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Brief Notes

Tehran Derides Putin–Witkoff Talks as 'Fruitless,' Says Europe 'Sidelined': Islamic Republic media cast the December 2 meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. Envoy Steve Witkoff as "fruitless" and emblematic of a broader breakdown in Western unity, with outlets across the spectrum highlighting a seemingly "sidelined" Europe and a weakened Ukraine. Coverage highlighted Moscow's perceived confidence and Europe's "fear of the grand bargain" between Russia and the United States, with several outlets pointing to NATO divisions and disagreements over peace frameworks.

IRGC Navy Issues Threats to U.S. Vessels in Persian Gulf: The IRGC Navy has launched a large-scale exercise in the Persian Gulf, during which it claims it issued "firm warnings" to nearby U.S. vessels. No details were provided regarding any potential response from the U.S. side. Commanders framed the drill as both a message of "reassurance" to neighbors and a "warning" to adversaries. Commander of the IRGC Navy, Alireza Tangsiri, said, "In this exercise, subsurface, surface and above-surface monitoring capabilities are being tested," and stressed that the IRGC Navy "maintains constant intelligence oversight in the Persian Gulf."

Tehran Deepens Defense Ties With Beijing: Tehran and Beijing today signed a new memorandum of understanding on defense and security education, paving the way for the future exchange of instructors and students, as well as joint academic events. While in Beijing, the head of Tehran's Supreme National Defense University, Esmail Ahmadi-Moghaddam, said of the agreement, "For the Chinese, Iran, at the heart of the Middle East, holds an important position, and for us, China, as an ally and partner in all fields, occupies a prominent place. Here, I believe scientific and educational diplomacy can serve as the driving force in the defence-security sphere." The agreement follows this week's joint SCO military exercise, Sahand-2025, hosted by the Islamic Republic.

Judiciary Moves to Enforce Khamenei's Hijab Directive

The head of the Islamic Republic Judiciary, Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, today said the current approach to mandatory hijab enforcement "will not continue," outlining coordinated steps with police, prosecutors, regulators, and intelligence bodies to confront what authorities describe as "organized" violations.

He warned that police are now required to intervene in visible cases, intelligence agencies have been ordered to identify networks promoting "improper hijab" practices, and restaurants, cafes, and public event organizers will face longer closures for breaches.

The push comes amid pressure from the Majles (parliament), with 155 lawmakers accusing the courts of passivity and urging consistent enforcement.

Yesterday, the Supreme Leader used a meeting with hundreds of women in Tehran to reject claims that mandatory hijab rules restrict women's progress. He framed criticism of compulsory hijab rules and gender-based restrictions as a part of a broader Western ideological campaign, cautioning domestic media not to "parrot" such views.

Earlier this week, a leaked audio file suggested Khamenei had issued written instructions for stronger implementation of the mandatory hijab following an Intelligence Ministry warning about declining enforcement.

Tehran Condemns GCC Statement on Persian Gulf Islands

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmaeil Baghaei has condemned a GCC summit statement for repeating what it called "baseless and invalid" claims to the Arash offshore gas field and the Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb islands of the Persian Gulf.

Meanwhile, Ali Akbar Velayati, senior advisor to the Supreme Leader, accused the GCC of favoring "tension-seeking" maneuvers rather than constructive engagement and condemned the UAE's "expansionist" behavior in Yemen and Sudan.

The Supreme Leader's representative to the Defense Council, Ali Shamkhani, also posted on X, "Iran showed restraint in the 12-Day War, despite some regional support for the aggression. Iran's authority in the Persian Gulf should not be misinterpreted. The role of neighbors is to create security, not to play with the red lines of the Iranian nation."

The statements come as the IRGC today conducted naval exercises near the islands. Separately, a joint SCO military exercise, dubbed the Sahand-2025 counter-terrorism drill, was concluded in Iran's East Azerbaijan Province today.

A senior IRGC commander said the exercise served as a warning to "hostile states," and highlighted growing tactical alignment among SCO participants. The commander also said the drill aimed to strengthen participants' collective capabilities through lessons learned from Axis of Resistance conflicts.

On the Radar

- Regime authorities in Mazandaran Province have detained eight alleged operators of the "anti-revolutionary" Shekar-e Mozdoor Telegram channel after what officials described as ten months of covert monitoring. Judiciary head of the Mazandaran Province, Abbas Pouriyani, accused the group of collecting information on local officials and subsequently blackmailing those officials for financial gain. The suspects were arrested across five cities and charged with "undermining national security" and "propaganda against the system." Pouriyani urged anyone who cooperated with the channel to immediately turn themselves in to receive potential "Islamic leniency" from the courts.
- Regime intelligence officers in southern Tehran Province reportedly seized 680kg (1,500lbs) of crystal meth, concealed in a rice shipment, in an operation officials described as one of the province's "most significant" recent drug busts. Authorities said two suspects were arrested.
- Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi today invited his Lebanese counterpart, Youssef Raji, to talks in Tehran following Raji's public criticism of Islamic Republic support for Hezbollah. Araghchi asserted that Tehran fully supports Lebanon's sovereignty and rejected the need for a third-party mediator between the two countries. He also signaled willingness to visit Beirut "should he receive an official invitation."

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