

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Iran on Friday rejected any meeting with the United States in Vienna, where it is taking part next week in a session with the remaining participants in its 2015 nuclear deal, an Iranian Foreign Ministry website reported.

"The United States will not attend any meeting in which Iran is present, including the meeting of the joint commission (of the nuclear accord), and that is certain," Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi was quoted as saying by the website.

"It is their business, whether other parties to the (nuclear accord) seek to consult bilaterally or multilaterally with the United States," he said.

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MOSCOW (Dispatches) -- The spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry says Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will pay an official visit to Tehran Tuesday at the invitation of his Iranian counterpart, Muhammad Javad Zarif.

"Consultations on various aspects of bilateral relations; regional issues, especially the latest developments in Caucasus, Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan; as well as Iran-Russia cooperation in major regional and international organizations" are on Lavrov's agenda during his visit to Tehran, Saeed Khatibzadeh said.

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Viewpoint

Points to Ponder for Production in the New Year

Iran Marks 42nd Anniversary of Islamic Republic



Tehran Friendly: Iran Beat Syria 3-0



Nasrallah: Zionist Regime, U.S. Still Pursuing 'Nile to Euphrates' Dream



Iran-China Strategic Partnership Deal Alarms West

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Last Saturday, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi was in Tehran to sign a 25-year partnership deal between China and Iran. The deal outlines plans for economic, political and security cooperation between the two countries, which are celebrating 50 years of diplomatic ties.

Since news of the agreement surfaced in 2016, the prospect of a closer alliance between two U.S. rivals has inspired alarm in the United States. In March, President Biden told a reporter he had been "concerned for over a year" about the partnership.

China is already Iran's top trade partner and oil client, but its signing of a 25-year strategic partnership agreement on Saturday has put US sanctions on the verge of collapse, global observers say.

The agreement covers a variety of economic activity from oil and mining to promoting industrial activity in Iran, as well as transportation and agricultural collaborations. The deal also supports tourism and cultural exchanges.

A Tuesday report said China is about to import more than 1 million barrels per day of Iranian crude oil in March despite U.S. sanctions designed to penalize buyers.

The Asian powerhouse has received record amounts of Iranian oil since the beginning of 2021. Reuters pegged China-bound cargoes at 30 million barrels for March, while president of SVB Energy International Sara Vakhshouri estimated Iran oil exports this month exceeded 1 million bpd.

According to Eurasia Group analyst Henry Rome cited by Reuters, "Iran is exporting more oil to China and that poses a challenge to the U.S. sanctions regime".

Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who signed the agreement in Tehran Saturday, told Iranian President Hassan Rouhani that "no matter how the world situation changes, China's willingness to develop China-Iran relations will not change".

China's Foreign Ministry said late Tuesday that Beijing has "consistently opposed" the U.S. unilateral sanctions and "long-arm jurisdictions" and urged Washington to lift these "illicit sanctions" as soon as possible. The country said last week that it would work to defend the legitimate interests of Sino-Iranian relations.

The accord has irked the West, with the U.S. saying that it would evaluate the deal and see whether it could trigger sanctions under American law.

"We of course will take a look and ensure that any sanctions that need to be implemented would

be as it relates to this package," White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki told reporters.

The U.S. government has already imposed sanctions on a number of Chinese companies, including state-owned energy company Zhuhai Zhenrong and Cosco Shipping Corporation subsidiaries, for shipping Iranian crude oil.

However, China "does not want to see the Islamic Republic fall because of American pressure, an outcome the Chinese would read as a net loss for themselves, geopolitically," according to Alex Vatanka, an Iran analyst at the Washington-based Middle East Institute.

Beijing regards the Middle Eastern powerhouse a key destination in China's trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative involving huge infrastructure projects connecting Asia to Europe and beyond.

Iran's Foreign Minister Muhammad Javad Zarif hailed China as "a friend in hard times" on Saturday. "We thank China for its valuable positions and actions in a period of cruel sanctions against Iran," he said.

According to Israeli newspaper Haaretz, "more than its declaratory significance, and more than its potential geopolitical importance, the newly signed 'comprehensive strategic partnership' between China and Iran is a testament to the dismal strategic policy failure by both the United States and Israel".

The deal "marks a momentous change in China's relations with Iran and the region" as relations with the United States deteriorate, former Chinese ambassador to Tehran Hua Liming said.

"Since the Carter administration, the U.S. has often reminded China of its relations with Iran, which was seen by Americans as an impediment to the U.S.-China relationship. But with fundamental changes in China-U.S. relations in recent months, that era has gone," he told English-language daily South China Morning Post.

Hua noted that China's oil imports from Iran have steadily increased in recent months despite U.S. sanctions. The new 25-year deal with Iran, he said, marks China's departure from its low-profile approach to Iran.

"Both China and Iran are interested in promoting their close ties publicly, which has reflected a changed reality. As China cares much less about what the U.S. thinks, we will no longer be restrained by those largely self-imposed restrictions on fostering close ties with Iran," he told the Hong Kong-based paper.

According to Amin Saikal, an

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Year of Production, Support and Elimination of Obstacles



Ayatollah Khamenei has repeatedly said state officials should not tie Iran's economy to the lifting of illegal sanctions.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has extended his felicitations to the Iranian nation on the occasion of Nowruz, calling on the government and the nation to support production in the country and remove related obstacles.

