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US-IRAN: Between Confrontation and Reconciliation

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Abstract. The US policy towards Iran is a part and parcel of its broader policy towards the Middle East and the Arabian (Persian) Gulf in particular. Most of the American targets, whether in the Middle East or Asia, are related to Iran, due to its possession of the military and geostrategic location that qualifies it to be an influential regional power in the future. Iran represents one of the challenges facing the United States, prompted the latter to deal with it according to constants and determinants, regardless the various US administration, which aimed at containing Iran and eliminating the threat that it could impose on its interests in the region.

The paper aims to identify the position that Iran occupies in the strategy of the United States of America and to clarify the determinants of American foreign policy, which highlight the points of convergence and divergence in the US-Iranian relations. A special attention is given to the nuclear file and sanctions that are considered as the factors affecting the domestic political and economic situation, as well as Iran's foreign policy. The authors adhere to the theories of the balance of power and regional security complexes, the principle that the foreign policy of a state is dictated by the logic of the international system and the distribution of force among states. The structural and systemic approach, as well as the historical methodology are used in order to formulate idea about the past and present of Iranian-American relations.

Keywords: US, Iran, Arabian Gulf, balance of power, foreign policy, sanctions, nuclear program, challenges

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США — ИРАН: между конфронтацией и примирением

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Аннотация. Политика США в отношении Ирана является неотъемлемой частью их более широкой политики в отношении Ближнего Востока и, в частности, Арабского (Персидского) залива. Большинство американских целей, будь то на Ближнем Востоке или в Азии, связаны с Ираном, поскольку он обладает военным и геостратегическим положением, позволяющим ему быть влиятельной региональной державой в будущем. Иран представляет собой один из вызовов, стоящих перед Соединенными Штатами, которые решают этот вызов в соответствии с постоянными и определяющими факторами, независимо от различных администраций США, стремящихся сдержать Иран и устранить угрозу, которую он может нанести американским интересам в регионе.

Цель статьи — определить место, которое занимает Иран в стратегии Соединенных Штатов Америки, и прояснить детерминанты американской внешней политики, которые выделяют точки сближения и расхождения в американо-иранских отношениях. Особое внимание уделяется ядерному досье и санкциям, которые рассматриваются как факторы, влияющие на внутривнутриполитическую и экономическую ситуацию, а также на внешнюю политику Ирана. Авторы придерживаются теорий баланса сил и региональных комплексов безопасности, принципа, согласно которому внешняя политика государства диктуется логикой международной системы и распределением сил между государствами. Для формулирования представлений о прошлом и настоящем ирано-американских отношений используются структурный и системный подходы, а также историческая методология.

Ключевые слова: США, Иран, Персидский залив, баланс сил, внешняя политика, санкции, ядерная программа, вызовы

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Historical Context

The US involvement in Iran dating back to the second half of the 19th century with introduction of the American missionaries in the Middle East, is considered as a turning point in the US interest in the region [1]. The first American diplomatic mission in Tehran was established in June 1883, after signing an act of diplomatic engagement and recognition and Treaty of commerce between the US and the Kingdom of Persia in 1850 (U.S-Iran Relationship) entered into force by 1857. The deeper American involvement in the Iranian affairs coincided with the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911 which led to the declaration of Iran as a constitutional monarchy, when most of Iranian nationalists found it possible to use the American factor to maintain Iran's independence and regional balance of power committing to the "positive equilibrium" [2].

The "equilibrium strategy" of Iran, which can also be represented as a pendulum — with the alternating change of the pro-England and pro-Russian orientation and vice versa. It was introduced in Iranian foreign policy as early as 1848 by the Iranian Prime Minister Mirza Taqi Khan, known as Amir Kabir. In 1951 the government of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq (was overthrown with the external support provided by the Central Intelligence Agency in 1953) used a "negative equilibrium" strategy and after his fall Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi applied strategies of "positive nationalism" and "independent national policy" [3].

In order to reduce Great Britain's hegemony over Iran, which was the majority share holder in Anglo-Persia Oil Company (APOC) in acquiring an oil concession in the Southern Iran and signing the Anglo-Persian Agreement in 1919, Iran expressed its desire of granting a concession to a US company in the Northern Persia outside APOC area [The

New York Times, 2012/04/07]. A suggestion that was rejected by Washington due to the substantial amount of oil reserve. While, between 1923 and 1928, an advisory mission led by Arthur C. Millspaugh took place as an economic support for the inefficient Iranian administration.

