



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR  
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES  
मनोहर परिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

# Iran

## *Digest*

February 2023

- **President Raisi visits China**
- **Taliban officials take charge of Afghanistan's Embassy in Iran**
- **Russia backs Iran's proposal for 3+3 format cooperation mechanism for the Caucasus**
- **Qatar and the UK mediate Iran-US prisoners exchange talks**
- **Foreign Ministry rejects claims that Iran is setting up a drone factory in Russia**
- **Supreme Leader Khamenei emphasises on 'national unity' on the 44th anniversary of Islamic Revolution**



## President Raisi visits China

President Ebrahim Raisi paid a state visit to China from 14 to 16 February, first such visit by an Iranian president to China in two decades. On the eve of his visit, in an op-ed '[Old friends are the best partners for a bright future](#)' in *The People's Daily*, Raisi wrote that the two countries "have chosen the comprehensive strategic partnership programme as a model for their sustainable interactions, and have common grounds and similar approaches to international developments. The two countries are against hegemony and unilateralism and emphasise the need to respect the rights and interests of all countries". Raisi's [delegation included](#) ministers of Foreign Affairs, Economy, Transportation, Petroleum, Agriculture, and Trade, Iran's lead nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani and the Governor of Iran's Central Bank. The presidential [joint statement](#) issued at the end of the visit reiterated the two countries' strong support for issues related to each other's basic interests and protection of each other's national sovereignty, territorial integrity and national honour. The two sides emphasised the importance of peace and stability in the Persian Gulf region for international security and energy flow. The Chinese side appreciated Iran's important role in maintaining global energy security. While praising the strategic importance of the meetings of the foreign ministers of the two countries, the two sides agreed to maintain a close coordination between the foreign ministers. Regarding developmental and economic cooperation, the two sides agreed to accelerate the implementation of the comprehensive cooperation programme and continue to increase cooperation in the fields of trade, agriculture, industry, renewable energy, infrastructure, etc. The

two sides agreed that the 18th meeting of the Iran-China Joint Trade and Economic Committee will be held in Tehran in 2023.

## Taliban officials take charge of Afghanistan's Embassy in Iran

On 26 February, Afghanistan's Embassy in Tehran, which had been staffed by the U.S.-backed Afghan government even after Taliban takeover of Kabul in August 2021, was handed over to Taliban. In Kabul, the Taliban Foreign Affairs Ministry in a statement said embassy "activities will continue in Tehran following the dispatching" of a new chargé d'affaires and diplomats from Afghanistan. In January Iran had appointed its Presidential Envoy for Afghanistan Hassan Kazemi Qomi as the [new ambassador to Afghanistan](#). Qomi had earlier served as Iran's ambassador to Iraq from 2006 to 2010. In a simultaneous change of the senior diplomats of their embassies, Taliban authorities appointed a new caretaker for its embassy in Tehran after the tenure of the current caretaker came to an end. The Public Relations Office of the [Iranian Foreign Ministry](#) in a statement noted that the Foreign Ministry of Iran has by no means been involved in any of the changes in the Afghan embassy. It maintained that such developments are internal issues of Afghanistan. On 27 February, Taliban released an Iranian border guard who was briefly detained after the vehicle he was searching for contraband on the Iran-Afghanistan border drove into Afghan territory leading the Afghan border forces to detain him together with other occupants. Notably, there have been several clashes involving border guards of the two countries, prompting Qomi to propose the formation of a [joint committee](#) to prevent further border skirmishes.

## Russia backs Iran's proposal for 3+3 format cooperation mechanism for the Caucasus

Hossein Amir Abdollahian in a meeting with Alexander Grushko, the Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia, in Tehran said that Iran is ready to hold a foreign ministerial conference within the framework a [3+3 group](#), which includes three southern Caucasus nations of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia and their three neighbours, Russia, Iran and Turkey. Following the Russian-brokered cease-fire agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan in November 2020, both Ankara and Tehran had put forward the proposal of a 3+3 format cooperation mechanism for the Caucasus, focussing on resolving differences between the two sides and implementing a provision in the ceasefire agreement calling for opening all transport routes between Armenia and Azerbaijan, including the roads that connect Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan. More recently, following the deadly clashes in September 2022, during which Azerbaijani side captured several strategic positions and heights within the Armenian territory, Iran had [offered mediation](#) as it called for preserving the status quo at the Iranian-Armenian border. Grushko's meeting with his Iranian counterpart, [Ali Bagheri Kani](#) discussed on a range of issues including the war in Ukraine, the situation in Afghanistan, the crisis in Syria as well as developments in Central Asia and the Caucasus. They also discussed Tehran-Moscow relations and their cooperation within the regional and international organisations.

## Qatar and the UK mediate Iran-US prisoners exchange talks

On 18 February, Foreign Minister Abdollahian said at the Munich Security

Conference that Iran is prepared to organize a major prison swap with Washington if the US delivers a significant gesture of goodwill, such as by releasing \$8 billion of overseas Iranian assets that are frozen by South Korea under US sanctions. Abdollahian said 'we believe [prisoner swaps](#) is a humanitarian issue ... unrelated to the nuclear accord'. He added that the country required the US to display some flexibility in providing political, legal and economic guarantees that Washington will honour the nuclear deal. Tehran is also seeking the release of the [10 Iranian nationals](#) charged with Conspiring to Evade U.S. Sanctions on Iran. Qatar and the UK which with the help of Oman had secured an agreement last March leading to the release of two dual citizens detained in Iran, has been mediating for a similar prisoner exchange that will bring home American citizens detained in Iran. Two days later Iran's foreign ministry spokesperson [Nasser Kanani](#) noted that a deal was on the verge of being clinched through intermediaries at an unannounced time, "but then the US showed bad faith". Kanani also acknowledged the Qatari government's mediation efforts in overcoming the technical issues.

## Foreign Ministry rejects claims that Iran is setting up a drone factory in Russia

[Nasser Kanaani](#), Iranian Foreign Ministry

spokesperson, dismissed reports of Iran setting up a drone factory in Russia as propaganda that aims to portray Iran as a party to the war in Ukraine. On 5 February, [Wall Street Journal](#) reported that officials of the two countries visited Yelabuga, a Russian town located around 600 miles east of Moscow for setting up a factory that could produce at least 6,000 drones with

Iranian designs for the war in Ukraine. In November, 2022, reports in Western media claimed that Moscow had [reached an agreement](#) with Tehran to begin manufacturing hundreds of unmanned weaponized aircrafts on Russian soil, citing new intelligence by the U.S. and other Western security agencies.

### **Supreme Leader Khamenei emphasises on ‘national unity’ on the 44<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Islamic Revolution**

On the anniversary of the historic pledging allegiance of Iran Air Force commanders with Imam Khomeini, which is marked as the National Air Force Day, Supreme Leader Khamenei addressed commanders and officers of the Iranian Army’s Air Force. While emphasising on “[national unity](#)” as an essential requirement for the

present times, Khamenei warned that “enemies are seeking to destroy the Islamic Republic by sowing discord and distrust between political groups, people’s distrust of one another, the people’s distrust of the government, and the government’s distrust of the people. And they have done so by bringing up issues of ‘women’, the ‘Shi’i-Sunni issues’ and the ‘differences between generations.” In the run-up to the anniversary, Khamenei also approved a judiciary proposal [granting amnesty](#) to tens of thousands who were arrested during the recent nation-wide protests.