

Department of **Political Science**

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**Aid in Foreign Policy.
The 2015 Joint Comprehensive Action Plan. (JCPOA)
A comparative analysis of US, Russian and EU approaches.**

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INTRODUCTION:

This work aims at analyzing and comparing the approaches of three principal global powers Russia, the United States, and Europe regarding the Joint Comprehensive Action Plan of 2015. In particular, it examines the negotiations' process which led to the signing of the agreement, the interests that each actor had in reaching the deal and their strategies, and finally the position taken by these three states after the United States' withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018.

The reasons why I chose to deal with this topic are in first position, my strong interest and curiosity for international politics and in particular for the dynamics existing between the countries that I decided to analyze; secondly, the importance, relevance, and influence of nuclear energy in the international political scenario. Therefore, given the vastness of the subject, I decided to analyze more specifically the case study of Iran and the positions of the various actors.

This study was conducted through the use of academic books, scientific articles, official IAEA documents, United Nations resolutions, official European documents, official declarations, published and issued in the local and foreign political arena. Furthermore, this research is articulated into four chapters, each of them based on the analysis and comparison of three parameters regarding each actor, namely: the relationship between Iran and the actor, the existing interests between Iran and the power, and each Country's position after the withdrawal of the United States from the plan.

The first chapter introduces the JCPOA, explaining the historical context and events that led to the signing of the pact.

This part of the study recounts the origins and background of Iran's nuclear program. Having thus provided a general framework of Iran's nuclear past, the various stages of the negotiation process between the different actors, which occurred between 2003 and 2015, are then analyzed in detail. Summing up, this chapter highlights the incentives that Iran and the three major powers taken into consideration had in concluding the 2015 Iranian nuclear plan.

The second chapter focuses on one of the three powers analyzed: Russia.

The chapter summarizes the relationship between Russia and Iran until the JCPOA was reached, analyzes in detail the existing interests between Iran and Russia, and finally highlights the position and strategy followed by Russia after the United States withdrew from the deal in 2018. In more detail, it aims to explain how the Iranian Nuclear deal has placed Tehran in a stronger strategic position and is capable of changing the balance in the Persian Gulf area and the Middle and Near East. In this context, the relations between Iran and Russia from the economic, commercial, and financial points of view, wound in different channels of collaboration.

Therefore, this part of the research focuses on four main interests underlying the bilateral relationship between Iran and Russia which are: economy, security, energy, and geopolitical. In terms of economic interests, after the achievement of the JCPOA and then after the gradual reduction of sanctions, many economic opportunities opened up for Russia that strengthened relations between the two countries. In particular, the area of greatest interest for both was military technology: Russia wanted to consolidate supremacy in arms sales to Iran, while Iran wished to reduce the military technology gap with rivals in the region.

As for the energy sector, Russia feared that Iran's return as an oil and gas supplier to the energy market, would threaten its position. In conclusion, the principal Russian worry on the issue of Iran's international rise was the concern of oil.

On the geopolitical level, Russia and Iran shared the same goals, in particular they both supported the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria and were opposed to Saudi initiatives in the region. The unique point where they disagreed was Israel: Iran remained a rival of Israel while Russia tried to maintain a more nuanced approach.

From a security perspective, the JCPOA would benefit from this aspect as well. Russia remained far more vulnerable to a possible Iranian nuclear attack than any other actor among the P5+1 member states. So a nuclear deal provided Russia with a safeguard against an Iranian nuclear attack, something it would not have been able to achieve on its own.

To sum up, Russia retains that Iran could be a favorable partner for Russia in the region since, from a geopolitical point of view, Iran's interests aligned more with Russia's ones rather than with those of the Western powers, and also because they have common viewpoints towards political, regional and global issues.

Lastly, regarding the position of Russia after the exit of the United States from the JCPOA, the research shows how it faced a difficult position: on the one hand, Russia wanted to continue to maintain relations with Iran so that it could replace western companies, while, on the other hand, it was concerned that new sanctions imposed could negatively affect the Iranian economy

and generate destabilization, also leading Russian companies to withdraw from the market. For these reasons Russia decided to continue to implement the JCPOA and to support Iran, remaining faithful to the deal.

It is possible to affirm that Russian companies wanted to adopt the "wait and see" strategy: wait for the action of European leaders and the reimposition of sanctions by the United States, and then decide how to act.

The third chapter focuses on the United States. This part provides an overview of the relationship between Iran and the United States since 1953. It then points out Obama's first two terms and the rise of Trump, explaining how these two different administrations have affected the JCPOA.

During his first term, Obama sought to adopt an opposite strategy to that of his predecessor Bush: following a diplomatic approach which did not involve military intervention. Obama has consistently pushed a plan of action known as "dual-track" that combines diplomacy with sanctions rather than pursue a hardline approach.

During his second term, Obama maintained a soft line on Iran, being opposed to international isolation and containment of Iran. To sum up, at the time of his election, Barack Obama wanted to operate a disengagement from the Middle East, in favor of a more incisive role in the Far East. Moreover, he preferred a multilateral approach and wanted to prevent a conflict with Iran at all costs. For this reason, his two mandates were characterized by a long negotiation process with the Islamic Republic, to find a deal that would prevent it from developing and using an atomic bomb.

With the rise of Trump, the scenario completely changed. Indeed, unlike Obama, Trump has always adopted harsh rhetoric towards Iran and always claimed to be against the JCPOA and in favor of the signing of a new pact. However, he continued to adopt the sharper language and state that he would implement an increasingly tough approach to Iran. The American president often reiterated that if no changes to the JCPOA were made or if no new solution was proposed, the United States would withdraw from the plan: in 2018 therefore the President officially declared the withdrawal of the United States. He reasoned his choice by claiming that, after a month of negotiations with European allies, it was clear that the JCPOA could not prevent Iran from coming into possession of atomic weapons.

The last chapter focuses on the European Union.

In particular, this part describes the existing relationship between the two powers, the interests between the EU and Iran, and finally to analyze the European position after the United States' exit from the deal in 2018.

First of all, it is possible to observe how, unlike the United States, the European Union has always had good relations with Iran trying to include it economically and strategically at the international level. In addition, it is crucial to note how the European Union has been for years one of the considerable Iranian partners with Iran that exported a large share of its oil and petroleum products to European markets in return for machinery, transport equipment, and chemicals.

As for the interests of the European Union in Iran, the chapter describes three of them : security, energy, and economy.

From the point of view of security, the JCPOA guaranteed Europe greater tranquility about the possible development of a military nuclear program. From the energy point of view, Vice President Mogherini affirmed that Iran would be a fundamental partner for Europe for energy security. From the economic point of view instead, it is possible to claim that the ties between Iran and the EU focus on infrastructure, financial, and airplane sectors.

The crucial point covered in this chapter is the European strategy after Trump's exit: keep the agreement alive, and maintain the areas of cooperation already existing between Iran and the European Union to continue to implement the JCPOA.

Among the instruments conceived by the European Union to adequately address the critical situation caused by the increase in sanctions, there are the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) through the foundation of the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX). However, Iran has shown its discontent with these instruments accusing Europe of not being very brave in maintaining its economic sovereignty.

In conclusion, it is possible to note that the only solution to bring the negotiating partners closer together would be to return to the full application of the JCPOA as originally conceived.

However, there seem to be many obstacles, including the condition imposed by Iran to negotiate with the United States only through the mediation of the other participants, which would result in an inevitable slowdown of the negotiations.

Through this dissertation it was possible to examine the different strategies implemented by Russia, the United States, and the European Union, considering the interests that each of them had in Iran.

In the conclusions, the possible scenarios concerning the future of the JCPOA will be exposed.

CHAPTER I: THE JCPOA

1.1 Background and origins of the Iranian nuclear program

1.1.1 The Iranian nuclear past

To better understand how Iran and the group of international powers known as the E3/EU+3 or the P5+1 reached the “Iran Deal” that is the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on 14 July 2015, it is necessary to analyze the events that preceded it.

This deal is the effect of several negotiations which ended a process started in 2003 by France, Germany, and the United Kingdom and subsequently joined by the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and finally extended in 2006 to China, Russia, and the United States.

The negotiation process can be defined as long and complex, and before describing the periods of negotiation, it is crucial to start from the origins of the Iranian nuclear program.

During the Cold War, the US considered Iran as its fundamentally in the Middle East to counterattack the Soviet Union. From 1957 those two powers announced their cooperation concerning the “cooperation in research in the peaceful uses of atomic energy”¹ through an agreement. After the establishment of the TRR or Teheran Research Reactor in 1959, the US decided to supply with the highly enriched uranium (HEU) in 1967.

In the following years, Iran signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons based on three principles disarmament, nonproliferation, and the peaceful use of nuclear power, and signed its safeguards Agreements with the IAEA. Precisely during the 1970s, a period characterized by a dramatic oil crisis and by harsh conflicts in the Middle East, the shah of Iran chooses to develop nuclear energy. To do so, he looked at the Western Countries to build different reactors. When in 1974 India erupted its first nuclear device, the American intelligence began to be suspicious concerning the possibility that Iran could have developed its nuclear weapons since it generated all scientific and industrial bases.² Nonetheless, the

¹ Esfandiary D., Finaud M., “ The Iran Nuclear Deal: Distrust and verify. An analysis of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and its potential implications for global and regional security”. P. 11 [2016]

² Central Intelligence Agency, “Prospects for Further Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons”, Special National Intelligence Estimate, SNIE 4-1-74, 23 August 1974, <<http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB240/snie.pdf>>.

United States president Gerald Ford gave to Iran the occasion to take control of the whole nuclear fuel cycle, through the acquisition of a reprocessing facility to create plutonium.³

Under Jimmy Carter's presidency several restrictions were made on the agreement concluded in 1978, but then Iran's Islamic Revolution of February 1979 led to the elimination of the deal.⁴

The revolution established the formation of the Islamic Republic, and this event led the West to stop any kind of collaboration and supply for nuclear power. Additionally, the United States pressed both the IAEA and China not to sustain Iran in producing the uranium hexafluoride, that was needed for the uranium enrichment.⁵ Subsequently, after the Iranian bombing of Bushehr during the Iran-Iraq war that lasted eight years, the United States started to impose national sanctions on Iran, which is considered among terroristic states.⁶ While the United States enhanced the number of restrictions with the 1992 Iraq-Iran Arms Proliferation Act and the 1996 Iran-Libya Sanctions Act⁷, Iran was looking to a Pakistani nuclear scientist to obtain the technology needed to build centrifuges to enrich uranium.

To worsen the situation, in August 2002 an exiled Iranian opposition group reported that Iran had secretly built two pieces of nuclear equipment: one in Natanz and the other in Arak. In response to this event, the IAEA's director-general, Mohamed ElBaradei, in 2003 announced to the Board of Governors: "Iran had failed to meet its obligations under its Safeguards Agreement"⁸. Iran replied by affirming that its program was made only for peaceful aims, but given the mistrust of the Iranian statements, in September 2003 the Board of governors requested Iran to "to suspend all further uranium enrichment-related activities and ... any reprocessing activities".⁹

The Governors explicitly asked Iran to take the necessary steps both to solve all the issues regarding nuclear power and to implement the IAEA Additional Protocol which provides for

³ D. Linzer, "Past Arguments Don't Square with Current Iran Policy", Washington Post, 27 March 2005.

⁴ Ibid., 1. P. 12

⁵ M. Hibbs, "U.S. in 1983 Stopped IAEA from Helping Iran Make UF₆", Nuclear Fuel, Vol.28(16), 4 August 2003.

⁶ Ibid.,1 P. 13

⁷ Z. Laub, "International Sanctions in Iran", CFR Backgrounder, Council of Foreign Relations, 15 July 2015.

⁸ All citations from IAEA documents related to Iran can be retrieved at <<https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/iran/iaea-and-iran-iaea-reports>>. [06-06-2003]

⁹ Ibidem

the possibility of inspections in case of unclear activities. From this moment on, a series of negotiations attempt was made before the formation of the JCPOA, and thus it is possible to divide the negotiation into different periods: from 2003 to 2006, from 2006 to 2008, from 2008 to 2013, and lastly from 2013 to 2015.

