

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- The United States on Wednesday blacklisted two Iranian foundations and their subsidies.

The designations announced by the U.S. Treasury Department target Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order (EIKO) and Astan Quds Razavi (AQR), their heads and subsidies. They are the latest action to reinforce the "maximum pressure" campaign on Iran pursued by President Donald Trump's administration. U.S. President Donald Trump is due to hand over power to Democratic President-elect Joe Biden after losing the Nov. 3 election.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Foreign Minister Muhammad Javad Zarif says, as per Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei's assertion, Iran has to effectively feel the results of any potential sanctions relief by the U.S. instead of only being served with toothless signatures.

Zarif was speaking to Khamenei.ir, Ayatollah Khamenei's official website, that published the interview on Tuesday. The interview has been subsumed under a section of the website titled "Definitive Statement" that covers Iranian officials' observations on the Leader's recent comments about the United States' obligations towards the Islamic Republic.

Viewpoint

Pompeo Punctured

Over 10,000 Iranian Nurses Thank Leader

TEHRAN (Press TV) -- More than 10,000 Iranian nurses on Wednesday lauded the "wise and strong" position of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei on the coronavirus vaccine as well as the basic issues faced by nurses in the country.

The nurses expressed their gratitude to Ayatollah Khamenei by joining a campaign called "Thank you, My Leader."

"We nurses not only support the Leader's recent stances on the coronavirus vaccine and the fundamental issues facing the nursing field and the healthcare system's infrastructure, but we also consider ourselves to be the executives, advocates, and followers of our dear Leader's orders," the nurses said in their campaign statement.

The nurses echoed the Leader's remarks in praise of the vaccine developed by Iranian scientists against the new coronavirus, describing the achievement as "a source of national pride and power, and a guarantor of the entire nation's health, especially that of medical workers" under the current circumstances.

They also denounced as a "historic disgrace" any import of vaccines that would serve to complete foreign research projects

In a speech on Friday, Ayatollah Khamenei expressed his opposi-

tion to the import of COVID-19 vaccines produced by the U.S. and Britain. The Leader also expressed pessimism about French-made vaccines.

The Leader further hailed the domestically-developed Iranian coronavirus vaccine, calling it a source of pride and honor.

"This should not be denied ... The vaccine has gone under human trials. God willing, a better version will also be developed in Iran. This is a source of pride and dignity."

Iran's Health Minister Saeed Namaki has promised that a safe and reliable Iranian vaccine will be available for public use by spring.

Elsewhere in their campaign statement, the Iranian nurses called on the administration of President Hassan Rouhani and the parliament to spare no effort to implement the Leader's orders in allocating the required funds for the nursing community.

In a televised speech in December, Ayatollah Khamenei emphasized the need for more support for nurses and healthcare staff during the pandemic.

Following the Leader's comments, the Iranian government announced that nurses in hospitals and care homes across the country would see their wages increase by another 50 percent with immediate effect.

President Rouhani: Trump 'a Big Terrorist of History'



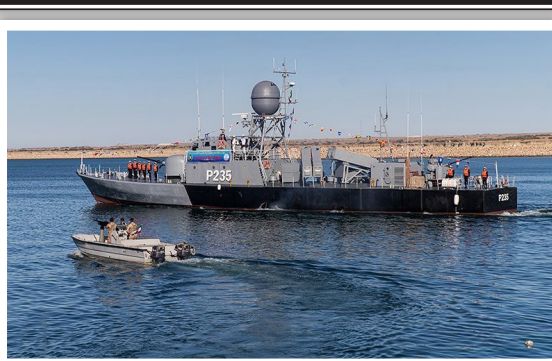
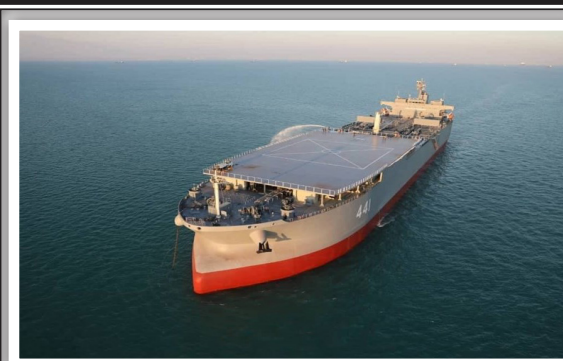
Two Iranians to Vie for Best AFC Champions League Player