In his televised message to the nation on the occasion of the Persian New Year, the Leader lauded the Iranian nation's proven capabilities both in the face of the coronavirus pandemic and sanctions imposed on the country.

He said the enemies openly acknowledge that their "maximum pressure" campaign against the Islamic Republic has failed.

Ayatollah Khamenei designated the new Iranian calendar year of 1400 as the year of "Production: Support and the Elimination of Obstacles."

The following is the full text of the message:

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds, and peace and greetings be upon our Master Muhammad, and upon his pure household O' Conqueror of hearts and sights O' Planner of night and day O' Transformer of power and conditions

Transform our condition to the best of conditions!

I wish to congratulate all our dear compatriots, in particular the esteemed families of martyrs and of disabled war veterans, the disabled war veterans themselves, and all veterans on the arrival of Nowruz and the new year. I also wish to congratulate all the nations who celebrate Nowruz and the arrival of this Eid. This year, our Eid coincides with the auspicious occasions of the month of Shaban. I hope that this coincidence will have many worldly and otherworldly blessings

for our new year.

The year 1400 is blessed with two 15th of Shaban celebrations as our people will be celebrating the birthday anniversary of the Imam of the Age (may our souls be sacrificed for his sake) twice in this year.

1399: Confronting Big Test, Maximum Pressures

The year 1399 ended with various incidents, some of which were unprecedented. One of those incidents, which was really unprecedented and unfamiliar to our nation, was the phenomenon of the coronavirus which affected the lives of all people. It had an impact on different businesses, the educational environment and religious gatherings as well as on trips, sports events and various other matters in the country. It delivered a hard blow to employment in our country.

Of course, the most bitter event was the demise of tens of thou-

sands of our dear people and this means that tens of thousands of families had to mourn the loss of their dear ones. I wish to benefit from this opportunity to express my condolences and my sympathy to all those dear families. I hope that God will give them patience and bestow His mercy and forgiveness on the deceased.

In one sense, the year 1399 was the year in which the Iranian nation demonstrated its capabilities including in confronting the big test – that is to say, the coronavirus. To be fair, our dear people – ranging from the medical personnel of the country, researchers and scientists to the masses of the people and jihadi groups, displayed great capabilities in handling that bitter incident despite the enemy's "maximum pressures". Despite the enemy's sanctions and although the path of foreign resources was blocked, our nation, our scientists, our physicians, our nurses, our medics, our laboratory experts and our radiologists – the people in charge of the people's health – really managed to engender a great experience and to display a great feat.

The Iranian nation also displayed its capability in confronting the enemy's maximum pressures. Our enemies, headed by the U.S., were after bringing the Iranian nation to its knees with their maximum pressures. Today, they and their European associates explicitly say that the maximum pressure policy failed. We knew that it would fail and were therefore determined to defeat the enemy in that area. We knew that the Iranian nation would stand firm. Today, they are acknowledging that their maximum pressure policy has failed.

Surge of Production Somehow Realized

Well, the slogan of the year 1399 was "A surge in production".

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U.S. Removes Troops Amid Saudi Defeat in Yemen

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- The United States has removed at least three Patriot anti-missile batteries from the Persian Gulf region, in a first step under President Joe Biden to pull the U.S. forces away from the Middle East, a report says.

One of the Patriot anti-missile batteries was removed from Saudi Arabia's Prince Sultan Air Base, which had been put in place in recent years to help protect American forces.

Other U.S. military capabilities, including an aircraft carrier and surveillance systems, are being diverted from the region to answer military needs elsewhere across the world, the Wall Street Journal quoted U.S. officials as saying.

According to the paper, an anti-ballistic missile defense system known as a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) was also proposed to be removed, but officials said it would remain in the region for now.

At the end of the Trump administration, there were about 50,000 U.S. troops in the region. As a result of the new move, several thousand troops are expected to leave the region over time.

The U.S. officials said the withdrawal is an effort to further reduce the American posture in the Middle East after decades of military engagement in the region.

The Journal said the changes come while Saudi Arabia endures

rocket and drone attacks from inside Yemen.

U.S. reports say American leaders have realized that the kingdom is waging a losing war in Yemen and want Washington to desist from the conflict.

According to Washington-based conservative defense policy think tank the Jamestown Foundation, "Yemen's established and emergent elites are more willing than they have been for years to set aside old grievances".

"The driving force behind these moves to reinvigorate political processes is the recognition that the Houthis (a.k.a. Ansarullah) are not going to be defeated militarily. Thus, the Houthis' influence and

grip on northwest Yemen must be dealt with politically, if it is to be dealt with at all," it wrote.

Since 2015, outside powers like the UAE and Saudi Arabia, have armed and funded proxies in their battle against Yemen's resistance forces because they viewed kinetic military action as more expedient than politics. The flow of funds and weapons from foreign powers has helped sustain a war economy and fed the growth of armed factions in Yemen.

In June 2019, the UAE began withdrawing most of its forces from Yemen. Tensions with Saudi Arabia, international fallout from the UAE's involvement in Yemen, (Continued on Page 7)