1.1.2 Negotiations' process: from 2003 to 2015

Starting from 2003, the foreign ministers of the so-called E3 (France, Germany, UK), asked the Iranian counterpart, Kamal Kharraazi, to suspend the enrichment and so to follow the requirements given by the IAEA, in exchange for technical cooperation.¹⁰

In the Teheran Statement that took place on 21 October 2003, a meeting between Iran's foreign minister and the E3 ministers, Iran implemented the IAEA Additional Protocol, and Teheran would have suspended the Natanz and Arak projects in exchange for technical cooperation with a peaceful Iranian nuclear program. Despite the agreement, there still was uncertainty concerning the lasting of the enrichment suspension, indeed for the E3, the suspension would be permanent, while for Iran would only be temporary to ease the negotiation for long-term cooperation.¹¹ Mohamed ElBaradei, IAEA general director affirmed: “ To date, there is no evidence that the previously undeclared nuclear material and activities ... were related to a nuclear weapons program. However, given Iran's past pattern of concealment, it will take some time before the Agency can conclude that Iran's nuclear program is exclusively for peaceful purposes.”¹²

At the same time, after the sign of the agreement by Iran in 2004, the IAEA started its inspections of Iranian nuclear powers and thus discovered several Iranian activities that were not declared even though they should have been, and for this reason, the IAEA Board of Governors issued a resolution affirming that “[Iran's] commitments have not been comprehensively implemented”.

Given the situation, and the pressure raised after the events mentioned, the EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, requested other negotiations with Iran, that were definitively concluded in the Paris Agreement of 2004. According to this, Iran,

¹⁰ P. Taylor and L. Charbonneau, “EU Big Three Offered Iran Carrot for Nuclear Deal”, Reuters, 19 September 2003.

¹¹ M. Fitzpatrick, *The Iranian Nuclear Crisis: Avoiding Worst-case Outcomes*, Oxford, Routledge, 2013, pp.23 ff.

¹² All citations from IAEA documents related to Iran can be retrieved at <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/iran/iaea-and-iran-iaea-reports>. [06-06-2003]

as reported by Finaud in “The Iran nuclear deal” accepted to “ o suspend “all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities” and that this “suspension will be sustained while negotiations proceed on a mutually acceptable agreement on long-term arrangements”.

According to the E3, indeed, this suspension has not to be considered as a legal obligation, but rather as a measure needed to increase confidence. Iran interpreted this agreement as a recognition of its right to enrich uranium, whereas the E3 imagined that a long-term accord would give enough guarantees that Iran’s nuclear facility is built for peaceful aims.

In 2005, Iran made different proposals beyond the scope of its nuclear project, among which there was the collaboration to fight terrorism and conflicts like those in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Arms Control Association in “History of Official Proposal on the Iran Deal” reported : “the nuclear “objective guarantees” included an Iranian commitment not to pursue WMD, continuous on-site inspections at key facilities, a limit to the expansion of Iran’s enrichment program and a policy declaration of no reprocessing. In exchange, Iran requested, among other things, that the EU remove restrictions on transfers of conventional arms and dual-use goods to Iran, recognize the latter as a major source of energy for Europe, and guarantee its access to advanced nuclear technology.”¹³ According to this, in August 2005 the E3/EU presented a request for long-term cooperation whereby Iran was asked not to withdraw from the NPT, and to give back spent nuclear fuel to countries that provided it, and the EU assured supplies of LEU for light-water reactors.¹⁴

This proposal was strictly rejected by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran’s president that succeeded Mohammad Khatami. The president reasoned its decision by sustaining that this deal did not respect Iran’s “inalienable right” to enrich uranium. As a consequence, Iran started to produce again the uranium hexafluoride (UF₆) and this automatically led the EU to cease the negotiations and on 24 September 2005 the IAEA Board of Governors proclaimed that Iran did not comply with the Safeguards Agreement. This opened the door to the country’s referral to the UNSC.¹⁵

¹³Arms Control Association, “History of Official Proposals on the Iran Nuclear Issue”, Fact Sheets & Briefs, January 2014, <http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Iran_Nuclear_Proposals>.

¹⁴ Esfandiary D., Finaud M., “ The Iran Nuclear Deal: Distrust and verify. An analysis of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and its potential implications for global and regional security”. [2016] p. 15

¹⁵ Esfandiary D., Finaud M., “ The Iran Nuclear Deal: Distrust and verify. An analysis of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and its potential implications for global and regional security”. P. 16 [2016]

From that moment to 2008 a new phase of negotiations started since the UN Security Council was involved. Moreover, on 4 February 2006 the Board of Governors of the IAEA demanded the general director to inform the UNSC of all the reports and resolutions regarding the implementation of safeguards in Iran.¹⁶ The UNSC affirmed that it was necessary that Iran would have suspended all enrichment-related and reprocessing facilities, rethought the building of the Arak reactor, and ratified the Additional Protocol and, lastly cooperated with the Agency. By this point, Iran responded by interrupting the unilateral implementation of the Protocol and all non-binding verification provisions. Additionally, Russia and China were reluctant to continue sanctioning Iran, and therefore, on 29 March 2006, the UNSC emitted a presidential statement by which it invited Iran to carry out the measures provided by the IAEA, and it also requested another report from the Agency within one month.¹⁷

This intermediate step taken by the UNSC did not bring any desired result, indeed Iran began to enrich uranium at Natanz, and subsequently, the deputy head of Iran's Atomic Energy Agency affirmed that Iran intended to expand the nuclear program to 54,000 centrifuges. Obviously, in the aftermath, George W. Bush ordered the UNSC to immediately act.

In the meantime, the E3/EU enlarged the team, including the US, Russia, and China becoming the so-known P5+1. Finaud Marc affirmed in "The Iran nuclear deal": "The new structure adopted a "package" of proposals: Iran would confirm its suspension of all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities; in return, light-water reactors would be provided to Iran through joint projects, along with nuclear fuel guarantees and a stock of fuel; the UNSC would suspend its discussion of Iran's nuclear program; and there would be cooperation on civil aviation, telecommunications, high technology, agriculture, etc."¹⁸ This proposal needed to be endorsed by the UNSC, that did it with the Resolution 1696 of 28 July 2006. The Council followed Russia's and China's preference not to impose strict sanctions on Iran, but it took decisions under article 40 of Chapter VII of the UN Charter, according to which they are binding.

According to this resolution, Iran should have suspended by 31 August 2006 the enrichment, and if it did not then the UNSC would have adopted sanctions; as expected Iran rejected to implement the resolution but at the same time, Iran appreciated two positive aspects of the

¹⁶ Esfandiary D., Finaud M., "The Iran Nuclear Deal: Distrust and verify. An analysis of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and its potential implications for global and regional security". P. 17 [2016]

¹⁷All references to or citations from UNSC resolutions related to the Iranian nuclear programme can be retrieved at <<http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/iran/>>.

¹⁸ Ibid.,18

request: Iran's inalienable rights to generate its nuclear program with peaceful aims without being discriminated, and the willingness for negotiations to make "comprehensive cooperation" with Iran.¹⁹

The UNSC was tied to its ultimatum, and hence when Iran refused to suspend its enrichment-related activities, the Council was obligated to impose new sanctions on Iran. Through Resolution 1737 (2006) of 23 December 2006, the UNSC banned the transmission of technology that would be used by Iran to develop nuclear facilities. Additionally, all states were requested to freeze the Iranian organizations and individuals' assets connected with Iran's nuclear projects. The implementation of the resolution was monitored by the "Sanctions Committee", which also needed to scrutinize the demands for transfer to Iran and request reports on national implementation. On 24th March 2007, another resolution (Resolution 1747) was taken, and according to this, it was prohibited to export arms from Iran and to freeze the assets, and restrict travels. At the same time, the IAEA keeps inspecting and verifying Iran's nuclear program.²⁰

Iran also re-proposed to expand the discussion with the P5+1 to non-nuclear issues, through the "Package for Constructive Negotiations" which included collaboration on several problems as terrorism, drugs, illegal immigration, and so on. The P5+1 decided to reformulate the proposal to give more incentives to Iran, also considering the possibility of dialogue on other issues as regional security, trade, economy, etc. The document sent to from the EU High Representative to their Iranian counterpart on 12 June 2008, signed the beginning of a new approach by the P5+1.²¹

Since 2008, a new phase of negotiations began, and it was based on reciprocity. The plan was based on an "exchange of shares" meaning that Iran needed to suspend its enrichment activities and the P5+1 needed to avoid imposing sanctions against Iran. Iran agreed to this different approach of negotiations, and so on July 2008, a meeting took place in Geneva. In this meeting, Iran drafted a "non-paper" which contained the common elements of the previous "packages"

¹⁹ Institute for Science and International Security, "Islamic Republic of Iran's Response to the Package Presented on June 6, 2006", <<http://www.isis-online.org/publications/iran/iranresponse.pdf>>.

²⁰ Esfandiary D., Finaud M., "The Iran Nuclear Deal: Distrust and verify. An analysis of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and its potential implications for global and regional security". P. 11 [2016]

²¹ Ibidem

Despite the meeting, that can be considered as one the highest-level meeting between US and Iran for the implementation of UNSC resolution, Iran did not change its policy and the UNSC reacted by calling on Iran to wholly comply with its commitments.

A major change occurred with the United States presidential election of Barack Obama. This shift in the US presidency led to the removal of the suspension of uranium enrichment activities to let Iran participate in dialogue, therefore in 2009, the P5+1 invited Iran to the talks to reach a diplomatic solution. As already happened, Iran tried again to expand the cooperation with the P5+1 to other fields within a broader framework that would have considered Iran as a partner of the great powers in proposing both world and regional issues.

Iran again declared that it needed LEU as fuel for TRR, and also made it known its intention to build a new fuel enrichment plant. This announcement was concerned by the French and British leaders like Iran's continuation of unwillingness to meet its obligations under the UNSC resolutions and IAEA requirements, but the P5+1 decided to keep negotiating with Iran.²²

In the following years Iran started to collaborate with Brazil and Turkey in the "swap deal" and in 2010 adopted the Tehran Declaration or Joint Declaration based on the same principles of the "fuel swap" proposal of the Vienna group (US, France, Russia, and IAEA). According to this plan, " Iran would ship 1,200 kg of its 3.5 percent LEU (or 80 percent of its stockpile) to Russia for enrichment to 20 percent and France would convert this into 120 kg of fuel rods for the TRR." However, the "fuel swap" fell apart, and subsequently, given this disagreement the UNSC imposed other sanctions. Following the UN sanctions, also the US and the UN imposed sanctions unilaterally, but notwithstanding the dialogue remained open.

In fact, Sergei Lavrov, Russia's foreign minister, made another proposal: he suggested a "step by step" approach agreed by the US, and generally by the P5+1, and finally endorsed by the G-8. With the 2012's declaration, the principles of a step by step approach and reciprocity were reaffirmed, but most importantly the aim underlined in the declaration was to find a shared solution to the nuclear issue according to which Iran would have implemented all the UNSC resolution and all sanctions should have been dismissed once international confidence in the peaceful purpose of Iran's nuclear project was restored. This was a crucial moment, indeed from then the negotiations accelerated.

In this context, a relevant event was the election of Hassan Rouhani as Iranian President in 2013. Along with the election of Obama, the initiative proposed by Lavrov marked a turning point. On 26 September 2013, the Iranian foreign minister Javed Zarif met the United States

²² Ibid. p.21

Secretary of State, John Kerry, and presented a new idea that was considered by Kerry as “very different in tone and in vision”. Thereafter, in October 2013, the P5+1 defined the new Iranian plan as an important contribution. The proposal was taken as a basis for comprehensive cooperation and as was temporary confidence-building measure for the subsequent months. The negotiators met in Geneva in November 2013 and adopted the JPOA (Joint Plan of Action), which was the latest step before the final comprehensive agreement.²³

The agreements which went from 2013 to 2015 signed the final negotiations before the establishment of the JCPOA. The JPOA needed to prepare the way to a “mutually agreed long-term comprehensive solution establishing that Iran’s nuclear program would only be peaceful”. Marc Finaud, in “The Iranian Nuclear Deal”, reported that “ half the existing 20 percent enriched Iranian uranium was to be retained and the remaining UF₆ would be diluted to no more than 5 percent, no enrichment of uranium over 5 percent would be carried out for six months, no further improvements would be made to the Natanz and Fordow plants or the Arak reactor, there would be no reprocessing or construction of a reprocessing facility, and there would be enhanced monitoring of facilities. In return the P5+1 would, among other things, pause efforts to reduce Iran’s crude oil sales; enable the repatriation of some oil revenue; suspend sanctions on insurance, transportation, petrochemical exports, gold and precious metals, and the auto industry; allow the supply of spare parts for the safety of civil aviation; refrain from new nuclear-related sanctions; facilitate humanitarian trade; etc.”²⁴

Those elements were agreed upon in the negotiation and were necessary to reach the final comprehensive solution, in fact when this solution would have been implemented, then the Iranian nuclear project would have been considered likewise that of any non-nuclear power state party to the NPT. Nevertheless, this agreement was not approved by everyone, indeed Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister reacted negatively, and also the Saudis behind the scenes expressed their discontent with the potential agreement, even though publicly seemed to support it.

