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Iran

Digest

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- **Iran open to direct negotiations with the United States in Vienna**
- **Iran's President Visits Russia**
- **Iran and Azerbaijan exchange ministerial visits**
- **Iran's Foreign Minister Visits China to begin implementation of the 25-Year Agreement**
- **Iran conducts joint naval exercise with Russia, and China in the Northern Indian Ocean**



Iran open to direct negotiations with the United States in Vienna

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein [Amir-Abdollahian](#) referring to Washington's request for direct negotiations with Iran in Vienna, observed "should in the course of the negotiations we get to a stage where a good deal with solid guarantees necessitates some level of talks with the United States, we will not ignore it." The United States has on many occasion called for direct talks with Iran, and as the negotiations to resume the implementation of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) reach a critical stage Tehran is softening its earlier stance that made direct talks with Washington conditional to its re-entering in the agreement and lifting of sanctions. On 9 January, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, in a speech commemorating the 8 January, 1978 uprisings in Qom marking the beginning of the revolution against Pahlavi monarchy, signaled support for negotiations with the United States. Indirectly referring to ongoing nuclear talks involving indirect negotiations with the United States, the Leader argued "the [refusal to surrender](#) to an arrogant enemy is another principle of the Revolution. It is another issue to negotiate, to discuss and sometimes interact with the enemy, we have never surrendered so far, and we never will." However, Tehran has refuted speculations that during President Raisi's visit to Russia, Moscow proposed to Iran to sign an [interim accord](#) in Vienna talks. Instead, Tehran maintains its long held position that removal of sanctions is [prerequisite](#) to any deal.

Iran's President Visits Russia

On 19 January, Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi arrived in Moscow for a two-day official visit. In his meeting with his Russian President Vladimir Putin, Raisi handed over a draft of Iran-Russia 20-year Strategic Cooperation Agreement. According to the account of the meeting

posted on the [Iranian president's website](#), Raisi noted that the "common understanding of the two countries on regional and international issues is at the basis of joint cooperation," and that Iran-Russia ties are on the path to become [strategic relations](#). While underlining "fighting against terrorism and organised drug trafficking as the pillar of joint cooperation" Raisi observed that "the successful experience of cooperation against terrorism in Syria can be applied to the Caucasus and Afghanistan as well." Further, in what seems to be a veiled reference to Azerbaijan and Turkey, a NATO member, President Raisi emphasised on inviolability of borders in the Caucasus and noted that "NATO influence under any kind of cover in the Caucasus and Central Asia threatens the common interests of independent countries." On bilateral economic ties, Raisi noted that "the current level of trade and economic relations is not satisfactory... we can increase the level of our trade and economic cooperation by several times." Iranian Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Ehsan Khandouzi, who was part of ministerial delegation accompanying Raisi, noted that Moscow has finalised previously agreed [US\\$ 5 billion credit line](#) for the completion of three power plant projects and two rail/transit projects, Rasht-Astara and Incheh Boroun-Garmsar railway, which are related to the International North-South Transportation Corridor (INSTC).

Iran's Foreign Minister Visits China to begin implementation of the 25-Year Agreement

On 14 January, Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian led a high-level political and economic delegation to China. While meeting his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in Wuxi, Jiangsu Province in East China, they jointly announced the launch of the implementation of the [Iran-China comprehensive agreement](#) on strategic

partnership. Before Abdollahian, Wang Yi had hosted foreign ministers from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman and the Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation in Wuxi from 10 to 14 January. During his consultations with Wang Yi, Abdollahian hailed Beijing's cooperation in providing more than 110 million doses of coronavirus vaccine and expressed hope that the opening of China's consulate general in the southern Iranian port city of Bandar Abbas in December, 2021 would facilitate bilateral trade cooperation. During his consultations with foreign minister of the Gulf States, Wang Yi had extended support for setting up of [multilateral dialogue platforms](#) and taking the initiatives on regional issues in their own hands, a position that corresponds with Tehran's views on these issues.

Iran and Azerbaijan exchange ministerial visits

On 24 January, Iran's Minister for Road and Urban Development Rostam Qassemi visited Azerbaijan for bilateral consultations on [facilitating trade and transit](#) and implementation of joint infrastructure projects. Since last year's standoff between the two countries was triggered by Baku's arrest of two truck drivers on charges of illegally crossing into Azerbaijan's territory, Tehran and Baku have had multiple rounds of consultations to resolve transit related issues. Baku's 'liberation' of parts of Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding seven districts close to Iranian border in the 2020 war with Armenia has not only complicated Iran's access to Armenia, but also delayed progress on joint Iranian-Azeri projects in the Caucasus-Caspian region. During the visit, Iranian and Azeri delegation [jointly visited](#) liberated areas and Tehran expressed interest in participating in [reconstruction](#) projects. Also, Tehran and Baku signed a MoU to jointly finance and construct a bridge over Astarachay River

that separates the Iranian city of Astara from its namesake town on Azerbaijan's side of the border. The construction of Astarachay Bridge is considered to be a positive step in completing the INSTC. On 26 January, Azeri defense minister Zakir Hasanov visited Tehran to discuss regional issues and military cooperation with his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Reza Ashtiani. President Raisi, while meeting with Hasanov, cautioned against relations with Israel and jihadi presence in the Caucasus as he expressed hope that "wise role playing by the armed forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan would prevent [Takfiri and anti-Muslim currents](#) from gaining a foothold in the region."

Iran conducts joint naval exercise with Russia, and China in the Northern Indian Ocean

On 21 January, regular Iranian Navy and Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Navy took part in the "[2022 Maritime Security Belt](#)" with navies of China and Russia in the northern Indian Ocean and Sea of Oman area. A total of 11 vessels participated in tactical exercises such as rescuing a hijacked vessel, firefighting and shooting at air targets at night over an area of 17,000 square kilometres. The three [Russian ships](#) included a missile cruiser, anti-submarine warfare ship and a tanker, the two Chinese vessels included a guided missile destroyer, while Iran's navy participated with smaller ships and helicopters. Following the exercise, the Commander of the Iranian Navy, Admiral Shahram Irani noted that "this manoeuvre sent a regional message, especially to friendly countries, and the resistance axis, and reminded that we can establish security in the region on the strength of our domestic capabilities, and provide peace and tranquillity to our people." Earlier, in 2019 navies of the three countries had conducted a four-day drill in the Sea of Oman to deepen cooperation between them.