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Iran

Digest

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Iran-Azerbaijan ties deteriorate further as Azerbaijan appoints ambassador to Israel

On 4 April, a group of 210 Iranian [lawmakers issued a joint statement](#) condemning Azerbaijan's move to open an embassy in Tel Aviv and appoint an ambassador to Israel "as a move against an oppressed country of the Islamic world, Palestine". The lawmakers also called on the Iranian foreign ministry to take the necessary diplomatic measures and send statements to all Islamic countries. Iran's foreign ministry asked Baku to explain the comments made by Israel's Foreign Minister Eli Cohen on the occasion of the opening of Azerbaijan's embassy that he had agreed with his Azerbaijani counterpart Jeyhun Bayramov on the need to form a "united front" against Iran. On 6 April, Azerbaijan [arrested six men](#) accused of links with Iran's secret services and plotting to "set up a 'resistance squad' aimed at establishing a Shari'a state in Azerbaijan through armed unrest. On the same day, Azerbaijani foreign ministry in a statement noted that 4 employees of the Iranian Embassy in Baku were [declared persona-non-grata](#) for engaging in activities incompatible with their diplomatic status. On 19 April, Eli Cohen travelled to Baku, where President Ilham Aliyev said the bilateral cooperation agenda of Israel and Azerbaijan is expanding, while calling for the deepening of ties with Israel in many areas, including security. From Baku, Cohen flew to Turkmenistan, to open what he called as 'closest Israeli embassy to Iran". Iran's foreign minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian had [telephone conversations](#) with his Azeri counterpart Jeyhun Bayramov on 9 and then 14 April stressing mutual respect for good neighborliness, each other's sovereignty, and territorial integrity throughout [open and frank discussions](#) about the issues at hand as well as any misunderstandings and potential solutions to the current predicament.

Iranian and Saudi Foreign Ministers meet in Beijing

On 6 April, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian met his Saudi counterpart Faisal bin Farhan al-Saud held in Beijing and issued a joint statement in which they agreed to launch [arrangements to reopen embassies](#) and consulates within the two month-period stipulated in the deal announced on March 10. Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang witnessed the signing of the joint statement by the two sides. In the joint statement, "the two sides emphasised the importance of following up on the implementation of the Beijing Agreement and its activation in a way that expands mutual trust and the fields of cooperation and helps create security, stability and prosperity in the region." It also said the two countries had agreed to work to activate a general agreement to cooperate on economy, trade, investment, technology, science, culture, sports and youth signed back in 1998, as well as a security cooperation deal signed in 2001. Following the agreement, the two sides agreed to proceed with necessary measures to open their embassies in Riyadh and Tehran, and their consulates general in Jeddah and Mashhad. On 8 April, a [Saudi technical team](#) arrived in Tehran to discuss reopening diplomatic missions in Iran. In Beijing, Abdollahian also met with France's Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs [Catherine Colonna](#), who was travelling with President Emmanuel Macron on his state visit to China. Colonna called for the immediate release of six French nationals who are being detained in Iran. Iran's foreign ministry [confirmed the meeting](#) took place, adding that "some consular issues were also raised during the meeting."

Iran's Defence Minister participates in the SCO Defence Ministers Meeting in New Delhi

On 27 April, Iran's Defence Minister Brigadier General Mohammed Reza Gharaei Ashtiyani travelled to New Delhi to attend a

meeting of the defence ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Mehdi Rabbani, the deputy commander of operations of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, and Brigadier General Seyed Hamzeh Qalandari, the Deputy Defense Minister also accompanied Ashtiani. In his [remarks](#), Ashtiani noted that “the expansionist policies of the West and NATO have accelerated in a bid to revive the unipolar world. The West and NATO’s actions in the Ukraine crisis are signs of this fact.” Noting that the principles of arms control system, non-proliferation and international treaties are under serious threat, he argued that the “SCO member states share the responsibility for designing a new world order” and emphasised the need for a common understanding among them to resolve different security challenges in the world. On the side-lines, he held a meeting with his Indian counterpart [Rajnath Singh](#), exchanging views on regional security issues, including peace and stability in Afghanistan. In their meeting in the national capital, the two ministers also discussed the development of the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) for transport links to Afghanistan.

Iran’s Foreign Minister participates in a quadrilateral ministerial meeting on Afghanistan in Samarkand

On 13 April, Amir Abdollahian participated in a quadrilateral [informal meeting of foreign ministers](#) of Iran, China, Russia and Pakistan on Afghanistan in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. Their joint statement called on Taliban authorities to form an inclusive government with the participation of all ethnic groups and political institutions. While blaming the US and its allies for the current state of affairs in the country, they asked for the “immediate lifting of unilateral sanctions against Afghanistan”. The statement also stressed the importance of respecting Afghanistan’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, and expressed support for the principle of “Afghan ownership and Afghan

leadership” to determine the political and development path of the country. The four countries asked the de facto government in Kabul to “take tangible action in fighting against terrorism and eliminating terrorist groups in the country.” All terrorist groups based in the country, including Daesh, East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and Jaish ul-Adl pose a serious threat to regional and international security, the ministers warned. The first quadrilateral meeting on Afghanistan was held on September 2022, on the side-lines of the SCO summit in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

Supreme Leader Khamenei calls for focus on economy, defends mandatory Hijab

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei in a [meeting with senior officials](#) from different branches of the government on 4 April, at the Imam Khomeini Hussainiyah, noted that the economy is the first and foremost issue of the country. He noted that different governmental organisations and different parts of the country need to accept the priority of making concerted efforts to implement the slogan for the Iranian calendar year 1402 “inflation control and a growth in production.” At the same time, Khamenei noted that the choice of economic slogan does not mean we should disregard cultural and social issues and other similar issues. He maintained that “a chaotic economy also affects the society’s culture. That is, the effect of the country’s crooked, unbalanced economy on social and cultural issues should not be ignored either. On the issue of mandatory hijab, Khamenei maintained that “hijab is a legal, Islamic boundary. It is not a governmental restriction”. Noting that it was Iran's enemies that have started the protest movement around Hijab issue, Ayatollah Khamenei said the issue “will definitely be resolved.” On 18 April, in an address to a group of students, Khamenei dismissed recent calls by pro-reform figures for a referendum as a means of resolving the country's issues.