Iran met all the deadlines and implemented all the requirements outlined in the JPOA, and the IAEA recognized its report in 2014. On the other powers’ hand, the US and the EU respected

²³ Esfandiary D., Finaud M., “ The Iran Nuclear Deal: Distrust and verify. An analysis of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and its potential implications for global and regional security”. P. 20 [2016]

²⁴ Ibidem

their promises by the lifting of sanctions covered in the JPOA, and by the releasing of oil payments held up by the application of oil sanctions.²⁵

To what concerns Iran's nuclear past, the IAEA already in November 2013, concluded with Iran a "Framework for Cooperation Agreement", to give the Agency all the necessary information unresolved regarding the nuclear facilities.

The final talks were resumed in December 2014 with the presence of foreign ministers and Federica Mogherini, the EU High Representative. In 2015 the negotiators declared in Lausanne that a "broad" agreement had been concluded, including the fundamental characteristic of the proposed JCPOA. As underlined in "The Iran Nuclear Deal", The Lausanne Accord provided that: "Iran's enrichment capacity, enrichment level, and stockpile would be limited for specified periods; there would be no enrichment facility other than Natanz; Fordow would be converted into a nuclear physics and technology center; Iran would rebuild a modernized heavy-water research reactor at Arak with international assistance; there would be no reprocessing and the spent fuel would be exported; the IAEA would have enhanced access to Iranian facilities; the EU and US would terminate all nuclear-related economic and financial sanctions upon IAEA certification of Iran's implementation of the agreement, and a new UNSC resolution would endorse the JCPOA and terminate all previous nuclear-related resolutions."²⁶ Finally, on 14 July the negotiators claimed that they had reached the JCPOA. The official document comprehended a principle text and five technical annexes on nuclear-related commitments, sanctions-related commitments, civil nuclear collaboration, the Joint Commission, and an implementation project.

This joint statement by Iran and the P5+1 named the agreement as "historic" because, after many years of long negotiations, it created "the conditions for building trust and opening a new chapter" in their relations, and also it would confirm that Iran's nuclear project would only have peaceful purposes using "balanced deal that respects the interests of all sides".²⁷

1.2 The deal: JCPOA

²⁵ J. Rezaian and A. Gearan, "U.S., Europe Lift Some Iran Sanctions under Nuclear Deal", Washington Post, 20 January 2014.

²⁶ Esfandiary D., Finaud M., "The Iran Nuclear Deal: Distrust and verify. An analysis of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and its potential implications for global and regional security". P. 21 [2016]

²⁷ Ibidem.

1.2.1 The JCPOA's content

Eventually, the arrangement was reached: the JCPOA instituted the most intrusive controlling regime activated by the IAEA ever. The JCPOA provided that Iran would implement the requirements of the IAEA Additional Protocol, according to which the Agency can check on Iran's compliance with the agreement, by accessing any site at which he has reason to have doubts regarding activity involving fissile material.

The IAEA would monitor Iran's facilities, uranium mines, and centrifuge production for 20-25 years. Additionally, to solve disagreements on the implementation of IAEA access, it has been established a dispute-resolution plan.²⁸

One of the most important aspects of the deal regards the sanctions; in fact, most of the economic sanctions which have been imposed on Iran needed to be waived or suspended once the Agency had ensured that Iran had taken the crucial steps to reduce uranium enrichment and to eliminate centrifuges and the Arak reactor core.²⁹

The precedent resolutions of the UNSC that established restrictions on Iran were to be substituted by a new resolution, mainly the 2231 UNSCR, which granted restoration of sanctions by a majority vote of the council without the possibility from any UN permanent members to use the veto right. This new resolution still provided restrictions on conventional arms and missile-related delivery for five and eight years and contained provisions of the JCPOA for checking on the procurement of nuclear-related goods and equipment which needed to conform with the allowed size and function of the project.³⁰

Western powers shared the same wisdom that Iran could not be trusted if they did not anticipate strong penalties for Iran's non-compliance. This did not provide that other powers which signed the agreement always would honor commitments under the deal and so any system was provided to deal with the United States' withdrawal in 2018. Therefore, the JCOPA, differently from the NPT, has not withdrawal clause.

Even though the limitations laid down by the JCPOA on civil nuclear facilities end after a limited period, the obligations not related to nuclear weapons activities and the key verification

²⁸ Mark Fitzpatrick (2017) Assessing the JCPOA, Adelphi Series, 57:466-467, 19-60, DOI: 10.1080/19445571.2017.1555914

²⁹ Mark Fitzpatrick (2017) Assessing the JCPOA, Adelphi Series, 57:466-467, 19-60, DOI: 10.1080/19445571.2017.1555914

³⁰ Ibidem, p.8

measures of the Additional Protocol are not definitive. A great improvement of the Additional Protocol provided by the JCPOA regards the maximum periods for IAEA to control suspicious undeclared sites, indeed, in the worst case 24 days in which the IAEA is unsatisfied with Iran's response to its concern. Iran has 24 hours to respond to an inspection which is requested by the Agency. This limit of time demonstrates a huge improvement to the Additional Protocol, which does not include this limit on delays; 24 days may be considered enough for cheaters to remove evidence, but the US Department of Energy National Laboratories showed that in this time is not possible to produce even limited quantities of uranium. Another important differentiation with the NPT, concerns the limits on civilian nuclear capability, since their imposition for 15 years, would preclude Iran to build nuclear weapons without detection after Termination Day.

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The deal perfectly respected what the Obama administration had set as its most important aim, which is to block all of Iran's plans to build a nuclear program. This purpose was reached by extending the so-called "breakout" time to one year, the time that Iran would have needed to produce HEU (highly enriched uranium) for a weapon, and by presenting an extensive monitoring mechanism that would provide high trust of detecting enrichment at undeclared sites.

Subsequently, the powers that signed the deal agreed to focus only on the nuclear issue, avoiding to enlarge the dialogue to other issues as Iran's sustain for Hizbullah and other non-state actors in MENA regions, an accusation of association with terrorist groups or human-rights abuses; those seemed to be less important to the P5+1 than blocking Iran's potential willingness to nuclear weapons. They believed that adding other issues would endanger the situation that was already complex. Nevertheless, a preface to the JCPOA mentioned the fact that the "full implementation of the JCPOA" by the parties would have positively contributed to regional and international peace and security.

Among the issues excluded more specifically, the Western powers agreed to eliminate from the talks Iran's ballistic missile program. This became a key point of contention for critics of the agreement, given the important role carried out by missiles as means for nuclear weapons. Iran, China, and Russia rejected the USA's proposal regarding the inclusion of missile restrictions.

³¹ Mark Fitzpatrick (2017) Assessing the JCPOA, Adelphi Series, 57:466-467, 19-60, DOI: 10.1080/19445571.2017.1555914, p.9

As already mentioned, after years of negotiations, finally the P5+1 and Iran agreed to the landmark JCPOA which provides restrictions on Iran's nuclear project, and also provides verification and implementation measures, and in exchange for relief of sanctions and peaceful nuclear collaboration. The JCPOA deals with both routes to a nuclear weapon which are enriched uranium and plutonium. It provides well-précised constraints on Iran's nuclear program that last, at least 25 years.

Analyzing in more detail the JCPOA schedule of the steps, it is possible to affirm that the JCPOA is organized in several steps.

The 18 October 2015, is known as the JCPOA Adoption Day, the day on which the deal finally became effective, after 90 days between the adoption of the agreement and the real effectiveness.

The second step took place on 16 January 2016, and it is known as the "Implementation Day", in which all the sanctions have been withdrawn: however, the European Union sanctions would remain present until the "Transition Day." The third step was held in 2020 when the UNSC ban conventional-arms export to Iran expired. Then in 2023, there has been the JCPOA "Transition Day", the moment at which the IAEA draws the "broader conclusion" according to the Additional Protocol, that all nuclear facilities in the country stay only for peaceful purposes.

UNSCR 2231 will be eliminated in October 2025, ten years after the Adoption Day, and only at this point, the UNSC will close Iran's nuclear site.

1.2.2 Two paths to a nuclear weapon: enriched uranium and plutonium

As already affirmed, this deal addresses both the routs to a nuclear program, and the first one is the enriched uranium. To what concerns this first "path" to a nuclear weapon, with the JCPOA agreement, Iran's there will be a reduction of 68 percent of centrifuges, which means that Iran will be allowed to enrich uranium only to less than 5 percent for ten years.³²

However, Iran will maintain a uranium enrichment program, which will be needed only for a peaceful nuclear program. Iran wishes to expand its enrichment activities without any constraints after the end of the JCPOA implementation period but practically is not likely to realize immediately. Concerning the second path to a nuclear weapon that is plutonium, states

³² Esfandiary D., Finaud M., " The Iran Nuclear Deal: Distrust and verify. An analysis of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and its potential implications for global and regional security". P. 22 [2016]

generally can choose to use plutonium-239 as fissile material in the essence of a nuclear weapon. Weapons-grade plutonium is generated in heavy-water reactors, indeed Iran produced its heavy-water reactor at Arak, which has not been finished. The JCPOA closed the plutonium path to nuclear weapons, and Iran under this deal committed not to build other heavy-water reactors, neither to reprocess spent fuel or separate plutonium for 15 years. With the JCPOA deal, Iran started to work with the P5+1 to rebuild the heavy-water reactor.³³

Despite the deal presents all the necessary measures to block Iran's potential path to a nuclear weapon, however, there is still be a possibility for Iran to "sneak out", using non-declared facilities. Properly, for this reason, the JCPOA put in place the most intrusive monitoring and verification system: the deal provides detailed instructions guarding against misinterpretation and permitting the P5+1 to gives sanctions to Iran in the case it does not respect the rules.

The system though by the JCPOA is intrusive and arranges the monitoring of all the aspects of Iran's nuclear project. Under the agreement, Iran needed to ratify and apply the Additional Protocol and adhere to Code 3.1 of its Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA.³⁴ Iran's adherence to the Protocol is permanent, and also the IAEA will have the possibility to access all Iran's nuclear activities for the next 20 years. This means that the Agency can constantly check the country's enrichment capacity, including through real-time control of its enrichment activities and access to its uranium mining. The plan also provides a mechanism to access sites of concern, in case the Agency believes that there is a suspicious facility at an undeclared site. Iran can also challenge the inspection request by the IAEA, leading to a process that could be solved for up to 24 days. This measure has been taken to close a loophole in the Additional Protocol, which does not explain what the international community should do if a country does not give IAEA access to suspicious activity in 24 hours. With this mechanism then Iran cannot "sneak out". A critique that has been presented from opponents of the JCPOA, regards the lack of inspections of all suspicious activities "anytime, anywhere"; but Iran would have never accepted such a rule, making it impossible to reach a compromise. Iran, like any other country for the matter, wished to protect its military activities and defenses, especially given the fact that most of them do not regard nuclear programs at all.

1.2.3 The agreement's incentives: sanctions relief and nuclear cooperation

³³ Esfandiary D., Finaud M., " The Iran Nuclear Deal: Distrust and verify. An analysis of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and its potential implications for global and regional security". P. 24 [2016]

³⁴ Ibid., p.25

Another important aspect of the deal regards the “carrots”; in fact, to incentivize the application of the deal the P5+1 and Iran needed to settle several “benefits”. This would assure that Iran would implement the agreement in the long term. Among those carrots, the most relevant are: sanctions relief and civil nuclear cooperation.

Starting with the first one, it is possible to affirm that the timeline and the aim of sanctions relief represented one of the most critical issues in the negotiations on the Iranian nuclear program. In the beginning, Iran was firm: all reliefs needed to be anticipated. This reason explains mostly why there has been a delay in reaching the deal, indeed only in 2015, the powers have achieved the final deal.³⁵ However, the Iranian negotiators’ team already knew that the sanctions relief would have been done only after the implementation of the terms of the final agreement.

As already mentioned, the mechanism of sanctions’ relief started on the “Implementation Day”, when the Agency controlled Iran’s compliance with the nuclear measure provided in the JCPOA. With resolution 2231 indeed, the UNSC unanimously approved the deal and decided to annul the previous resolution once Iran implemented JCPOA’s nuclear obligations. Consequently, the UN sanctions on Iran were “terminated subject to re-imposition” on Implementation Day.³⁶

The EU sanction, as anticipated, was not fully lifted, indeed it only lifted its unilateral financial and energy sanctions and its 2012 oil embargo. The sanctions that the EU lifted were on shipping, insurance, gold, and precious metals and it also unfroze Iranian assets. Rather, concerning the US sanctions, it is possible to affirm that they had a complicated nature and, it was not possible to remove them immediately, as it happened with the EU and UN sanctions. Only on the “Implementation Day”, the US stopped applying most of the sanctions on Iran’s financial and energy fields and it also let Iran access to oil revenue kept abroad. Even if the US eliminated the implementation of banking sanctions on Iran, other banks with that country will stay frozen out of the US market because of US third-party sanctions.³⁷ The only kind of sanctions that remained was the one related to human rights abuses and terrorism.