The World War II was a turning point in the American-Iranian relationship. The meeting of the "Big Three" in Tehran in 1943 was preceded by the creation of the "Persian Corridor" by the allies in the anti-Hitler coalition, the most important Lend-Lease land route, which still remains a little-known page in the history of World War II, although this episode played a significant role in the victory over Nazi Germany. On December 1943, a strategy meeting of the Big Three, Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill held in Tehran in order to open the second front in the Western Europe against Germany and Japan and to discuss the post-World War II era [4]. The Tehran conference was considered as a significant development in the bilateral relationship between US and Iran, in which a "Declaration of the Three Powers regarding Iran" had been issued to "recognize the assistance which Iran has given in the prosecution of the war against the common enemy, particularly by facilitating the transportation of supplies from overseas to the Soviet Union". And most importantly they agreed about "their desire for the maintenance of the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iran" [5].

The stepping-up of US attention towards the Middle East did not start until the aftermath of the Second World War in order to contain the Soviet influence in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean and protect US vital interests. President Truman announced in March 1947 his famous «doctrine» that was introduced into the so-called «Pentagon Talk» held on November 1947

between Britain and the USA [6] in which they agreed to provide protection for Iran's oil and focused on sovereignty of Iran as well as Turkey and Greece for the security of the US. The statement said "The security of the whole Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East would be jeopardized if the Soviet Union succeed in its efforts to obtain control of any one of the following countries: Italy, Greece, Turkey or Iran" [7].

During the Cold War era, and in order to maintain a friendly and independent state, Iran became a goal of US foreign policy given the extremely importance to its security. The US took a decision to continue military aids to Iran and to place it on a grant basis while the Foreign Assistance Coordinating Committee (FACC) placed Iran in the second of three priority groups. The FACC, between 1949 and 1952, increased the amount of aids for Iran to \$16.5 million for the Army and the Air Force [8].

The political situation in Iran witnessed a significant instability from 1949 due to the raise of Iran's oil industry nationalization (1951) [9]. In 1953 the elected Prime Minister Mosaddeq was overthrown by a coup d'état supported by the CIA in an operation named «Ajax» which put the end to Iran's twelve-years of democracy and reinstall the power of the Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi to serve US strategic interests and prevent any domestic dissent due to his special relationship with the US government [10].

The Iranian nationalist aspirations growth was partly responsible for facilitating the US intervention in Iran's affairs and the rise of its supremacy in the Arabian Gulf under the Iranian proxy leadership, a sovereignty that was enhanced with the peaceful transition of power in the Middle East from Britain to the US by 1971.

The two decades of the Shah can be called the period of "complete engagement"

of his policies with the US interests specially under the Nixon Doctrine. The United States would more rely on the Shah, who was disappointed in his ambition for Iranian primacy in the region, to maintain stability in the Gulf area. The Nixon Doctrine was marked as a significant turning point in the US containment policies, a strategy that he inherited from Britain during their withdrawal from the Gulf. The "Balance of Power" policy in the Gulf, which finds its origins in London, consists in preventing the two largest powers, Iran and Saudi Arabia, from dominating their weaker Arab neighbors, as well as deterring any other great power from invading the Gulf [11]. Contrary to popular perceptions of Nixon's Gulf policy of balancing Iran and Saudi Arabia as the "twin pillars" of the Gulf, between 1969 and 1972 Nixon gradually abandoned balancing in favor of Iran to embrace its regional primacy [12]. Gasiorowski described the close US-Iranian bilateral relation during that period as an international cliency relationship [13], a relationship that has been enhanced since signing the Treaty of Amity, Economic Relations and Consular Rights in 1955 [14] in 23 clauses stipulated a set of items, that provided establishment of the continuous relationship of friendship and peace; exemption of citizens and companies from fees and taxes; freedom of trade and rent for both parties to the treaty.

The "Cooperation Concerning Civil Uses of Atoms" agreement of 1957, as a part of President Eisenhower's "Atoms for Peace" initiative gave Iranians the opportunity to receive nuclear education and technology from the United States, and therefore the foundation for the Iran's Nuclear Program and the establishment of Tehran Nuclear Research Center (TNRC) at the university of Tehran by 1959 [15]. Under the Shah, Iran launched a series of ambitious nuclear projects that relied on assistance from the United States and Eu-

rope, and in 1958 Iran signed the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which was adopted by the United Nations in 1968 and entered into force in 1970. And in 1974, the Shah of Iran has established the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran and announced the establishment of 23 nuclear power plants in the future (till 2000). But the Iranian revolution in 1979 led to the severing of Iranian-American relations and the project was suspended. During the Iran-Iraq war from 1980 to 1988, Iraqi forces damaged the Iranian nuclear reactor under construction in Busher. Under the Shah, neither America nor Washington's allies in Europe were worried by Shah Pahlavi's public statement that "Iran will have nuclear weapons, no doubt, faster than some think" [16].

