

TEHRAN (Press TV) -- Iran's Foreign Ministry said on Saturday the Islamic Republic has no relations with the new administration in the United States.

"Whatever has been done so far was only related to the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action)," ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said, pointing to the 2015 nuclear agreement. He added that negotiations between Tehran and Washington were only related to the Iranian nuclear program.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- The Kuwaiti government could pay up to \$60,000 to President Donald Trump's hotel in Washington for a party on Saturday that will be an early test of Trump's promise to turn over profits from such events to the U.S. Treasury.

The Kuwait Embassy is hosting an event to mark their National Day. Similar National Day celebrations at the Trump International Hotel for a crowd of several hundred can run from \$40,000 to \$60,000, according to cost estimates from the hotel seen by Reuters. The hotel declined to comment on the figures.

Viewpoint

By Kayhan Int'l Staff Writer

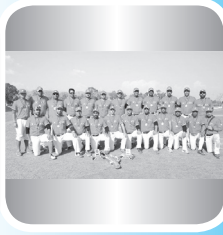
U.S. Media Ban:

Undemocratic and Totalitarian


Moondance Offers Free Entry Fees for 7 Banned Countries by U.S.



Iran Ease Into West Asia Baseball Cup Semi-Finals



Iraqi Forces Gain More Grounds in Western Mosul



FM Zarif Warns: IRGC Designation Won't Benefit U.S.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Foreign Minister Muhammad Javad Zarif on Saturday praised Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) for providing the highest support to regional countries in their anti-terror fights.

"The entire world admits that the IRGC has rendered the utmost support to neighboring countries in the face of terrorism," Zarif said on the sidelines of a ceremony held to pay tribute to the Foreign Ministry's martyred officials.

He pointed to U.S. efforts to impose sanctions on the IRGC and said such attempts have never benefited Washington.

The IRGC has been successfully advising Iraqi and Syrian militaries in their operations against the Daesh terrorist group and other such outfits.

However, the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump is reportedly considering designating the IRGC as a "Foreign Terrorist Organization." Senior security officials in the U.S. administration have warned against such a designation, drawing attention to its adverse consequences.

The U.S. has already imposed sanctions on some Iranian individuals and entities that it claims to be linked to the IRGC.

Zarif emphasized that all countries in the region had to cooperate to fight terrorism and that fanning the flames of sectarianism benefited no one.

According to officials familiar with the matter, cited by Reuters, the proposal against Iran's IRGC has stalled over warnings from defense and intelligence officials that the move could backfire.

"If you do that, there is no way to escalate, and you would foreclose any possibility of talking to the Iranians about anything," the news agency quoted one of the unnamed officials as saying.

Momentum behind a possible presidential order has slowed amid an internal debate that has included concerns it could undermine the fight against Daesh, draw opposition from key allies, torpedo any U.S.-Iran diplomatic prospects, and complicate enforcement of the Iran nuclear deal, U.S. and European sources said.

The proposal has been in the works for weeks, and was originally expected to be rolled out this month. But while the idea remains under consideration, it is unclear when – or even if – an announcement might be forthcoming, Reuters reported.

A decision on the matter was complicated by the Feb. 13 resignation of Trump's national security adviser, Michael Flynn, over disclosures that he discussed U.S. sanctions on

Russia with the Russian ambassador before taking office. Flynn was one of the Trump White House's leading Iran hawks, and was spearheading the crafting of a strategy for confronting Tehran.

Even before Flynn's departure, however, officials from the Pentagon and U.S. and foreign intelligence agencies had raised objections to naming the IRGC a terrorist group.

Such a move would be the first time the 1996 Foreign Terrorist Organizations law, which has been applied to militant groups such as Al-Qaeda and Daesh, has been wielded against an entire institution of a foreign government, potentially subjecting it to a wide range of U.S. sanctions.

It likely would complicate the alleged U.S. fight against Daesh in Iraq and Syria, defense and other officials said, also. Militias backed by Iran and advised by IRGC fighters are battling Takfiri groups there.

In addition, said another of the officials, adding the IRGC to the terrorist list would cause friction with U.S. European allies, who in the wake of the 2015 nuclear agreement are trying to rebuild business ties to Iran.

For now, the officials said, the discussion of naming the IRGC a terrorist organization is still in play, but apparently on the back burner. A European security source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said U.S. counterparts told him the order is on hold.

Terrorists Hit After Top U.S. General Visits Syria



Top U.S. military commander for the Middle East, General Joseph Votel, met in Syria with militant leaders in the first secret trip under the new U.S. administration.

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) -- A terrorist assault on two security service bases in Syria's third city of Homs killed dozens of people, including a top intelligence chief, on Saturday, overshadowing peace talks in Geneva.

Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate Fateh al-Sham Front claimed the spectacular attack which targeted and killed General Hassan Daabul, a close confidant of President Bashar al-Assad.

The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said 42 people were killed when the bombers targeted the headquarters of state security and military intelligence in the

heavily guarded Ghouta and Mahatta neighborhoods.

Provincial governor Talal Barazi said 30 people were killed and 24 wounded.