³⁵ Esfandiary D., Finaud M., “ The Iran Nuclear Deal: Distrust and verify. An analysis of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and its potential implications for global and regional security”. P. 27 [2016]

³⁶ Except for the arms embargo and restrictions on ballistic missiles. See UN Security Council, Resolution 2231 (2015), S/RES/2231, 20 July 2015, <<http://www.un.org/en/sc/inc/pages/pdf/pow/RES2231E.pdf>>.

³⁷ See US Treasury, “The Comprehensive Iran Sanctions and Divestment Act”, Public Law 111-195, 1 July 2010, <<http://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Documents/hr2194.pdf>>.

The subsequent step in the sanction relief “plan” occurs on “Transition Day”, as anticipated in this dissertation, eight years after the JCPOA agreement by Iran or once the Agency will affirm the peaceful aim of Iran’s nuclear program. After that, the EU will finally eliminate its arms embargo and restrictions on the transferring of ballistic missile technology. In the USA, instead, while the president may delete executive orders, about the elimination of the remaining sanctions on Iran’s nuclear proliferation facilities it is necessary to have legislative action.³⁸ Finally, the UN also will lift restrictions on trade in conventional arms, which will take place five years after the JCPOA.

An innovative character of the deal is the “snap-back” measure agreed by the negotiators. According to this aspect, any party of the JCPOA may launch an investigation in case they suspect Iranian non-compliance, which might lead to a reimposition of sanctions on Iran. With this mechanism, any violation of the deal would be reported to the UNSC and then reported to the Joint Commission for resolution of the dispute; at this point, the commission would emit a non-binding opinion to the UNSC which will finally determine whether or not to snap back the sanction.

A complex issue of the sanctions relief process will be the detangling of the several sanctions regimes and overlapping restrictions for Iran to enjoy the benefits of the removal. First of all, the EU and UN sanctions were eliminated on Implementation Day, while the US only stop to be implemented later. As a consequence, different businesses might fear that the US could suddenly reimplement sanctions on Iran, and this would enhance the risk for them to do business with Iran. Additionally, if Iran does not comply with the agreement, and then the sanctions are re-imposed, there is no clause in the JCPOA Resolution 2231 which outlines that signed contracts need to be respected. The sanction abolition is indispensable to guarantee the endurance of the deal because it encourages Iran to respect the agreement.³⁹

The second aspect that can be considered as a “carrot” to make the deal regards the civil nuclear cooperation.

The deal promotes the civil nuclear cooperation between the powers of the deal and other foreign countries’ providers. This particular character of the deal is important for Iran to gain acceptance in the country. In fact, during the years Iran built a narrative of nationalism and

³⁸ Esfandiary D., Finaud M., “ The Iran Nuclear Deal: Distrust and verify. An analysis of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and its potential implications for global and regional security”. P. 27 [2016]

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 29

prestige related to the nuclear issues.⁴⁰ Obviously this made difficult for Iran to accept a document that stripped it of aspects of its nuclear program, built under pressure and without the reinforcement of cooperation to keep advancing its peaceful civilian nuclear program. With this provision, Iranian officials can “swallow” the JCPOA pill by affirming that the deal allows Iran to legitimately continue its research and development of its nuclear program, with the support of foreign nuclear powers’ technology.

Concerning the civil nuclear cooperation, the crucial aspect is the cooperation of P5+1 states, Iran, and other nuclear powers on the reconstruction of the Arak reactor. The negotiators also agreed to ease Iran’s possession of light-water reactor facilities, including helping to build new reactors and to get training and technology. The P5+1 will help Iran in fuel production and enhance the security of its nuclear activities and materials due to training programs.

The presence of a list of civil nuclear cooperation projects with Iran, presented in the deal, is important for the long-term application and respect of the agreement. Apart from giving legitimacy to Iran’s civil nuclear development which is necessary to have domestic support of the agreement, collaboration provision also entails Iranian scientists and engineers with plans that they can keep working on. Knowing Iran’s civilian nuclear program could be a way to know how Teheran works on its program and also to know what are its priorities. Moreover, cooperation will lead to more transparency on Iran’s nuclear program and standardization of Tehran’s security practices. Also, it would lead Iran to establish a steady relationship which could be useful after the expiration of the JCPOA, letting Iran expand its program faster.

To sum up, if the JCPOA will be implemented as planned, it will oblige and roll back Iran’s nuclear program by stopping both the enriched uranium and plutonium paths to a nuclear weapon. The deal, as explained in detail, provides the most intrusive verification mechanism to date, by giving IAEA unprecedented access to all steps of the fuel cycle in Iran. The JCPOA does not completely block Iran’s enrichment capacity or close all its activities since that type of agreement was not easy to reach. Both actors, the P5+1 on one hand and Iran on the other, have incentives to assure effective implementation of the JCPOA.⁴¹

⁴⁰ W. Bowen et al., *Living on the Edge: Iran and the Practice of Nuclear Hedging* (forthcoming).

⁴¹ Esfandiary D., Finaud M., “ The Iran Nuclear Deal: Distrust and verify. An analysis of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and its potential implications for global and regional security”. P. 29 [2016]

1.3 Potential weaknesses of the deal

The major weakness of the JCPOA is that some of the limitations of Iran's enrichment activities will be removed after 10 to 15 years, mostly regarding its centrifuge capability to carry out research and development of future centrifuges.⁴² The restrictions on the number of centrifuges Iran may operate will be eliminated after 10 years, and limitations on Iran's uranium stockpile will be deleted after 15 years and most importantly constraints on Iran's research and development begin to come off in 10-15 years and beyond. This means that Iran could conduct research or also construct new ones which would be more efficient to allow Iran to shorten the breakout time with fewer centrifuges.

However, some reasons mitigate this problem. If the inspection regime last beyond 15 years, which would be the most favorable scenario for an Iranian pursuit of a nuclear weapon would still be a secret pathway. Several aspects of the JCPOA could be renewed, in particular, if the Iranian's implementation of this deal satisfies the international community, and if Iran is pleased with the pros of the civilian nuclear collaboration it has under the deal. Therefore, Iran has the incentive to renew the agreement or continue to obey and respect the restrictions, otherwise, it might risk being sanctioned.

1.3.1 Domestic impact

It can be affirmed, that once that the nuclear deal between Iran and the P5+1 has been reached, what gains more attention are the implications of the JCPOA for the Middle East region and its security, and the expectations to maintain dialogue with Iran. Obviously, the deal guarantees that a wall to dialogue with Iran has been eliminated especially for Western countries.

Marc Finaud affirmed in "The Iranian nuclear deal": " Generally, the implications of the nuclear agreement are threefold: for Iran's domestic politics, for its regional relations, and its relations with the West – the US and the EU in particular. While in the immediate aftermath of the deal the domestic and international situation seems to have worsened for Iran, it is expected that in the long term the agreement may positively influence Iranian foreign policy."⁴³

⁴² Ilan Goldenberg, Elizabeth Rosenberg, Avner Golov, Nicholas A. Heras, Ellie Maruyama and Axel Hellman. After the Joint Comprehensive plan of action: A Game Plan for the United States. 2015. URL: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep06378>

⁴³ Esfandiary D., Finaud M., " The Iran Nuclear Deal: Distrust and verify. An analysis of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and its potential implications for global and regional security". P. 31 [2016]

Briefly, it is possible to say that in the aftermath of the July 2015 deal the political conflict in Iran worsened. However, there is more scope for moderation due to the empowered president that since his election in 2013, has shown his interest to engage both with the West and with Iran's neighbors. A stronger and more independent Iran will be easier for it to reach its own interests. It also aspires to gain regional stability and to cooperate and strengthen ties with the EU, US, and the region.

Lastly, this deal could lead to greater cooperation between Iran and the United States on several complicated issues. With time, it could also conduct collaboration to reach stability in Afghanistan, stronger US-Iranian cooperation against ISIS, a de-escalation of the conflict in Yemen, and also a new relationship for energy partnership in the Gulf. However, it could also lead to an opposite effect, which is enhancing tensions between Iran and its regional competitors.

In the following chapters, this study will deeply analyze the international implications of the deal especially focusing on the actors taken into consideration by this research.

CHAPTER II: Russia

2.1 Theoretical framework

In this section of the dissertation, there will be analyzed theories on sanctions and nuclear deterrence related to the case of Iran. The aim is to better illustrate the theories which are beyond the interests of the actors in joining the deal, their strategies, and their position toward the JCPOA.

2.1.1 Sanctions

The debate on sanctions is settled once again; indeed, due to Iran's nuclear program preparation, scholars and policymakers are reflecting on the utility of sanctions. According to Megan L. O'Sullivan, despite reliable criticism, sanctions regimes during the 1990s gave many lessons. Moreover, even if it is not possible to attribute major foreign policy victory only to the use of sanctions, at the same time, in some occasion sanctions or the threat of them helped to reach a positive outcome such as in the 1990s, Indonesia in 1999, and Serbia in 2000.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ L. O'Sullivan M., Iran and the Great Sanctions Debate. P. 7

A deeper analysis of the many sanctions regimes, the variety of results, and the different circumstances under which sanctions were adopted seemed to give two lessons for policymakers which seems to still present foreign policy problems.

First of all, sanctions work better when the sanction regime is based on the goals set out for it. According to the author, this seems to be evident, but actually, very few sanctions strategies are realized with a clear goal that has to be reached and with the awareness that the sanctions regime should be built on the desired result. Indeed, if a sanctioned strategy aims at bringing a change in the government's behavior it should create a flexible scheme for working through different issues and to reach incremental progress by partially eliminating sanctions. Contrarily, if the sanctions' regime aims at containing a country it needs to give priority to the multilateral support for sanctions to maximize the economic impact. As an alternative, a sanctions strategy based on promoting a wholesale change in the government will necessitate a different set of sanctions.⁴⁵

Second, the chance that sanctions may work depends on the extent to which they are properly flanked by other tools. Furthermore, to work precisely, diplomacy needs to have other tools as a military force to bring satisfaction without other efforts, or economic engagement to achieve strategic gains without complementary actions.⁴⁶

To have an overall successful strategy it is necessary to have several components as sanctions and other foreign policy tools. Therefore, efficient sanctions are likely to be those accompanied smartly with diplomacy, the threat of force, economic incentives. Those two lessons may seem to be abstract, but actually, there are practical examples of the success and failure of past sanctions that can be associated with the adherence or departure from them.⁴⁷

Before explaining the case of sanctions on Iran, it is possible to mention two different instances: one in which the sanctions' regime succeeded and another in which it failed.

As reported by Meghan L. O'Sullivan, in the case of Vietnam and the United States in the 1990s, the sanction strategy came out to be very well-structured on the goal of getting Hanoi to modify its behavior.

The multi-tiered sanctions permitted the Clinton administration to provide a road map, according to which certain sanctions would be removed as Vietnam addressed specific concerns as cooperation with the Cambodian peace process. The sanction strategy was enough adjustable to allow the US administration to lift sanctions in the case in which Vietnamese

⁴⁵ L. O'Sullivan M., Iran and the Great Sanctions Debate. P.8

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁷ Ibidem p.9

action was correct, suspend lifting when they were not, or threaten to reimpose sanctions in case of relapse. It is necessary to underline how the sanctions regime was accompanied by several other instruments, especially regular and direct dialogue between the US and Vietnam which granted them to smooth out misunderstandings and to carry on their expectation or explanations.⁴⁸ By 1995, the United States and Vietnam reestablished normal diplomatic relations, in 2001 signed a bilateral trade agreement, and finally in 2004 direct air connections resumed.⁴⁹

If the case of Vietnam can be considered as an example of sanctions regime success, the case of Iraq can be considered as an example of the failure of sanctions strategy which aimed at changing Saddam Hussein's behavior. Moreover, the complexity of sanctions, which also entailed UN constraints and United States' penalties, and the different purposes of the many countries imposing sanctions made it extremely difficult to use endorsements as a liber tool to benefit or penalize steps in a long process of rehabilitation.⁵⁰ However, despite the complexity of the sanctions regime, they were well organized for the aim of containing Saddam's government and, finally, did a great job of limiting resources arriving at it and contrasting its external ambitions over the thirteen years in which the sanctions were given.⁵¹ The sanctions were well based on the objective of containment, which gives importance to multilateralism and doesn't require the same adaptability as restrictions that seek at changing behavior. In addition, there were also other foreign policy instruments, as the use of military force to strengthen no-fly zones and the most extensive humanitarian program ever tackled by the UN to mitigate human consequences of sanctions.⁵²

Analyzing the case of Iran, and the sanctions imposed on it, it is possible to observe how there has been a visible lack of strategic direction concerning sanctions in Iran between the 1990s and 2000s. During this period, the United States tried to use sanctions to coerce Iran to limit its willingness of weapons of mass destruction, cease its support for terrorists, terminate its opposition to Israel, and end human rights violations. Given these objectives, the United States

⁴⁸ L. O'Sullivan M., Iran and the Great Sanctions Debate

⁴⁹ For more on the normalization of U.S.—Vietnam relations, see Raymond F. Burghardt, "Old Enemies Become Friends: U.S. and Vietnam," Brookings Northeast Asia Commentary, no. 3, November 2006, http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2006/11_southeastasia_burghardt.aspx.