In 1970s Iran was considered similar to a Western country and was enunciated by Jimmy Carter as "an island of stability in one of the more troubled region in the world". Iran's foreign policy continued closely aligned to its national progress. Under the Shah's leadership Iran emerged as a power in this area. In this sense, President Nixon's visit to Iran in 1972 is indicative. During this visit he spoke out in favor of selling weapons to Iran, as well as strengthening trade relations and promoting foreign investment and technological exchanges on the basis of friendly bilateral relations. Because of his long-standing friendship with the Shah, Richard Nixon brought new ideas to the White House about the Pahlavi monarch and his ambitions for Iran, which stood in stark contrast with the views of both the Johnson administration and the British one. This change in American thinking provided fertile ground for the Shah's relentless efforts to secure Washington's backing for Iranian regional primacy under the Nixon Doctrine [17].

As a result of this visit Iran was included as a key element in the US geopolitical

"security triangle" in the Indian Ocean. So, the course of the Shah's regime on domination in the Indian Ocean was also curtailed through the formation at the first stage of the South Africa-Iran-Australia trilateral alliance¹ in order to ensure the safety of navigation in the region. It can be assumed that the agreements in principle were reached during the celebration of the 2500th anniversary of the Persian Empire, which took place on October 12-16, 1971.

In general, Iran's foreign policy in the Shah era was based on ensuring its national security through: first, playing on the policy of balancing power, as it allied with the United States and Israel, and secondly through building its own capabilities on the military and economic side. It also adopted a regional policy based on positive engagement to increase its influence and protect its national interests.

Clash of Interests

The Islamic revolution transformed Iran from a pillar of the US policy and one of its sincere allies into a staunch enemy and one of the leading threats to the regional status quo and the international system. Ayatollah Khomeini was a symbol of 'resistance and hope' to the common Iranians against Shah's repression and suppression. It took more than two decades for Ayatollah Khomeini, who was arrested in 1963 and banished to

¹ Speaking about the importance of cooperation between South Africa and Iran, on the one hand, and South Africa and Australia, on the other, from the point of view of the American military strategy in the Indian Ocean, it is enough to mention the fact that South Africa was considered as the guarantor of the approaches to the island of Diego Garcia with a large US military base. At the same time, the Shah's Iran, together with the leading countries of the region, should have ensured the development, security and defense of the countries of the Indian Ocean basin as a nuclear-free zone and within the framework of the planned common market of the coastal states of Asia, Africa and Oceania [for more details see: [18]. (in Persian)].

Paris, to garner enough support to bring a popular revolution in 1978-1979 turning Iran from a pro-West monarchy to a vehemently anti-West Islamic theocracy [1]. Imam R.M. Khomeini held the post of the first Supreme leader (Rahbar) of IRI in 1979-1989.

The relationship between the two sides became further strained with the "Hostage crisis" (1979-1981), which was resolved by signing the Algiers Agreement (1981) [New York Times. 1981/01/20]. During this period, the United States adopted basic objectives in their dealings with Iran, including: preventing Iran from obtaining modern weapons and preventing its military build-up, and this resulted in mistrust between the two countries. Many restrictions and problems were created to obstruct Iran's military and strategic policy, whose echoes can be monitored in the propaganda war launched by the US media, which claimed that Iran is developing its offensive military force in order to impose control over the Arabian Gulf. The diplomatic relations between Iran and the United States were severed after the success of the Iranian Islamic revolution for more than two decades, as the Islamic revolution negatively affected the American-Iranian relationship.

After the proclamation of the Islamic Republic in Iran (1979), the US policy towards Iran was built on the basis of four key principles: 1) preventing the dominance of Russia and Iran in the region; 2) preventing the expansion of the influence of Shiite Islam and Islamic fundamentalism in the region; 3) nuclear disarmament and obstruction of the export of nuclear technologies and equipment to Iran; 4) support and development of the economic and political actions of the US allies (Israel and Turkey) and their opposition to Iran, China and Russia (The Washington Post. 2002/01/29/). In the 1990s the US approach to Iran was determined in the

context of the most important problems for America — the security regime in the Persian Gulf zone, the Kurdish issue, the future of Iraq, relations with Turkey, the situation in Afghanistan and Central Asia, and the settlement of the status of the Caspian Sea. Within the framework of the traditional "balance of power" paradigm, Iran was seen as a direct threat to the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, which received the support of Washington.