Zionist Regime Strikes Syria Using U.S. Intelligence: Official



Navy Holds Missile Drill, Inducts New Warships



This combination shows the Zereh and the Makran joining a navy drill in the Gulf of Oman while Chief of Staff Gen. Muhammad Baqeri and other military commanders watch off the southeastern coast of Iran.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) — Iran's navy began a short-range missile drill in the Gulf of Oman on Wednesday amid provocative moves by the U.S. military in the region.

The two-day missile drill is being held in the sea's southeastern waters where two new Iranian-made warships joined the exercise on Wednesday: The missile-launching Zereh, or "armor," and the Makran, a logistics vessel with a helicopter pad named for a coastal region in southern Iran.

Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Muhammad Baqeri and Chief Commander of the Army Ma-

jor General Abdolrahim Mousavi, and other senior commanders attended launch of the exercise.

The Makran, designed as a "mobile seaport", is about to support the Iranian navy's missions in remote waters, such as north of the Indian Ocean, the Bab al-Mandab Strait, and the Red Sea.

The vessel has a displacement capacity for 82,000 tonnes of logistics. It is capable of making voyages for up to 1,000 days without a port call. It is said to be Iran's largest military vessel and can carry five helicopters at the same time.

Gen. Baqeri said Iran will resume

its patrols in the Red Sea to ensure full security for its oil tankers and other commercial vessels.

Iran's missile program the Middle East's most potent, regarding it an important deterrent and retaliatory force against U.S. and other adversaries in the event of any aggression.

The drill will mark Iranian surface combat units, sub-surface naval forces as well as aerial units practicing battles with mock enemy forces and performing warfare tactics as well as joint operations against any possible military scenario.

Surface-to-surface cruise missiles and torpedoes will be fired from

domestically-developed submarines during the war games, while aircraft, coastal and seaborne operational units will practice special tasks. Unmanned aerial operations and electronic warfare tactics will be exercised as well.

The naval drills come amid America's stepped-up military threats against Iran in the final days of U.S. President Donald Trump in office.

Late last month, two American B-52 bombers flew over the Middle East. They deployed from Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota and were escorted by F-16s, according to U.S. Central Command.

It marked Washington's third deployment of nuclear-capable B-52s to the region within 45 days.

On December 10, two B-52 long-range bombers took off at short notice from Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana for the non-stop, 36-hour mission to cross Europe and then the Arabian Peninsula to the Persian Gulf, according to U.S. military officials.

The U.S. Navy had earlier announced the arrival of a nuclear-powered submarine in the Persian Gulf. The USS Georgia passed the Strait of Hormuz accompanied by two American warships, making it the first missile-loaded submarine of its kind to enter the region in eight years.

Iran holds annual exercises to display the Islamic Republic's military might to confront "foreign threats".

On Saturday, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps held a naval parade in the Persian Gulf and a week earlier Iran held a massive drone maneuver across half the country.

With Trump Out, Iran, Iraq Move to Enhance Trade

TEHRAN (Press TV) -- Iraqi Trade Minister Alaa Ahmed al-Jubouri has visited Iran to remove hurdles to further expansion of economic relations which are the target of U.S. sanctions.

The two Muslim neighbors held their fourth Joint Economic Committee meeting in Tehran after a six-year hiatus, with Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian saying they had signed new agreements in the fields of water and energy.

Since 2018, Iran and Iraq have set a five-year target to increase bilateral trade to \$20 billion per year -- a vision which Ardakanian reiterated on Tuesday -- but it has been hampered by a combination of restrictions caused by the COVID-19 outbreak, trade barriers and U.S. sanctions.