⁵⁰ L. O'Sullivan M., Iran and the Great Sanctions Debate. P.9

⁵¹ See George Lopez and David Cortright, "Containing Iraq: Sanctions Worked," Foreign Affairs 83, no. 4 (July/August 2004):1—14.

⁵² L. O'Sullivan M., Iran and the Great Sanctions Debate. P.10

imposed a strong rigid sanctions regime that limited all political, economic, and diplomatic relations. According to Meghan O' Sullivan, this type of strategy could not be considered as a framework for gradual rapprochement.⁵³ Also, given the fact that were not well-structured to gain specific goals, sanctions on Iran during this period amounted to the whole United States' policy. Only with the Clinton administration, there has been an effort to start a dialogue, otherwise, no other means accompanied sanctions to reach a larger and greater strategy.⁵⁴ To make things worse, affirmations by several administrations suggested that the United States' policy aim was a change in government in Iran.⁵⁵

Analyzing deeply the sanctions' process build-up by the United States from 2010, it is possible to observe that the new Obama administration tried to follow the pre-existing sanctions' scheme to reach its aim which was changing Iran's behavior. However, the first step made in this direction was refused by Iran, which declined the possibility to have a dialogue. Given the fact that all the hopes of using restrictions to change behavior were dashed, the Obama administration has implemented a sanctions regime much more coherent with the purpose than has been the case in the past years. The first major step was restricting and better defining the objective: by recognizing the "Islamic Republic of Iran", the United States made clear that they were not trying to change Iran's government. From that moment on, the United States' board was clear and coherent that restrictions aimed to force Iran to participate in the crucial negotiations on its nuclear program. This approach was more complicated than a simple "sanction for containment" strategy since a change in the behavior requires the sheer impact of sanction to be turned into political change. Once this goal has been established, the next step was to rally enough multilateral support for the limitations that would generate sufficient pressure on Teheran. This implied a considerable diplomatic effort, as well as executive and congressional duties, as the Obama administration worked with other actors to build international consent for the fourth round of UN sanctions, which were followed by the European Union ones one week later.⁵⁶

⁵³ Ibidem. P.11

⁵⁴ In 1998, after the election of President Mohammad Khatami, the Clinton administration sought to extend an opening for dialogue with Tehran through a speech by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Madeleine Albright, "Remarks at 1998 Asia Society Dinner," Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, New York, June 17, 1998, <http://www.aghayan.com/alb061798.htm>.

⁵⁵ J. Dumbrell, "The Bush Administration, US public diplomacy and Iran" (working paper, School of Government and International Affairs, Durham University, Durham, 2007). <http://dro.dur.ac.uk/4123/1/51832.pdf>.

⁵⁶ L. O'Sullivan M., Iran and the Great Sanctions Debate. P. 11

In building its strategy, the Obama's administration did not make the common mistake of only including sanctions to achieve its goals, indeed the imposition of restrictions of 2010 was accompanied by other political instruments; however, the problem was that they were not enhancing the drive to get Iran at the negotiating table to make real concessions, and they may generate the opposite by increasing insecurity and doubts over the plans of the United States and the international community. In the case of Iran, building a great and clear sanctions strategy is not the only element that needs to be taken into account, moreover the most important challenged concerns the international consensus on sanctions against Iran. The international community has demonstrated a great level of unity in imposing sanctions on Iran, mainly given the efforts of the Obama administration.⁵⁷

According to the author then, it is possible to affirm that even if the sanctions regime is constructed on the goals at hand and limitations are coupled with other policy means, it is not sure that sanctions will work. Related to the specific case analyzed by the author, the sanctions imposed would have had an economic impact, and with the additional restrictions imposed by the United Nation, Europe, and other countries would have generated uncertainty in Iran economy and would have reduced its capability in developing its oil and gas field as the country wished. The real question regards whether this regime would result in behavioral change among the policymakers in Teheran. According to Meghan O' Sullivan, the result will depend on the internal dynamics of the government, on Iran's government's ability to unify its population in the face of sanctions, and on how the government sees the requests of the international community. As anticipated at the beginning, The Obama administration should also think about how to transform the sanctions regime based on a failure or success. If sanctions will lead a more agreeable Teheran to the negotiating table, the United States and the international community would need to rapidly rethink the regime of sanctions in favor of a new one capable of delivering behavior changes. The author affirms that: " This conversion will require some creative thinking and some intense diplomacy, for, for sanctions to function as a framework for step-by-step negotiations, they need to be flexible and easily lifted to build confidence or recognize positive actions quickly. With the web of sanctions currently in place, negotiators may have difficulty in responding with the alacrity required in a bargaining dynamic."⁵⁸ This means that to achieve a certain objective, that in this case was a policy change, then the administration is obliged to reconsider its scheme. Yet, the author concludes

⁵⁷ L. O'Sullivan M., Iran and the Great Sanctions Debate. P. 12

⁵⁸ L. O'Sullivan M., Iran and the Great Sanctions Debate. P. 13

that it is too idealistic thinking that the 2010 sanctions-based strategy would allow reaching strategic results with Iran. To conclude, sanctions schemes should be modified according to the objectives that a certain country is willing to achieve, and in particular, they may lead to success as well as to failure. In the case of Iran, as it has been already studied in the first chapter, the restriction regime has been changed several times since 2010, and the “final” agreement has been reached only in 2015 with the approval of the JCPOA.

2.1.2 Nuclear Deterrence

Other important theories related to nuclear weapons concern deterrence. Generally, deterrence is considered an instrument to deter nuclear terrorism. A range of strategies as arms control focused on stated would not cease non-state terrorist threats but at least would help in reaching this aim. However, after 9/11 the Cold War concept of deterrence has been re-elaborated to face the threats of a new era. Moreover, terrorist groups as Al-Qaeda or ISIS, which aspire to carry out mass-casualty attacks may not be deterred by the threat of retaliation but states that live in an international system in which the international law governs states’ behavior must respect leverage which affects their conducts. In 2004, the United Nations Security Council unanimously approved Resolution 1540, which recognizes Non-state weapons of mass destruction (WMD) terrorism as a “threat to international peace” and asks member states to implement corresponding measures of internal regulation. A possible violation of the Resolution would be told to the Security Council for appropriate sanctions under the Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. There are two main variants of classical deterrence strategy which respectively are *deterrence by punishment* and *deterrence by denial*.⁵⁹ The first one aims at affecting the intention of a state to accomplish a hostile act through the credible threat of a disciplinary response, while the second one seeks at affecting the capacity of the target state (by stopping the acquisition of those instruments or by adopting defensive measure to make them ineffective.)⁶⁰

To better understand the difference between these two types of strategies and to find out in which of those falls the case of Iran, it is necessary to explain more details of both.

⁵⁹ Robert S. Litwak (2017) Recalibrating Deterrence to Prevent Nuclear Terrorism, The Washington Quarterly, 40:1, 55-70, DOI: 10.1080/0163660X.2017.1302739

⁶⁰ The two variants of deterrence were developed in Glenn H. Snyder, Deterrence by Denial and Punishment, Research Monograph no. 1 (Princeton University, Center for International Studies, January 1959).

Starting from the first one, it is possible to say that according to Robert Litwak: “The vast majority of work done in the nonproliferation area to counter nuclear terrorism falls under the rubric of deterrence by denial. This covers a range of activities including export controls to limit access to technology and physical security at sensitive sites to lock down fissile material to prevent illicit diversion, an objective pioneered through the U.S. Cooperative Threat Reduction program which the Obama administration had proposed expanding to regions beyond its original focus on the former Soviet Union.”⁶¹

However, some shapes of deterrence by denial can also be non-cooperative as the interdiction of contraband cargoes through the multinational Proliferation Security Initiative to avoid the purchasing of WMD technologies. The strategy of the United States was a deterrence-by-denial strategy called “cooperative threat reduction” with the adoption of four Nuclear Security Summits by bringing together a lot of heads of state.

An impressive result of the Summit process was the reduction in the number of countries which possessed weapons-usable nuclear materials, from 32 in 201 to 24 by the end of 2015.⁶²

Generally, the Summit initiative resulted in the elimination of approximately 3,000 kilograms of Highly enriched uranium, sufficient to build 100 bombs.

Another type of deterrence, as already mentioned, is known as Deterrence by Punishment. The impulse for the Bush administration’s decision to start a preventive war to overturn the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq in 2003 was a nightmare scenario that a “rogue state” would give nuclear weapons to a terrorist group. Bush government did not deliver a deterrent threat to prevent the transferring from state to non-state actor until North Korea decided to carry out a nuclear test in October 2006. Considering the scenario of the Agreed Framework in 2003, President Bush had alerted North Korea that its endeavors to buy nuclear weapons would not be accepted.⁶³ Nevertheless, North Korea enlarged its stock of weapons-grade fissile material, and only after its nuclear test in October 2006 and after having proclaimed itself as a nuclear weapon state, President Bush did announce a policy of deterrence by punishment. As reported by David E. Sanger he affirmed that: “The transfer of nuclear weapons or material by North

⁶¹ Robert S. Litwak (2017) Recalibrating Deterrence to Prevent Nuclear Terrorism, *The Washington Quarterly*, 40:1, 55-70, DOI: 10.1080/0163660X.2017.1302739 p. 57

⁶² Michelle Cann, Kelsey Davenport, and Jenna Parker, “The Nuclear Security Summit: Accomplishments of the Process,” *An Arms Control Association and Partnership for Global Security Report*, March 2016, <https://www.armscontrol.org/files/The-Nuclear-Security-Summits-Accomplishments-of-the-Process.pdf>.

⁶³ David E. Sanger, “2 Nuclear Weapons Challenges, 2 Different Strategies,” *New York Times*, June 21, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/21/world/2-nuclear-weapons-challenges-2-different-strategies.html>.

Korea to states or non-state entities would be considered a grave threat to the United States, and we would hold North Korea fully accountable for the consequences of such action.”⁶⁴

While Bush’s statement was referred to North Korea, the administration later extended that formulation into a general policy in February 2008.⁶⁵ Yet the difficulty of strengthening the red lines was evident in 2007, months after the North Korea nuclear test and the deterrence menace when Pyongyang carried out a state-to-state transfer with Syria by giving a prototype of a nuclear weapon. Bush administration did not react militarily, however, Israel decided to act unilaterally by bombing the Syrian site in September 2008.⁶⁶

The Obama administration’s Nuclear Posture Review of 2010 inserted a repetition of Bush’s policy toward transfer by reaffirming the United States’ commitment to consider fully accountable any state or terrorist group, or other non-state actors that sustain or enable terrorist attempts to achieve or use weapons of mass destruction, by either facilitating, financing or giving competences or safe havens for the effort.⁶⁷ However, there is still uncertainty regarding what is meant with “fully responsible” actors; David E. Sanger reported that “To the dismay of arms control proponents who hold that the sole purpose of nuclear weapons should be to deter other states’ nuclear weapons, the Obama administration’s calculated ambiguity left open “the option of using nuclear weapons against foes that might threaten the United States with biological or chemical weapons or transfer nuclear material to terrorists.”⁶⁸ For North Korea a clear alternative to the calculated ambiguity would be an explicit red line: the conscious transfer of weapons of mass destruction capacities by the Pyongyang regime to a non-state actor could generate a non-nuclear and regime-changing response from the United States. This

⁶⁴ David E. Sanger, “2 Nuclear Weapons Challenges, 2 Different Strategies,” New York Times, June 21, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/21/world/2-nuclear-weapons-challenges-2-different-strategies.html>.

⁶⁵ Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, “Remarks by the National Security Advisor, Stephen Hadley, to Center for International Security and Cooperation,” Stanford University, February 8, 2008, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/02/20080211-6.html>.

⁶⁶ David E. Sanger, “2 Nuclear Weapons Challenges, 2 Different Strategies,” New York Times, June 21, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/21/world/2-nuclear-weapons-challenges-2-different-strategies.html>.

⁶⁷ Department of Defense, Nuclear Posture Review Report, April 2010, p. 13, http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/defenseReviews/NPR/2010_Nuclear_Posture_Review_Report.pdf.