After the end of the bipolarity of the socialist and capitalist orientation in the Middle East in the early 1990s and the pole of geopolitical attraction associated with the USSR, the United States needed to find a new basis for its positioning as the dominant world leader in the region. Washington made an attempt to rally the countries of the Middle East on an anti-Iranian basis, trying to form a pan-Arab front against the Islamic Republic of Iran as part of a policy of "systemic containment". Thus, the confrontation with Iran was included in the Middle East agenda and the US policy of "systemic deterrence", designed to ensure American patronage over all countries of the Middle East, became one of the main external drivers of changes in the region in the late XX — early XXI centuries. However, the idea of forming a united anti-Iranian front with the participation of Arab countries remained unrealized, which prompted Washington to make adjustments to its policy and strike at the "military leader" of the Arab countries — Iraq in 2003.

At the turn of the 1990s three leading components of the US policy on "systemic deterrence" of Iran received legal and institutional formalization: military-political, economic and ideological. At the same time, depending on the specific situation in the Middle East and in Iran itself, the US had the opportunity to change the hierarchical significance of each of them in the policy towards Iran. However, in every historical pe-

riod, “systemic deterrence” has included the aforementioned triad” [19].

Washington attached importance to a set of economic measures on the Islamic Republic. The first step in this direction was the executive order 12170 of US President D. Carter (November 14, 1979) the reason for which was the seizure of the US embassy in Tehran. The next important component of the “systemic deterrence” of Iran was an ideological confrontation with the Islamic Republic both within the country, as well as at the regional level. In the Middle East, Washington has made stake on partnership with the Sunni states, a special place among occupied the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) — the bearer of the Sunni fundamentalism (Wahhabism) ideology. Later allied relations with Islamic fundamentalists from the Gulf monarchies were supplemented by the strategy of “democratization of the Greater Middle East” [20].

In the absence of militarily strong regional allies from among the Arab countries, Washington had to rely on its own forces to ensure its interests, which were reduced to control over areas of extraction of energy resources and routes of their transportation. At that time, the military-political component of the “systemic containment” of Iran, which included the maintenance of the American military presence near the Iranian borders also aimed to form a capable military block from among the regional allies of the United States. The Gulf monarchies (KSA, The United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman), were united in 1981 in the Cooperation Council of Arab states.

Under the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997) Tehran moved to a more pragmatic foreign policy and mitigated the ideological dimension in Iranian foreign policy. In turn, when Muhammad Khatami came to pow-

er in 1997, he adopted the reformist trend and hinted at the desire for American Iranian rapprochement. The US administration in the Clinton era actually tried to normalize relations, despite the restrictions imposed by the Clinton administration on the major American oil companies from investing in the Iranian oil, crude and natural gas sector. In absence of American companies, the opportunity was available for the British, French and Italian oil companies to develop major deals with Iran, which explains Europe’s refusal to support the United States in its policies against Iran.

In the aftermath of the Kuwait crisis (1990-91), the US adopted the “dual containment” policy against Iran and Iraq, which did not yield the desired results. The Iranian opposition to the US involvement in the Middle East and its continuous support to Israel had won popular support for Iran in the region. Iran had found two regional proxies, Hezbollah and Hamas, to undermine the US and Israeli role in the regional security dynamics. Iranian opposition to the ‘Peace Process’ and continued US political and military support to Israel against the Palestinians further hardened the Iranian position vis-à-vis the US. The use by Iran of a negative terminology towards the US as the “Great Satan” and by Washington such as a “Rogue State” and ultimately “Axis of Evil” added fuel to the fire in the US-Iran bilateral relations.

The tensions in the relationship between Iran and the United States during the second period of Rafsanjani’s presidency began to diminish with the coming of Khatami (1997-2005) who was more enthusiastic than his predecessor about improving relations with the US and the West in general.

At the beginning of the XXI century the rapid rise in oil prices and Iran’s skillful use of the difficulties experienced by Washington in Iraq and Afghanistan gave Iran an unprec-

edented opportunity to confront the United States, that added confidence to the incumbent Rahbar IRI Ali Khamenei and other hardliners. It is worth taking into account the personality factor of A. Khamenei, who, like his mentor R. Khomeini, saw in the United States the embodied “global arrogance” [21; 22]. However, Iran’s admission to the club of nuclear powers while Tehran remained faithful to the precepts of Imam Khomeini seemed suicidal to Washington and its allies.

