

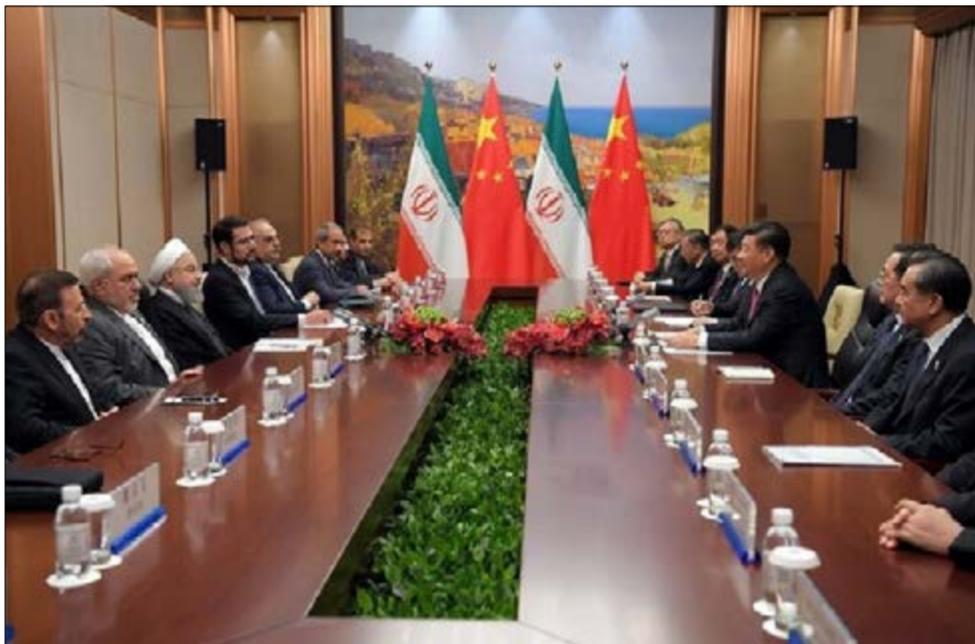


Iran: Conflicting Assessment of China Talks

OE Watch Commentary: Iran's new "strategic partnership" agreement with China made international headlines last July but, in the months since, negotiations have been mired in the details. The negotiations began during the administration of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) but, as implied in the excerpt of this article from *Donya-e Eghtesad*, perhaps Iran's top financial newspaper, may outlast his successor Hassan Rouhani, whose second term will end in 2021.

That *Donya-e Eghtesad* highlights the divergence between Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and his deputy for economic affairs reaffirms the pattern in which Iran's financial papers dryly skewer the Iranian government's official positions without comment by juxtaposing inconsistencies.

While the excerpt suggests a lack of consensus on drafts that must be worked through before anything can be finalized, the article also suggests that the threat of U.S. sanctions has also slowed China's willingness to deal with Iran. This in turn suggests that while Tehran highlights its partnership with China as a means to counter the United States, the view from Beijing is more nuanced and appears to prioritize economic opportunity above strategic factors. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



Iran President Hassan Rouhani and Chinese President Xi Jinping sign cooperation agreements in Beijing, 11 June 2018.

Source: Islamic Republic News Agency, <https://img9.irna.ir/d/r/2/2020/07/16/3/157216967.jpg>

“The only thing that can be done now is to wait.”

Source: “Mozakirat-e Iran-Chin Motavaqaf Nashodeh Ast (Iran-China Talks Have Not Stopped),” *Donya-e Eghtesad*, 5 November 2020. rb.gy/gx4jpg

Iran-China Talks Have Not Stopped

The 25-year comprehensive strategic cooperation plan between Iran and China is one of the most important developments in the Middle East region which, while deepening relations between the two countries, can also have a great impact on the quantity and quality of economic cooperation between the two countries and trade relations in the Middle East. The news of this strategic plan has caused growing concern among some American politicians who have long been trying to prevent the expansion of Iran's relations with China by so-called maximum pressure and harsh sanctions against the Iranian nation....

The developments come as [Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad] Zarif recently said Iran is ‘very close’ to a comprehensive agreement with China, but his deputy says it will take a long time. On the sidelines of the cabinet meeting, Zarif told Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting that the Chinese side had submitted a document based on Tehran's proposed draft and that Iran was ready to begin negotiations to finalize it. The Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Affairs, however, said that official travel between Iran and China had stopped and that we should “wait.”

The Islamic Students' News Agency reported on 24 July, citing the Islamic Republic's Deputy Foreign Minister for economic affairs that it would take “several drafts” for such a document to be finalized. Gholamreza Ansari said that the only thing that can be done now is to “wait,” and he said, “We have to wait for the negotiations to start, the content of the negotiations to be clear and the agreements to be clarified, then we can say how these documents should be published.” The Deputy Foreign Minister says that the beginning of the discussion on the long-term agreement with China dates back to the visit of the president of the country to Tehran in 2015.

Today, after five years, we are here to prepare the documents and negotiate,” he added. According to official reports, Iran's draft proposal for a document on long-term cooperation between Iran and China was approved by the cabinet in the early days of June and referred to the Foreign Ministry for follow-up and negotiation. According to some speculations, China's delay in finalizing the strategic cooperation document with Iran may not be unrelated to the severe U.S. sanctions against the Islamic Republic....