⁶⁸ David E. Sanger, “2 Nuclear Weapons Challenges, 2 Different Strategies,” New York Times, June 21, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/21/world/2-nuclear-weapons-challenges-2-different-strategies.html>.

position, which goes beyond the US policy, could show an effective form of deterrence by punishment.⁶⁹

Taking into consideration the case of Iran, analyzed in this research, it is possible to say that Iran found itself at an inflection point since by concluding the JCPOA of 2015 with the world's major powers, it will prevent its access to nuclear materials usable for fifteen years. By limiting Iran's capabilities, this arms control arrangement was a form of deterrence by denial. The nuclear agreement was transactional since it addressed an urgent threat to avoid an Iranian nuclear leak to the bomb. Iran remains targeted as a state sponsor of terrorism by the United States Department, but the JCPOA, if successfully implemented, removes the possibility of Iran transferring a nuclear weapon or materials that could be used for building arms to a terrorist group.

It can be said that Obama's strategy of "pressure and engagements" to obtain the nuclear agreement with Iran showed the successful management of the two kinds of deterrence, by punishment and by denial. Moreover, the government threatened deterrence by punishment, which was widely understood as a potential military attack on the nuclear infrastructures of Iran, if the country crossed the technological threshold of armaments.

Also, Obama better explained that the mixed message of Bush's government, affirming that the aim of the United States was not the maximalist purpose of regime change but was to modify Iranian behavior by conforming the Iranian nuclear program into compliance with its NPT duties. By restricting the focus of Iranian conduct that violated imposed norms, the Obama administration gained multilateral support, which entailed also the sustain of Russia and China, to exercise crucial pressure on Iran. The JCPOA has established a fundamental non-proliferation precedent. This approach, that is deterrence by denial through weapons' control could be used to manage two other difficult situations related to nuclear capabilities, North Korea and Pakistan.

2.2 A summary of Iran and Russia's relations

Putin's return to Kremlin in 2012, and the following election of Hassan Rouhani as the president of Iran in 2013, signed the beginning of a new period in Iranian-Russian relations, which had been declining during the year of Dmitry Medvedev's presidency between 2008 and 2012. Vladimir Putin, only two months after his election, met his Iranian counterpart,

⁶⁹ Robert S. Litwak (2017) Recalibrating Deterrence to Prevent Nuclear Terrorism, *The Washington Quarterly*, 40:1, 55-70, DOI: 10.1080/0163660X.2017.1302739

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. During the meeting, the Russian president affirmed Moscow's intention in boosting its relations with Tehran. Putin outlined in his speech the issues that both countries should have discussed; they entailed a wide range of regional problems as the legal status of the Caspian Sea, the instability in Syria, Iraq, bilateral relations, and perspective on the settlement and management of the nuclear concern.

The presidents talked about the problem of the low volume of bilateral trade and investment, the prospect of Russian-Iranian cooperation in the nuclear and oil and gas fields, as well as the possibilities for Russian military exports to the Islamic Republic.

After the meeting, Tehran and Moscow began to actively coordinate their efforts on Syria. The Kremlin has endorsed the Iranian's inclusion in international discussion of the situation in Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq. In 2014, Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov even named Iran as "a natural ally" of Russia in the fight against religious extremism in the Middle East. These claims aimed at demonstrating that Russia considered Iran as more than just a "southern neighbor".

The purpose of Russian and Iran to build closer relations after the presidential elections in Russia and Iran in 2012 and 2013 respectively was brought by a complex mixture of internal drivers and external challenges. Both presidents needed to rethink their foreign policy priorities. While the ideational elements related to the Russian confrontation with the West became one of the most important determinants for Putin's foreign policies, Rouhani took power with the extremely pragmatic task of saving the country from the pressure of restrictions. As a consequence, this difference determined the perception of each other in the minds of Putin and Rouhani. Finally, both Russia and Iran were forced to deal with the challenges posed to their interests by the Syrian crisis and the outcomes of the Arab Springs.⁷⁰

2.2.1 Iran's foreign policy objectives and Russia's role.

Rouhani's idea of Russia was largely dependent on the foreign policy aims of Iran's political agenda when he arrived at the power. From this point of view, Rouhani could be considered as a unique Iranian president: moreover, contrary to his predecessors, Rouhani did not think globally, but he was concentrated on concrete objectives to be reached. His purposes were: to facilitate the burden of international restrictions, enhance the economic situation in Iran, and

⁷⁰ Kozhanov N. "Foreign Policy of Iran under President Hassan Rouhani's First Term (2013-2017). Edited by Luciano Zaccara.

secure Iran's regional interests in the unfolding conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. Rouhani's plan did not follow a global strategy, rather it was mainly based on regional and security goals. His instrumental and pragmatic foreign policy thinking played a key role in Tehran's relationship with Moscow.

Since 2013, dialogue with Russia has decreased since Tehran gave much more attention to other foreign policy aims as relations with central Asian countries. As a consequence, dialogue with Russia on some of these issues decreased, whereas it strengthened on others.

First of all, after the partial lifting of the sanctions as a result of the accord (JCPOA), Russia started to sustain Iran's application to the full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), since before that time, there was a total rejection to guarantee Iran's membership in the SCO due to both internal and external factors.

Rouhani, under these circumstances, decided to stop negotiations for Tehran's membership in this organization until better times, especially given that the SCO was opposing Iran's achievement of certain political goals.⁷¹

The nuclear question regarded a different case and Iran searched for dialogue with Moscow on this: by 2013, it was clear that the restrictions against Iran were working. Moreover, Iran was almost cut off from the international banking and security system, and the possibility to access foreign investments, advanced technologies and international sea carriage services were highly restricted.

Patrick Clawson reported: "In 2012, the official rate of unemployment reached 12.2% (and more than 19% in unofficial calculations). The shutdown of industrial projects requiring foreign technology, investments, and equipment accelerated the growth of this indicator."⁷²

This explains the fact that Rouhani came to the power by playing on the feelings of the majority of Iranian society, which wished the new government to substantially reinforce their quality of life and the socio-economic conditions in the country. This latter was related to the easing of the United States and the European sanctions, which put pressure on the Iranian economy. It was properly in this context that Moscow played a key role: it proposed an initiative that generated the necessary framework for Iran's negotiations with the international community on the nuclear field. For Tehran, was crucial to have Russia on board during these negotiations,

⁷¹ Kozhanov N. "Foreign Policy of Iran under President Hassan Rouhani's First Term (2013-2017). Edited by Luciano Zaccara.

⁷² Patrick Clawson, "Iran beyond Oil?," The Policy Watch, No. 2062, April 3, 2013, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/iranbeyond-oil>.

as for the Iranian leaders, Moscow and, to a lesser level, Beijing were the forces that could counteract the Western powers during nuclear talks.

Since 2012, even before the elections of Rouhani to the president, the Russian administration actively worked to support authorities in Tehran and the West on the nuclear issue.

Lavrov proposed in 2012 to set the stage for negotiations, which finally led to the signing of the JCPOA and thus to the beginning of the partial lifting of restrictions.

Russian interests in the settlement of the nuclear issue were easy: Moscow hoped that a nuclear agreement would guarantee that Iran would not become another “hotspot” on the post-Soviet space’s periphery. In addition. The end of Iran’s pariah status and its gradual reintegration into the international community would also allow Russia to collaborate with the Islamic Republic more actively on regional questions without damage the Kremlin of being accused of creating an “unholy” alliance.

Finally, Moscow wished that reaching a nuclear agreement would remove the sanctions that had hindered Russia’s economic activity in Iran: thus, international restrictions were a serious obstacle to the development of economic cooperation between Iran and Russia.

As a matter of fact, in the eight years preceding the JCPOA, Russian businesses failed to make any substantial economic basis in Iran.

Russia's investment activity in the Islamic Republic since 2006 had been unimpressive, and since 2011, the volume of trade between the countries had been continuously falling by more than 30 percent annually and by 2014 it reached around \$1.7 billion. According to Moscow experts, the principal reason for this was the international restrictions adopted against Iran, which compelled the Russian business to refrain from dealing with Iran. For this specific reason, the end of the sanctions regime would, in exchange, grant Russian companies better access to the Iranian economy. In 2015 international discussions resulted in the signing of a “nuclear agreement”, the JCPOA, which put Iran’s nuclear program under the control of IAEA and the international community, resulting in a restriction being partially eliminated.

This was surely a significant achievement of Iranian diplomacy and guaranteed Rouhani’s re-election for a second presidential term in 2017.

To sum up, for Russian- Iranian relations, the successful end of the nuclear negotiations provided a necessary boost for further development.⁷³

⁷³ Kozhanov N. “ Foreign Policy of Iran under President Hassan Rouhani’s First Term (2013-2017). Edited by Luciano Zaccara.

2.3 Russia's interests in the JCPOA

After having illustrated two of the several theories that may influence actors in deciding on the nuclear field, and especially regarding the case of Iran, and also after having analyzed the relationship between Russia and Iran, this part of the current research aims at clarifying the interests that the Russian Federation had in taking part to the Iran Deal of 2015.

The JCPOA certainly puts Tehran in a new, stronger position and potentially able to change the balance of the Persian Gulf area and the Middle and Near East of the region.

In this context from the purely economic, commercial, and financial point of view, the relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation winds through various channels of collaboration and in different dossiers, starting from the sensitive sector of nuclear energy. Moscow has guaranteed its commitment to the conversion of the uranium enrichment plant in Fordow into a nuclear technology center with implications in the field of medicine, for example, and the Russian contribution to the construction of the Bushehr nuclear power plant is well known.

Looking at every single productive sector and the possible commercial entanglements between Moscow and Teheran, without framing them in a wider frame of reference, which also entails the balances of the area and the cross relations between the main regional players which are Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Israel, and the points of understating between Iran and Russia.⁷⁴

2.3.1 Economic benefits

The survival of Iran's Islamic regime, accompanied by the gradual disposal of restrictions, opened up essential economic opportunities for Russia as well. Moreover, economic relations between Iran and Russia, have intensified in the last several months before the deal, as the two countries negotiated commercial transactions of significant meaning for Russia.⁷⁵ Also, already in 2014, Russia signed a multibillion-dollar accord to construct two additional nuclear reactors for Iran at the Bushehr nuclear power plant.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Lupo S., "Iran e Russia: un matrimonio di interesse (con incognite)." ISPI. February 26, 2016. URL: <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/iran-e-russia-un-matrimonio-di-interesse-con-incognite-14713>

⁷⁵ Schwartz N. P., "What the Iran Deal Means for Russia". CSIS. June, 2015.

⁷⁶ Andrew E. Kramer, "Russia Reaches Deal with Iran to Construct Nuclear Plants," *New York Times*, November 11, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/12/world/europe/russia-to-build-2-nuclear-plants-in-iran-and-possibly-6-more.html?_r=0.

Other than substantial revenues achieved from the creation of those facilities, Russia will also be able to sell Iran nuclear fuel throughout the durability of reactors. The agreement also contains possibilities for Russia to build up to six other reactions in the future.⁷⁷

In January, Iran and Russia signed a new military cooperation accord, that facilitates the future transfer of Russian military weapons to Iran.⁷⁸

Later, Vladimir Putin affirmed that he was lifting the ban on the delivery of air defense systems to Iran opening the way for future weapons sales once sanctions were removed.

Before ceasing the S-300 sale, Russia had long been Iran's first weapons supplier, with total sales of about \$ 3.4 billion between 1991 and 2010.⁷⁹

Russia hoped that the elimination of the United Nations' restrictions would have led to a resumption of large-scale arms transfers. Indeed, Sergei Shoigu, Russia's defense minister, claimed that Russia would have tried to build a "long-term and multifaceted" military relationship with Iran.

According to Paul Schwatz, Iran's military sorely needed modern arms, but given the disputes and general mistrust, it is not likely that the West would sell such weapons to Iran for some time to come, even after having reached the Iran deal; Iran would, in any case, remain suspicious of relying on the West for the essential weapon system. Therefore, given Russia's breach with the West due to Ukraine and its increasing aversion in sustaining the Western sanctions initiatives as showed by its votes to block United Nations restrictions against Syria, Iran would probably feel safer in relying on Russia for future arms sales.⁸⁰

At the same time, Iran was most likely to look at the West to obtain computer and telecommunications systems, electronic materials, and other types of high-technology commercial equipment since Western products are technologically more developed than Russian ones. Nonetheless, according to Y.Y. Belobrov, Russia was likely to create its way in certain areas where it remains technologically competitive as space technology, oil and gas

⁷⁷ Schwartz N. P., "What the Iran Deal Means for Russia". CSIS. June, 2015.

⁷⁸ Elena Holodny and Michael B. Kelley, "Russia and Iran Just Got Even Closer," *Business Insider*, January 20, 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/russia-iran-signed-military-cooperation-2015-1>. The new accord also provides for cooperation on military exchanges, joint training of military personnel, increased use of port facilities by their respective navies, and joint counterterrorism activities.