In fact, at the end of the 1990s, a change in Iran’s foreign policy paradigm took place — in 1999 President M. Khatami proclaimed a course towards a dialogue among civilizations and cultures. The cultural component temporarily became the determining factor of the new state course. Thus, Ali Shariati’s idea “returning to the bases”, popular during the anti-Shah struggle period, turned into a declaration of the Iranian-Islamic identity, while the utopian concept of the world Islamic revolution was transformed into a more real doctrine of the Iranian-Shiite domination. However, the positively started process of the dialogue of civilizations was seriously deformed under the international pressure on Iran. Strategically, Iran declared its mission which was defined as “creating conditions for the establishment of a worldwide just power through the new rise of Islamic civilization” [23].

After the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the United States tightened their policy towards Iran, as a result a new round of “radicalization” of Iran’s policy in the international arena began. In addition, the US military-political presence has changed the situation in the region and become a new breeding ground for conflict of interests, giving it a global dimension. The post-9/11 period became another significant turning point in the bilateral relation which led President Bush to abandon dual contain-

ment and follow a more ambitious strategy of regional transformation. Paradoxically, at a moment when the US military power was unrivaled the interventionist policies of the United States put in motion the regional transformation that disadvantaged the United States vis-à-vis Iran. Washington put the Islamic Republic of Iran in the list of “rogue states”. In this struggle, “Iran, defending the system of the Islamic Republic, ultimately solved the problem of preserving its own civilizational identity” [11].

The IRI, USA and Sanctions

It is unlikely that R. Khomeini assumed that practically from the very beginning of its existence, the Islamic Republic, created in 1979, would experience the pressure of various sanctions, which would leave the imprint on all further development of the country and its foreign policy. For the first time, Tehran faced the need to circumvent restrictions on the supply of equipment and technologies imposed against it at the international and state level during the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988. Under the arms embargo by the United States, Great Britain and other Western countries, Iran, whose army was equipped with weapons and military equipment of Western production, faced a shortage of spare parts for armored vehicles and aviation, as well as a shortage of ammunition. Showing extraordinary flexibility, the country’s leadership entered into secret negotiations with the United States and Israel, as a result of which an agreement was reached on the supply of anti-tank missiles and spare parts for American-made combat aircraft and helicopters to Iran. Subsequently, this deal that occurred during the second term of the Reagan Administration became known as Irangate (Iran-Contra affair, 20 August 1985 — 4 March 1987). In 1979 — 2023 it is possible to distinguish the following

stages of the US sanctions policy towards Iran [19].

At the **first (initial) stage** (1979-1993), everything was subordinated to the solution of the main task — the maximum international isolation of Iran. To this end, American diplomacy used the thesis about the threat of Islamic fundamentalism (the problem of exporting the Islamic revolution), allegedly emanating from Iran.

The **second stage** covers the period of the second presidency of A.A. Hashemi-Rafsanjani (1993-1997), when the new anti-Iranian policy of President B. Clinton got legislative substantiation in 1996 after the adoption of the D'Amato Law. The key point of the US policy in the second half of the 1990s was to prevent Iran from participating in the development of oil and gas resources of neighboring countries and in the construction of oil pipelines in the Central Asian republics.

The third stage, which is characterized by a certain softening of the sanctions regime, falls on the presidency of M. Khatami (1997-2005) and includes the period of the first presidency of M. Ahmadinejad (2005-2009), when the sanctions regime is gradually tightened again after the introduction of the first sanctions package against Iran through the UN Security Council in 2006.

The beginning of the **fourth stage** (2009-2015) is associated with the time of the second presidency of M. Ahmadinejad (2009-2013) and the final agreement, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), adopted 18 October 2015. As a result, the UN sanctions were lifted on 16 January 2016. The system of tough sanctions against Iran turned out to be insufficiently effective. And that required the adoption by Barack Obama in 2010 of a new law No. 2194, which supplemented and expanded the content of the D'Amato Law. The Obama administration noticeably increased the political

component of its pressure, trying to find the weak points of the Islamic Republic regime. It was no longer so much a "policy of results" characteristic of the Bush team as a "policy of modeling", which built the framework of the process for developing an optimal solution necessary to achieve a result.

Obama abandoned the "fist" diplomacy of his predecessor — President George W. Bush. A sore point for Iran was the threat of being isolated in relation with such countries as Russia and China. While in a long confrontation with the United States, Tehran nevertheless found opportunities for dialogue with Washington. Washington's desire to fundamentally change the US presence in the Middle East so that Iran becomes the basis of a new regional security architecture (Barack Obama's "outstretched" policy) determined the strategic direction of American foreign policy towards the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Iranians themselves retain a sense of humor in any situation. As soon as Barack Obama became President of the United States, a pun was spread among them, in which the sound of the name of the American President was played up. "Obama" (or in Persian — "U ba ma") means in translation "He is with us".