Jubouri said he had arrived in Tehran Tuesday with a high-ranking delegation "to remove obstacles to increasing trade be-

tween the two countries", Fars news agency reported.

The Iraqi minister underlined the importance of modern technologies which the two countries need to use in their transactions in order improve their economic relations.

Ardakanian said they needed new cooperation agreements on taxation, investment, preferential tariffs, and customs. The Iranian minister also underlined the importance of developing transportation routes between the neighbors.

In March 2019, they signed a preliminary agreement to build a railway linking the southern Iraqi oil city of Basra and the Iranian border town of Shalamcheh when President Hassan Rouhani visited Baghdad.

Apart from religious and cultural connections, Iran and Iraq share a nearly 1,500-kilometer-long border. Iran is one of Iraq's

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'Preposterous' Pompeo Claim Against Iran Triggers Derision

UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) -- Iran has repulsed Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's "preposterous" allegations that the Islamic Republic had links to takfiri terrorist group Al-Qaeda, branding the accusations as part of a last-ditch effort by President Donald Trump's administration to vilify Tehran before a transition of power.

"These preposterous, false accusations are nothing new, and only reinforce the fact that the Trump administration is desperately continuing their failed policy of Iran-bashing," Iranian permanent mission to the United Nations spokesperson Alireza Miryousefi told Newsweek shortly after Pompeo's speech Tuesday.

Pompeo used his last days in office to accuse Iran, without any evidence, of being the Al-Qaeda terrorist group's "new home base".

Miryousefi said Iran is, in fact, a bulwark against such organiza-

tions, which Tehran has also fought in countries like Iraq and Syria.

It is the U.S. and its partners who are responsible for the conditions that allowed such groups to thrive in the region, the Iranian diplomat added.

"It is a well-known fact that Iran was and is the extremist terror groups' most hated enemy and that the founder of Al-Qaeda and many of its followers hail from what is the U.S.' close ally in the Middle East," Miryousefi said. "Needless to say, US officials have repeatedly acknowledged their role in creating extremist groups in the region, including Al-Qaeda."

Shortly after his anti-Iran speech, the U.S. secretary of state further vented his outrage by posting at least 16 anti-Iran tweets, in which he leveled more accusations against the Islamic Republic.

In these tweets, which he posted

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General Salami: JCPOA No More Necessary

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is no more necessary whether or not the next U.S. administration returns to the nuclear deal, chief commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Hussein Salami said on Wednesday.

The IRGC commander said the enemies of Iran have been entangled in many troubles in such a way that even American think tanks admit that the U.S. is falling apart from inside.

"The situation has become such that Iran is in no need of the JCPOA, whether or not the U.S. rejoins the deal," he added.

The general said it is a divine promise that the enemies' hostile plots would return to themselves.

Highlighting the failure of the U.S. policy of maximum pressure on Iran, the general derided outgoing U.S. President Donald Trump as a "depressed and exhausted man" whose departure is everybody awaiting.

Iran has started research on uranium metal-based fuel for its research reactor in Tehran, its envoy to the UN atomic agency said on Wednesday.

"R&D activities related to the design of an improved type of fuel for the Tehran Research Reactor start-

ed. Natural uranium will be used to produce uranium metal in the first stage," Kazem Gharibabadi said on Twitter.

He added that Iran has given design information about its research to the International Atomic Energy Agency. The agency has conducted an inspection, he said.

In December, Iran's parliament passed a law that obliges the government to harden its nuclear stance, including inauguration of the metallic uranium factory in Isfahan within five months.

It also says if U.S. sanctions are not eased by Feb. 21, Tehran will step up uranium enrichment and will end the sweeping inspection powers given to the IAEA by the nuclear deal, limiting inspections to declared nuclear sites only.

Iran resumed enriching uranium to 20% fissile strength at its underground Fordow nuclear plant earlier this month.

Tehran began scaling back its compliance with the 2015 accord in 2019 in a step-by-step response to President Donald Trump's pullout in 2018 and his reimposition of U.S. sanctions that had been rescinded under the deal, beside the Europeans' failure to support Iran.