⁷⁹ Based on data from SIPRI [Stockholm International Peace Research Institute] Arms Transfer Database.

⁸⁰ Schwartz N. P., "What the Iran Deal Means for Russia". CSIS. June, 2015.

drilling and refinery equipment, pipeline construction, metallurgy, mining, civil aviation, chemical equipment, and railway expansion.⁸¹

If Western companies hesitated to enter into Iranian markets due to lingering worries over the stability of Iran's relationship with the West, Russia could acquire market share in other fields of Iran's economy as well. Indeed, Mehd Sanayee, who was Iran's ambassador to Russia at that time, noted that the two countries planned to enhance bilateral trade from \$ 5 billion to \$70 billion per year over the future years.⁸² Even if this objective seemed to be exceedingly ambitious, it represented the final purpose of the two countries concerning their trading relationship.

Iran's opening to trade and the international market could certainly determine positive consequences also in and for the Russian market. But it was above all in the Defense and military material sector that the true axis of understanding between the two countries unfolds, a relationship consolidated and strengthened well before the gradual elimination of sanctions, albeit with alternating fortunes (with specific reference to the agreement for the sale of Russian S-300 air defense systems, later canceled in 2010, restored in 2015 and still awaiting Persian payment.)⁸³

To sum up, the most intense collaboration, also because it was supported by Russian giants as Rosoboronexport (arms export), Atomstroyexport (export of atomic equipment and materials) and even, albeit with greater reactance, Gazprom, was further consolidated with the visit, in February 2015, of Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu to Iran for priority talk with his Persian counterpart Hossein Denhgan. The common will was to exploit the synergy in the sector: on the one hand, Iran wished to reduce it is the military technology gap with rivals in the region (most of all Israel and Saudi Arabia), on the other hand, attracted by the Iranian necessity, Russia aimed to consolidate its supremacy in the sale of armaments to Iran, in

⁸¹ Y. Y. Belobrov et al., *Modern Russian-Iranian Relations: Challenges and Opportunities*, Working Paper (Moscow: Russian International Affairs Council, 2014), 21–27 <http://russiancouncil.ru/common/upload/WP14Russia-Iran-En.pdf>.

⁸² Alex Vatanka, "Shrimp, SAMs, and the Limits of Russian-Iranian Romance," *National Interest*, January 23, 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/shrimp-sams-the-limits-russian-iranian-romance-12101>.

⁸³ Lupo S., "Iran e Russia: un matrimonio di interesse (con incognite)." ISPI. February 26, 2016. URL: <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/iran-e-russia-un-matrimonio-di-interesse-con-incognite-14713>

particular in those sectors, as surface-to-air missile technology and air fighters, in which it had a significant competitive advantage over the other major provider, China.⁸⁴

2.3.2 Energy sector

One important potential negative effect for Russia arising out of the agreement would be the enhanced competition that Russia will face when Iranian gas and oil supplies return to the world energy markets. Given the Iranian economic situation, it will be keen to resume large-scale oil and gas exports to obtain much-needed revenue.⁸⁵

The injection of Iranian oil into a market that was already glutted, threatens to increasingly reduce oil prices at a time when Russia's economy has already been badly affected by lower oil prices and a consequent decline in the ruble's price. A growth in Iranian natural gas exports would also pressure regional gas prices, especially for Europe which in turn would negatively affect Russia's economy.⁸⁶ However, Iran needed at least a year to increase its oil production, and even longer to enhance the gas one. Nor there is no guarantee that oil and gas prices would still be at the same low levels when important Iranian supplies come online. Meanwhile, Russia at that time already begun taking steps to balance the potential damages arising from Iran's return to the energy markets. In August 2014, Russia and Iran signed a memorandum of understanding on a \$ 20 billion barter accord under which Russia would have exchanged up to 500,000 barrels of oil per day from Iran in return for Russian goods and services.⁸⁷ Even though Iran's oil minister later denied that the accord had gone beyond the discussion phase, subsequent reports from Russia show that it may be still alive.

According to Reuters, in April 2015, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov claimed that the agreement was active and that Russia had already begun to deliver grain,

⁸⁴ Lupo S., "Iran e Russia: un matrimonio di interesse (con incognite)." ISPI. February 26, 2016. URL: <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/iran-e-russia-un-matrimonio-di-interesse-con-incognite-14713>

⁸⁵ Schwartz N. P., "What the Iran Deal Means for Russia". CSIS. June, 2015.

⁸⁶ Schwartz N. P., "What the Iran Deal Means for Russia". CSIS. June, 2015.

⁸⁷ Andrew Trotman, "Vladimir Putin Signs Historic \$20bn Oil Deal with Iran to Bypass Western Sanctions," *The Telegraph*, August 6, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/energy/oilandgas/11014604/Vladimir-Putin-signs-historic-20bn-oil-deal-with-iran-to-bypass-Western-sanctions.html>.

equipment, and construction equipment to Iran. However, this assertion has been contradicted by other reports.⁸⁸

In any event, if this agreement has complied, it would theoretically enable Russia to maintain this extra oil off the market until prices return to a lower and more acceptable level. Undoubtedly, enhanced Iranian production is not the only element that would determine future oil prices, indeed much depended on the policy of OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries), particularly Saudi Arabia, which could answer to growing Iranian production by decreasing their result to bypass further price declines and to keep the same profit margins. Meanwhile, Russia has done little to balance the potential impact of diminished Iranian natural gas exports, the threat was less immediate given the delays that Iran faced in increasing gas production.

To conclude, the main Russian concern on the subject of Iran's international rise was the question of oil, moreover, in the medium term, the Vienna agreements would allow Iran to return to being an adequate energy provider, potentially undermining some positions of pre-eminence matured over time by the Kremlin, at least as far as Europe is concerned. The friction in OPEC key between Russia and Saudi Arabia, ready to freeze part of the oil production to counteract the decrease in prices, and the Iranian opposition in this regard, further show the divergent need of the two countries.⁸⁹

2.3.3 Geopolitical advantages

Paul Schwartz affirmed: "Russia is also poised to benefit geopolitically from the nuclear accord, because Iran is likely to emerge from this process as a newly empowered state, no longer constrained by the international sanctions regime and thus able to leverage its enormous energy reserves to obtain billions of dollars in additional export revenues".⁹⁰

The new wealth would enable Iran both to enhance Iran's military power and to better support its allies in the region relative to that of Saudi Arabia and its Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) allies as well as Israel.

⁸⁸ Gabriela Baczynska and Vladimir Soldatkin, "Russia Confirms Iran Oil-for-Goods Swap, No Signs Seen," Reuters, April 14, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/04/14/us-iran-nuclear-russia-kremlin-idUSKBN0N50QN20150414>.

⁸⁹ Lupo S., "Iran e Russia: un matrimonio di interesse (con incognite)." ISPI. February 26, 2016. URL: <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/iran-e-russia-un-matrimonio-di-interesse-con-incognite-14713>

⁹⁰ Schwartz N. P., "What the Iran Deal Means for Russia". CSIS. June, 2015.

Generally, this outcome would benefit Russia, which stood to gain the most from a newly empowered Iran able to more efficiently achieve its Middle East purposes. According to Paul Schwartz, as things stood, there were several and strong reasons for Iran and Russia to strengthen cooperation in the region since in general, they shared the same geopolitical objectives.⁹¹

For instance, Russia and Iran both were strong supporters of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria, whereas contrarily, since the Syria crisis exploded in earnest, the West has repeatedly asked for Assad's removal from power. Even though Western nations have started to work with Assad (even if not officially), in the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), their will to work with Assad was still limited and is not likely to endure once the threat from Isis was ceased.⁹²

Russia and Iran were also united by the opposition to Saudi initiatives in the region, Iran due to the intensified sectarian distinctions it had with Sunni-led Saudi Arabia and because it saw Saudi Arabia as its greatest political competitor in the Middle East and Russia which was worried for Saudi support for Sunni radicalism and its possible spillover effects in Russia.⁹³

Additionally, Moscow has been annoyed by Saudi efforts to diminish oil prices, which as a consequence had badly undermined Russia's economy. Contrarily, the United States and its Western allies had long enjoyed close links with the Saudis. Moreover, despite disagreements among them regarding the right strategy toward Syria and the wise to follow the Iran agreements itself, they were likely to stick together aligned on crucial concerns in the Middle East, comprising opposition to Assad and Iran's adventurism in the region.

However, there is an area in which the two countries differed markedly: in their relationship with Israel. Indeed, while Iran kept staying an implacable rival of Israel, Russia's approach to Israel had been more nuanced. For instance, even though Russia continued to support the cause of Palestinian statehood, it has done so in a balanced way, considering Israel's interests and also sometimes condemning Palestinian attitude, and scrupulously bypassing a starkly anti-Israeli tone.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Ibidem.

⁹² Schwartz N. P., "What the Iran Deal Means for Russia". CSIS. June, 2015.

⁹³ Ibidem

⁹⁴ Ibidem

At Israel's demand, Russia had also agreed to moderate or even eliminate weapons sales to Syria and Iran because they were considered as particularly alarming to Israel. From the Israel part, there has been a strong sustain for Russia, where more than 1 million Israeli citizens originally left the former Soviet Union to reach Israel. Also, Russia was considered as a fundamental export market for Israeli technology and agricultural productions.

Thus, while Russia would have certainly tackled challenges in managing its relations with both Israel and the newly empowered Iran, it had proved at keeping good relations with both states despite such issues. This means that in the absence of a total transformation and development in the relationship between Iran and the West, Russia and Iran were likely to reinforce their ties once the Iranian agreement was in place.⁹⁵

Given the already strong relationship, after the JCPOA it was possible to expect greater cooperation between the two in several areas, including showing support for Assad in Syria, enhancing their correspondent influence in Shiite-dominated Iraq, and facing Saudi influence in the region. Lastly, the consequence would be to reinforce Iran's influence in the region at the expense of the United States' allies, thereby simultaneously reducing American influence while increasing Russia's one.

The common commitment in support of the Assad regime in Syria, in the civil conflict since 2011, with the complication of the presence of the Islamic State, has certainly welded the military relations between Iran and Russia, precisely because both Sukhoi Su-30SM and T-90 are employed, in various capacities, on Syrian territory.⁹⁶

The alliance of convenience, or marriage of interests, that seemed to have revived after the agreement for the cessation of hostilities in Syria, reached in February 2015, did not shield Russia and Iran from the different horizons and objectives that distinguish them in the common defense of the status quo of Assad in Syria. For Iran, the permanence of Assad's government was fundamental for the country's stability (and, at the same time, for the maintenance of Iranian influence in Syria); for Russia, which was particularly interested in the coastal area from Latakia to Tartous, where it had an important naval base in the Mediterranean, the destinies of future Syria and al-Assad were not inextricably intertwined, and this could lead

⁹⁵ Schwartz N. P., "What the Iran Deal Means for Russia". CSIS. June, 2015.

⁹⁶ Lupo S., "Iran e Russia: un matrimonio di interesse (con incognite)." ISPI. February 26, 2016. URL: <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/iran-e-russia-un-matrimonio-di-interesse-con-incognite-14713>

Moscow to favor possible situations and understandings of compromise not acceptable to Teheran.⁹⁷

Syrian Civil War indeed appeared to be the main game-changer in the relationship between Iran and Russia. Russia's military involvement in the Syrian conflict in late 2015 became the main element that brought the two countries together. From Tehran's point of view, the start of Moscow's engagement in Syrian affairs gave to Iranian authorities what they had been searching for a decade: a solid military base for the development of bilateral relations.⁹⁸ Since the 2000s, Tehran had been searching for a leading world power that could be a counterweight to the US pressure on Iran, and Russia was one of the best candidates for this role. However, during the precedent decades, any Iranian try to win Moscow's sustain had failed; the Kremlin collaborated with Teheran only on a case-by-case basis, and attentively followed that this collaboration never reached the level when it could negatively influence the development of the Russian dialogue with Western powers or other countries of the Middle East. Moreover, until 2012, Moscow had sacrificed its good relationship with Teheran many times to enhance its ties with the United States and the European Union. Thus, the so-known reset in Russia-United States relationship declared Medvedev and Obama in 2009 was one of the reasons why Russian authorities postponed the delivery of the S-300 missile complexes to Teheran and issued unilateral restrictions against Iran in 2010.⁹⁹

However, even given these conditions, Russia remained the most favorable candidate for the Iranian authorities as a potential counterweight to the US influence in the Middle East. Tehran attempted to form a stronger political collaboration with Russia, therefore they tried to find political issues of common interest whose discussion could lead to long-term cooperation between the two countries. The perfect time came when there has been a total degradation of Russian relations with the United States as a consequence of Euromaidan in Ukraine, and when Moscow started to be involved in Syria. Those two events led to the long-awaited circumstances for increasing discussion between Russia and Iran.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Lupo S., "Iran e Russia: un matrimonio di interesse (con incognite)." ISPI. February 26, 2016. URL: <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/iran-e-russia-un-matrimonio-di-interesse-con-incognite-14713>

⁹⁸ Kozhanov N. "Foreign Policy of Iran under President Hassan Rouhani's First Term (2013-2017). Edited by Luciano Zaccara.