The **fifth stage** started on May 2018, when the US President D. Trump evoked the US signature under the JCPOA and the sanctions against Iran were reinstated by the United States. The resumption of US sanctions led to the collapse of the Iranian economy (Fig. 1)

After Democrat Joe Biden won the presidential election in the United States and was sworn in, Washington started to pursue a return to negotiating the JCPOA. The new administration aims to overcome the legacy of Donald Trump, who unilaterally broke the deal even though it was sealed by the UN Security Council Resolution 2231

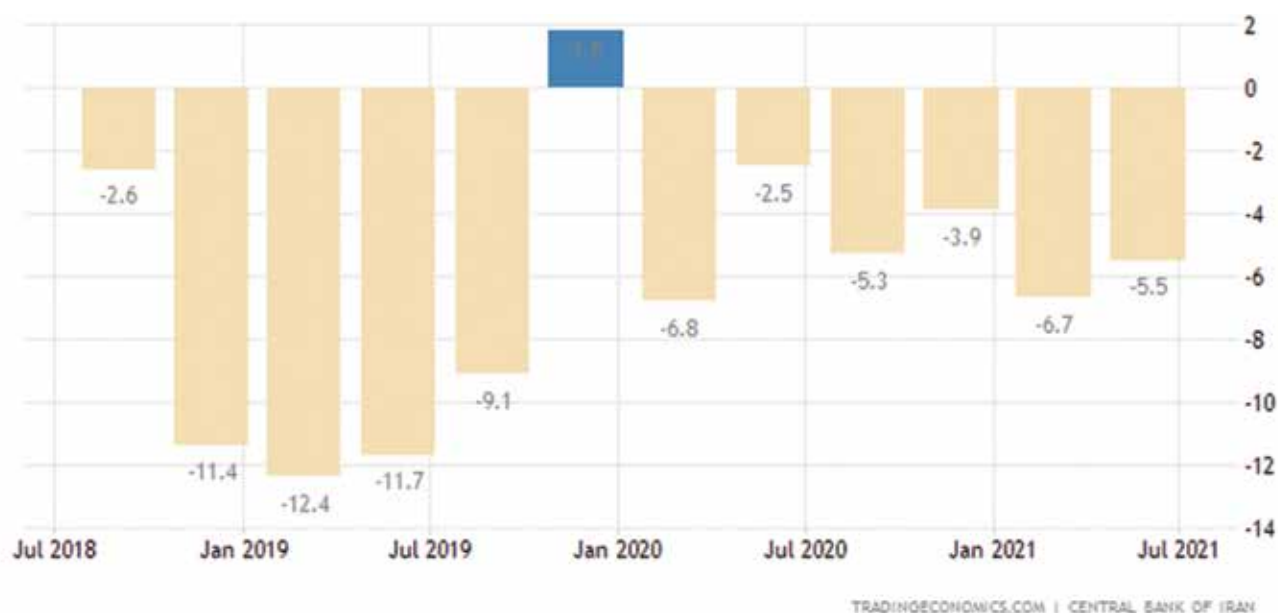


Fig. 1. Iran GDP Annual Growth Rate [24]
Рис. 1 Ежегодный прирост ВВП Ирана [24]

of 2015. In 2018, Trump renewed the unilateral US sanctions against Iran, and went on to tighten the restrictive measures even further. Eventually Iran also began to refuse the deal, resuming uranium enrichment to 20% in accordance with the law "On the strategic measures for the lifting of sanctions" [25].

In many respects a consequence of the imposition of sanctions against Iran, the problem of getting out of isolation throughout these years remained one of the central issues in Iran's foreign policy, which led, in particular, to the phenomenon of its expansionism. Both under the last Shah and under the Islamic leaders, the focus on enhancing their role in the region and in the world remained. One cannot but agree with the opinion that "containment has failed in each of its objectives: it has not isolated the Islamic Republic, and it has failed to convert the regime to the cause of regional peace or to convince it to forgo the nuclear option." [26].

The Iranian Supreme Leader (Rahbar), Ali Khamenei, described the sanctions as a

"full-scale economic war" aimed at the Iranian people. According to A. Khamenei, the reason for this war lies in the desire of the Iranian people for independence. "The sanctions against us existed even before the nuclear issue was raised, and they will continue to exist ... In response to this pressure, immunity must be achieved: the internal foundation must be strengthened. We need to make the economy strong so that the enemy becomes disenchanted with trying to influence through this area" [27].

