most of the terrorists wreaking havoc in the region are inspired by the Wahhabi ideology preached in the kingdom.

He sidestepped a question about the occupying regime of Israel's call for concerted action with Saudi Arabia and its allies amid growing speculation that Riyadh and Tel Aviv could normalize relations and join forces to oppose Tehran, much as Turkey has done.

"Iran remains the single main sponsor of terrorism in the world," Jubeir told delegates at the conference. "It's determined to upend the order in the Middle East ... (and) until and unless Iran changes its behavior it would be very difficult to deal with a country like this."

Russia Calls for Post-West Order

MUNICH (Dispatches) -- Russia called for an end to what it said was an outdated world order dominated by the West after U.S. Vice President Mike Pence pledged Washington's "unwavering" commitment to transatlantic allies in NATO.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov offered a diametrically opposed global vision, just hours after Pence vowed to stand with Europe to rein in a resurgent Moscow.

"I hope that (the world) will choose a democratic world order - a post-West one - in which each country is defined by its sovereignty," said Lavrov.

The time when the West called the shots was over while NATO was a relic of the Cold War, he said.

In its place, Moscow wanted a relationship with Washington that is

"pragmatic with mutual respect and acknowledgement of our common responsibility for global stability."

Russia wanted to see a "common space of good neighbor relations from Vancouver to Vladivostok," Lavrov said.

Moscow has been impatiently waiting for U.S. President Donald Trump to make good on his pledge to improve ties which plunged to a post-Cold War low as Barack Obama slapped on sanctions over the Ukraine crisis and Russia's alleged meddling in Trump's election.

On the campaign trail, Trump repeatedly praised Russian President Vladimir Putin and voiced his willingness to work with him in fighting terrorism.

U.S. Challenges China With Warship Patrols

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- A U.S. aircraft carrier strike group is patrolling in the South China Sea, the U.S. Navy said, days after Beijing told Washington not to challenge its sovereignty in the waterway.

China asserts ownership of almost all of the resource-rich waters despite rival claims from several Southeast Asian countries. It has rapidly built reefs into artificial islands capable of hosting military planes.

The USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier group was engaging in "routine operations in the South China Sea," the navy said in a statement on its website.

It noted that the ships and aircraft had recently conducted exercises off Hawaii and Guam to "maintain and improve their readiness and develop cohesion as a strike group."

"We are looking forward to demonstrating those capabilities while building upon existing strong relationships with our allies, partners and friends in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region," strike group commander Rear Admiral James Kilby said in the statement.

China's foreign ministry said ships and aircraft were allowed to operate in the area according to international law.

But Beijing "firmly opposes any country's attempt to undermine China's sovereignty and security in the name of the freedom of navigation and overflight," spokesman Geng Shuang told journalists Wednesday, responding to reports that the Vinson was headed to the South China Sea.

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