State television confirmed Daabul's death, saying that the general had been specifically targeted by one of the suicide bombers.

The bombers engaged in prolonged gun battles with intelligence officers before blowing themselves up.

Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said they lasted two hours. Fateh al-Sham said five of its militants took part in the assault. State

Homs has been under the full control of the government since May 2014 when terrorists withdrew from the center under a UN-brokered truce deal.

But it has seen repeated bombings since then. Twin attacks killed 64 people early last year.

Like its Takfiri rival, the Daesh group, Fateh al-Sham is not party to a ceasefire between government forces and militant groups taking part in the Geneva talks.

Despite renouncing links with Al-Qaeda last year, it remains black-listed as a "terrorist" group by the United Nations and Western governments.

The group overran almost all of the northwestern province of Idlib in 2015 in alliance with Takfiri terrorists.

But relations have since frayed as its allies have joined peace negotiations with the government, first in Kazakhstan earlier this year and then in Geneva.

Fateh al-Sham has meanwhile been targeted by intensifying airstrikes, not just by the government but also by its ally Russia. Scores of its terrorists have been killed since the start of the year.

The tensions have triggered deadly clashes between the Takfiris and their erstwhile allies in Ahrar al-Sham - the largest terrorist faction.

Saturday's attack comes as the UN is struggling to get the new round of peace talks in Geneva off the ground aimed at ending the six-year war which has killed more than 310,000 people.

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Saudi Arabia's Controversial FM in Baghdad

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) -- Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir held talks in Baghdad with Iraq's leadership Saturday, the first such visit by a chief diplomat from the kingdom since 2003.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi received Jubeir and his accompanying delegation, a statement from his office said, a key step in efforts to normalize frosty ties.

Both sides "discussed cooperation in various fields, including the fight against the Daesh gangs," it said, referring to the Takfiri group which Iraqi forces are currently battling in the northern city of Mosul.

The Saudi minister also met his counterpart Ibrahim al-Ja'afari, who said in a statement the visit was "the first by a Saudi foreign minister since 2003."

"This visit is to reestablish relations in a more stable way than previously," a senior government official said told AFP on condition of anonymity. "It's the first visit of its kind."

Abadi, who has been at the helm since 2014, has supported efforts to improve strained ties but the road to normalization has been rocky.

Thamer al-Sabhan, whose credentials were received in January 2016, became the first Saudi ambassador to Iraq in a quarter

century, after relations were cut following ex-president Saddam Hussein's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

He left the same year after Baghdad demanded he be removed following remarks he made to the press about an alleged plot to assassinate him and criticism he voiced of the Hashed al-Sha'abi.

Hashed al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilization) forces, which have played a key role in the fight against Daesh, are seen with suspicion and frowned at by Saudi rulers.

Ja'afari was one of the most vocal critics of Saudi Arabia at the time and issued several strongly-worded statements against the kingdom and Jubeir himself.

He told him directly on the sidelines of a global conference on the anti-Daesh war last year and in a statement expressing Iraq's "annoyance" over what he called "unacceptable interference."

Saudi Arabia is very unpopular among the Iraqis and often accused of direct support to Daesh that took over a third of the country in 2014.

Saudi Arabia nominally supports the fight against Daesh but Iraq and other partners have argued it needs to do more to help

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Iran to Buy Uranium Ore From Kazakhstan

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Iran plans to buy 950 tonnes of uranium ore from Kazakhstan over three years and expects to get Russian help in producing nuclear fuel, its top nuclear official said in remarks published on Saturday.

The acquisition would not violate Iran's landmark 2015 deal with world powers over its nuclear program as the deal did not set limits on the Islamic Republic's supplies of uranium ore.

The report by the Iranian Students' News Agency ISNA comes a day after the UN atomic agency said Iran's official stock of enriched uranium had fallen by half after large amounts stuck in pipes was re-categorized as unrecoverable under a process agreed with the major powers.

"About 650 tonnes is to be delivered in two shipments over two years and 300 tonnes during the third year and this shipment is to be returned to Kazakhstan (after enrichment)," Ali Akbar Salehi, head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, told ISNA in an interview.

Iran has asked a body overseeing its 2015 nuclear accord with world powers to approve the purchase of uranium ore and was still

awaiting Britain's agreement, Salehi said.

"Five of the members of the committee overseeing the (nuclear deal) have given their written approval, but Britain changed its mind at the last moment, considering the U.S. elections and Middle East problems," Salehi said, without elaborating.

There was no immediate reaction from Britain to the report.

"In nuclear talks ... we reached a final agreement on jointly producing nuclear fuel with Russia," Salehi said. "We asked for their help in this regard... and it was agreed for the Russians to give us advisory help."

The nuclear agreement brokered by Britain, France, Germany, China, Russia and the United States lifted sanctions against Iran in return for curbs on Tehran's nuclear program.

Asghar Zare'an, special assistant to the AEOI head, said on February 7 that Iran had received the final consignment of a 149-tonne shipment of uranium from Russia as part of the JCPOA.

Iran and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council - the United States, France, Britain, Russia and

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