Analyzing the position of A. Khamenei towards the United States, K. Sadjadpur showed how the views of the Rahbar of the Islamic Republic of Iran influenced the formation of Iran's foreign and domestic policy. Firstly, since Khamenei believed that the goal of American policy was still to change the regime, not to change its behavior, he firmly insisted that no compromises with Washington, despite its pressure and intimidation, were possible. Any concessions would be interpreted as a sign of weakness, and this will

lead to even more pressure from the United States. Secondly, Khamenei's conviction of Washington's hostile attitude towards Iran automatically put the task of countering the United States among the top priorities of Iranian foreign policy: Iran must confront the "arrogant powers" and not beg them for anything — so the Iranian leadership's approach to the nuclear problem had become even more tough [21; 22].

The key points in maintaining or lifting the sanction regime against Iran are determined by the following reasons. Firstly, the sanction policy towards Iran is an expression of the consensus of the American elites on this issue. The strategy for escalating sanctions was adopted by the United States and Western countries as an important instrument of pressure on Tehran. Secondly, a one-time lifting of anti-Iranian sanctions is de facto impossible, since the decision to apply these sanctions in the United States was approved at the legislative level and can only be canceled after passing the appropriate lifting procedures. Let us note in this regard that the current regime of economic sanctions imposed by the US administrations against Iran is based on a broad legislative base, including a number of acts (D'Amato Law, 1996, "Law on Comprehensive Sanctions against Iran, prosecution and divestment" (CISADA), 2010 and others). Since the officially proclaimed main reasons for the restrictions on Iran — support for terrorist organizations and violation of the principles of the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) by Tehran — remained relevant, the sanctions were extended annually. Thus, through the introduction of a tough sanctions regime, the USA seeks to isolate the Iranian economy from the world market as much as possible, to block Iran's access to external technologies, especially in the nuclear sphere.

Iran's Nuclear Dilemma

Under the Shah, Iran launched a series of ambitious nuclear projects that relied on assistance from the United States and Europe. In 1957, Iran signed a cooperation agreement with the United States of America, and in 1958 Iran signed the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which was adopted by the United Nations in 1968 and entered into force in 1970. In 1974, the Shah of Iran established the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran and announced the establishment of 23 nuclear power plants in the future. But the Iranian revolution in 1979 led to the severing of Iranian-American relations and the project was suspended. During the Iran-Iraq war 1980-1988, Iraqi forces damaged the Iranian nuclear reactor. The Iranian government closed the nuclear reactor for several years. In 1987 Iran concluded an agreement with Argentina to convert a reactor from highly enriched uranium fuel into low-enriched uranium and export it to Iran in 1993. In 1992 Iran invited International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors to visit the nuclear facilities in Iran and the agency confirmed its activities as consistent with peaceful use. Iran partially resumed work in the Bushehr nuclear reactor in 1995 after signing a contract with Russia, and with Iran's attempts to resume work in the nuclear reactor. At the same time the United States of America were pressuring countries to stop these attempts.

Through some illegal deals that were concluded, Iran was able to achieve progress in its nuclear program. In 2003 the IAEA issued a report confirming Iran's violation of the agreement to suspend enrichment activities, and by 2004 Iran had to stop its uranium enrichment program as a result of pressure from Britain, Germany and France. In 2005 Iran returned to uranium enrichment and reneged on its promise to allow the IAEA to

carry out inspections. As a result, Iran's issue was referred to the UN Security Council.

In the post-revolutionary era terrorism has become a crucial issue in Iran-US relations. The US consider Iran as a state supporting terrorism. In 2006, the UN Security Council demanded that Iran had to stop its uranium enrichment activities. The sanctions were imposed after hard efforts by the UN Security Council, and it finally succeeded in December 2006 when China and Russia agreed to a package of limited sanctions. During 2007 to 2011 the sanctions imposed by the Security Council on Iran were expanded and allowed to inspect and confiscate shipments. By 2013 Iran headed to negotiations to lift the sanctions on it, including five countries: America, France, Britain, Russia, China and Germany (5 + 1). After the Geneva Accord succeeded in achieving its objectives, Iran and the 5+1 reached a new agreement stipulated that Iran would reduce work on the nuclear program in exchange for canceling the sanctions imposed on it. Iran allowed the International Energy Agency to carry out inspections at nuclear sites and to conduct its research for a period of 10 years. The agreement obtained the approval of most countries of the world.

One of the bets of the nuclear deal of 2015 was to test the motivation of Iran's strategic doctrine of forward defense. A host of issues have led to speculation about rearranging the geopolitical chessboard, with Tehran replacing Riyadh as Washington's main ally in the region. However, instead of replacing one ally with another, US President Barack Obama forged a new approach to the Middle East. The United States no longer seek to isolate Iran but would instead try to get Iran to act responsibly to promote a "new balance" between Iran and Saudi Arabia characterized by competition and perhaps suspicion, but not by actual or proxy war [28].

This agreement was in force until the arrival of US President Donald Trump to power in 2016 and his decision to withdraw from the nuclear deal and adopt a "maximum pressure campaign" against Iran which aimed to:

- achieve the maximum degradation of the Islamic Republic by depriving it of much-needed funds and resources to pursue its nuclear, military and regional strategy in the short-term;
- change the strategic behavior of the Islamic Republic through a comprehensive treaty that will address the ballistic missiles, nuclear program and regional policy to guarantee its endurance under different US administrations in the future, in the mid-term;
- change the Iranian regime through weakening the Islamic Republic's security apparatus and giving material support for opposition voices and protestors inside Iran [29].

Donald Trump announced the complete withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, or the so-called "Iran deal", in May 2018, and imposed new sanctions on Iran. He took this step after Iran announced that it had exceeded the limit agreed in the agreement on uranium enrichment. As the agreement stipulates a specific amount for uranium enrichment, in exchange for lifting the sanctions imposed on Iran and allowing it to export oil. But the US President's announcement to withdraw from the deal and impose new sanctions, affected the Iranian economy significantly, as the local currency exchange rate declined and foreign investors turned away from completing projects in Iran, and the impact on the scarcity of some imported products (CNN, 2020/09/13).

On the Iranian side, the nuclear agreement comes within the general framework of its strategy of achieving a leading position in the region, wide influence, and in-

ternational recognition of its stature and influence. According to the realistic principle pursued by the Iranian leadership, gaining sufficient power is a rational act that serves its interests. As for gaining more than enough power, it may expose it to punish the international system, so that power is a source of destruction, not a source of security and protection. This is exactly what Iran did. It gained from the force what preserves its security and guarantees its position in the international and regional system [10].

The Biden administration is facing challenges in delivering on one of its campaign promises which consisted in return to the 2015 nuclear deal due to some domestic politics which represents a significant obstacle. The administration aims to overcome the legacy of Donald Trump, who unilaterally broke the deal even though it was sealed by UN Security Council Resolution 2231 of 2015. The agreement remains highly contentious among members of the Congress. Many Republicans but also key Senate Democrats, who could hold up confirming senior administration officials, are opposed to lifting Trump-era sanctions on Iran [25].

Biden promised to adopt smarter ways towards dealing with Tehran, to commit to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, to restore respect for diplomacy and to amend the nuclear agreement with the participation of allies, provided that the negotiation includes many issues such as the missile file and issues related to human rights. In addition to stop Iran's destabilizing activities and threatening the allies of the United States, with a pledge to defend his country's interests in the event of an escalation of Iran [30].

Conclusion

As it has been discussed throughout this article, the US has long attempted to contain and isolate Iran. Since 1979 the US pol-

icy towards Iran have alternatively ranged from some version of "maximum pressure" to appeasement and back again. Despite the logic of different strategies and doctrines pursued by the consecutive US administrations toward Iran since 1979 they have not worked despite the significant economic results. Amid what the administrations hailed among the dual containment, the historical nuclear deal and Trump's maximum pressure campaign, Iran summoned its own maximum resistance strategy. It was just the White House policies that set in motion the conditions that altered Iran's internal power dynamics. Iran's deterrence strategy has practically failed. It was not possible to isolate Tehran in the international arena, which is a particularly important factor given Iran's role in building a new multipolar world.

The rapidly developing Iran aims to return the status of a key player in its "large space" from Central Asia to South Arabia, and President of the IRI Ebrahim Raisi will continue this movement. However, the implementation of these ambitious aspirations was complicated by the ongoing international isolation of Iran and external instability on its borders. Currently, the United States are ready to significantly lift sanctions on Iran in order to put pressure on Russia when energy supplies from the Russian Federation to Western countries are being blocked because of the Ukrainian crisis.

At the global geopolitics level, Tehran is looking for a "security umbrella" in confrontation with Washington and its allies. In the Gulf region, Iran strives to form a new system of mutual agreements in the field of regional security. A significant factor is Iran's desire to oppose the GCC, which is mainly Arab and Sunni oriented, using the Shanghai Cooperation Organization with its Asian and Caspian vectors.

The tendency of geopolitical transit towards a new regional balance of power has clearly emerged in the Greater Middle East. The USA, Western European countries, Russia, China, as well as regional players — Saudi Arabia and other members of the “Arabian Six”, Israel, Iran, and Turkey are striving to exert a decisive influence on the formation of this balance.

Conflict of Interests / Конфликт интересов

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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