⁹⁹ Kozhanov N. "Foreign Policy of Iran under President Hassan Rouhani's First Term (2013-2017). Edited by Luciano Zaccara.

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem

Putin's decision to send Russian troops to Syria opened even more options for this cooperation: indeed, after the start of the Russian military action, Iranian authorities sent a clear message about the readiness to collaborate with Russia.

Russian leaders also seemed to be very interested in enhancing relations with Tehran after the signing of the JCPOA. Since 2012 when the international community renewed its attempt to settle the Iranian nuclear program, Russian leaders were worried about the possibility that the end of sanctions and subsequent Iranian rapprochement with the West could reduce Moscow's influence in Tehran and thus distance the Islamic Republic from Russia. The failure for Iran and Russia to create a solid relationship through the strengthening of bilateral economic ties compelled Moscow to reinforce the discussion of political issues of mutual interest.¹⁰¹

As a consequence, cooperation in Syria became of the most important issues as a base for the development of the bilateral dialogue between Iran and Russia.¹⁰²

To conclude is possible to affirm that the very arc of crisis represented by the Syrian war, with several regional players competing or clashing as Iran and Saudi Arabia, as already mentioned, however, contributed to emphasize some differences in perspective that divide Moscow and Tehran, if the Russia/Iran link is introduced in the broader framework of power relations and balances in the area from Lebanon to Afghanistan. Indeed, as explained previously, Moscow had important accords with Israel and did not wish to reduce this agreement with a high content of technological value) to please Iran, nor does it aspire to antagonize Saudi Arabia, as could be intended from the note of criticism issued by the Kremlin for the attacks on the Saudi Embassy in Teheran and the consulate in Mashad. Contrarily, Moscow did not raise any exceptions for the execution in Saudi Arabia of the Shiite preacher Nimr al-Nimr on January 2, 2016 (a fact that had triggered Iran's violent reaction).¹⁰³

It is then possible to conclude that Russia tried to keep the relations with all regional actors balanced and to maintain its good relationship with Iran by exploiting the "new" Iran agreement of 2015.

¹⁰¹ Kozhanov N. "Foreign Policy of Iran under President Hassan Rouhani's First Term (2013-2017). Edited by Luciano Zaccara.

¹⁰² Kira Latukhina, "Vladimir Putin Obsudil s Iranskim Politikom Borbu s Terrorizmom," Rossiyskaya Gazeta, October 22, 2015, <http://www.rg.ru/2015/10/22/larijani-site-anons.html>.

¹⁰³ Ibidem

2.3.4 Security benefits

The JCPOA would also benefit Russia's security. Even if it was not widely acknowledged, Russia remained much more vulnerable to a possible Iranian nuclear attack than any other actors among the P5+1 member states. Iran's recently constructed Shahab-3A ballistic missile had an effective range of up to 2,000 kilometers, not long enough to reach any other P5+1 member state, but more than sufficient to arrive and hit targets in Western Russia.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, given the fact that Russia was the signatory of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Agreement, it was forbidden from fielding medium-range nuclear-armed missiles able to strike Iran directly, which would provide the most effective instruments of deterring such a potential Iran attack. By confining Iran's capacity to develop nuclear arms, therefore, a nuclear agreement provided Russia with a safeguard against Iranian nuclear attack, a result that it would have been unable to reach on its own.¹⁰⁵

However, the reduction of the Iranian nuclear threat was certainly not the most important advantage that Russia would receive from a concluded nuclear agreement. It was thus even more important the fact that the accord virtually assured the long-term survival of Iran's Islamic Republic, which had long been one of Russia's first aims in the Middle East. Russia's willingness to preserve the regime that existed at that time did not arise out of any crucial affinity it might hold for mullahs, instead, it reflected Russia's view that Iran's regime could guarantee stability in the Middle East that was already hit by several unrests and also that instability in Iran could also negatively affect Russia's interests in the region.

Additionally, it also reflects Russia's belief that Iran could be a favorable partner for Russia in the region since, from a geopolitical point of view, Iran's interests aligned more with Russia's ones rather than with those of the Western powers.

As reported by Paul Schwartz, Iran's defense minister Brigadier General Hussein Dehghan affirmed: "Iran and Russia have common viewpoints towards political, regional and global issues."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Schwartz N. P., "What the Iran Deal Means for Russia". CSIS. June, 2015.

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem

¹⁰⁶ "Russia and Iran Sign Defense Deal, 'May Resolve' S-300 Missile Delivery Issue," RT, January 20, 2015, <http://rt.com/news/224443-russia-iran-defense-deal/>.

Even though Iran's nuclear agreement may not insulate Iran fully from the forces of change, it would at least leave a militarily imposed regime from the table, as long as Iran would comply with the agreement.¹⁰⁷

2.4 Development of Russia and Iran relationship after United States' withdrawal from the JCPOA

One of the most important challenges that were faced by Moscow and Tehran in the process of developing their relationship was the decision of the United States to withdraw from the JCPOA, as claimed by President Donald Trump in May 2018.

According to Khozanov the unpredictability of the Iranian plan's future immediately revived old rumors that Russia was interested in maintain anti-Iran sanctions rather than lifting them; but while there was some truth in these speculations, the reality was more complicated and more diverse. The situation that existed in Iran before May 2018 fully adapted Russia's interests. Tehran has been excluded by the remnants of the restrictions regime 2010-2015. These sanctions, as well as Trump's menace to impose new punitive actions against Tehran, prevented Western investors from intervening in the Iranian economy.¹⁰⁸

Yes, this did not represent an obstacle for Russian businesses: moreover, contrarily to their Western enemies, Russian companies were the first to trade Iranian oil after the JCPOA was established in 2015. Almost all Russian oil and gas companies were working out their participation in Iran's hydrocarbon plans.¹⁰⁹

By May 2018, Kremlin was sure that Russia was not limited by time and it should not be rushed when working with Iran, permitting the Iranian leadership to get used to the idea that Russia was the only possibility. There were also no illusions in Moscow that Russian companies could replace Westerners: Russia's purpose was to fill the spaces it was interested in, but not to take the whole economy. Simultaneously, the Kremlin was not interested in enhancing the United States sanctions regime above the already existing level.

¹⁰⁷ Schwartz N. P., "What the Iran Deal Means for Russia". CSIS. June, 2015.

¹⁰⁸ Kozhanov N. "Foreign Policy of Iran under President Hassan Rouhani's First Term (2013-2017). Edited by Luciano Zaccara.

¹⁰⁹ Kozhanov N. "Foreign Policy of Iran under President Hassan Rouhani's First Term (2013-2017). Edited by Luciano Zaccara.

On the one hand, Russia was worried by the fact that the new restrictions could lead to the partial restoration of the pre-2015 sanction regime that could negatively influence the Iranian economy and thus lead to socio-economic destabilization of the country.

On the other hand, new restrictions could put some pressure on Russia's companies interested in Iran and make them withdraw. As a consequence, Moscow decided to secure the implementation of the JCPOA and to support Iran in staying loyal to the agreement.¹¹⁰

Nevertheless, after statements by Trump in May 2018 this negative scenario became a reality. The tone of the statements by Russian and Iranian officials about the bilateral collaboration under sanctions differed, indeed while Russians tried to be cautious, the Iranian due to obvious propaganda issues declared the beginning of a new age of Russian-Iranian cooperation determined by Trump's decision to leave the JCPOA, pushing Tehran towards Moscow.¹¹¹

Thus, Russian oil companies were about to sign new contracts in Iran: Gazprom intended to invest in the development of the Iranian LNG producing capacities. Rosneft, in turn, signed a cooperation road map with the NIOC that comprised \$30 billions of investments in the oil and gas area of Iran (the whole oil output of projects to be issued by Rosneft might reach 55 million metric tons annually).¹¹² Gazprom Neft gave Iran all technical plans to develop the Cheshm-e Khosh and Shangleh oil fields. In early December 2017, it also improved the proposal to develop the Iraqi Badr oil field and Iranian Azar oil field, as a united group.

Yet, it is possible to affirm that all these will have never been carried out due to several reasons. First, Iran was interested in showing to the international community that Trump's behaviors were futile. Concerning plans to get closer with Russians, Tehran was trying to upset Americans, supposing that United States policymakers would not like to see Iran and Russia building a real alliance under the pressure of restrictions. Second, forthright statements on the prospects of Russian-Iranian collaboration under sanctions were often made by Iranian or Russian politicians who were not accountable for the practical development of these ties.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Kozhanov N. "Foreign Policy of Iran under President Hassan Rouhani's First Term (2013-2017). Edited by Luciano Zaccara.

¹¹¹ Denis Davydov, "Vozobnovleniye Sanktsiy SShA, kak i Ozhidalos, Sblizilo Iran i Rossiyu," Tekhnoblog, May 16, 2018, <https://teknoblog.ru/2018/05/16/89381>.

¹¹² Denis Davydov, "Vozobnovleniye Sanktsiy SShA, kak i Ozhidalos, Sblizilo Iran i Rossiyu," Tekhnoblog, May 16, 2018, <https://teknoblog.ru/2018/05/16/89381>.

¹¹³ Volodin: SShA Provodyat Sanktsionnyu Politiku protiv Aktivno Razvivayushchikhsya Stran," TASS, May 15, 2018, <http://tass.ru/ekonomika/5200151>.

Those who were responsible, contrarily, were often modest in their declarations: they probably did not get that Trump's decision would not help in the development of economic ties between the two countries.¹¹⁴

Third, Russian policymakers and businessmen were against the United States' proposal to restore sanctions. This skepticism was not determined by compassion to Iranian problems, but by the negative behavior towards restrictions as a tool of political pressure. It is also fundamental to mention the fact that Moscow was also under the United States sanctions and could not allow itself to stay silent on this concern.

The same was valid for Russian business: on May 25, 2018, the managing director of Rosneft, Igor Sechin severely criticized the United States' choice to impose restrictions against Iran and Venezuela: basically, its speech largely reflected the worries of Russian companies on the sanctions inflicted to Russia.¹¹⁵

2.4.1 Russia's "wait and see" strategy

Practically, Russian companies seemed to be ready to adopt "wait and see" tactics and if necessary, were decided to step back from Iran in precise areas. There had already been the case of Russian company's withdrawal from Iran, probably under the influence of United States' restrictions. Thus, in May 2018, the Russian-Middle Eastern Trade Centre declared its willingness to leave Iran.¹¹⁶

This society had been contracted to construct desalination facilities in Iran. Shortly after, one of Russia's major oil producers, Lukoil, also stated its intention to leave Iran. As of June 2018, other Russian companies operating in Iran had shown interest in enduring their efforts to participate in the Iranian market.¹¹⁷

However, there was a clear understanding that Trump's decision to leave the JCPOA made this task more risky and challenging. Even though Kremlin tried to ensure its Iranian allies its

¹¹⁴ "Kozak: Riski dlya Biznesa RF v Irane iz-za Sanktsiy SShA Est, no Ikh Mozhno Minimizirovat," TASS, May 17, 2018, <http://tass.ru/ekonomika/5208923>.

¹¹⁵ Mikhail Kalmatchkiy, "Nerynochniye Obstoyatelstva," Federal Press, May 25, 2018, <http://fedpress.ru/article/2052377>.

¹¹⁶ "Iz-za Sanktsiy Kompaniya Syna Chayki Otkazalas ot Proyektu v Irane za 180 Milliona Dollarov," TV Rain, May 10, 2018, https://tvrain.ru/news/igorja_chajki_irane-463406/

¹¹⁷ "Kozak: Riski dlya Biznesa RF v Irane iz-za Sanktsiy SShA Est, no Ikh Mozhno Minimizirovat," TASS, May 17, 2018, <http://tass.ru/ekonomika/5208923>.

readiness to keep business with Tehran, Russia's presence in Iran depended on two factors: first, the behaviors of the Europeans; moreover, Moscow noted that if European politicians needed to support their statements on European readiness to guarantee ties with Iran to make sure that Russia would not be standing alone against the United States if decided to protect Iran from America restrictions.¹¹⁸

The second element was Trump's determination in restoring sanctions and implementing new measures against Iran. By 2019, none of these elements could persuade Russia that it should keep its business in Iran. Moscow's leverage to affect the United States' attitude was negligible. This was officially recognized. In early May 2018, Lavrov claimed that Russia could do nothing about new restrictions that would be imposed by Trump.¹¹⁹

The Kremlin was not enough ready to fight for Iran: if Moscow saw that the situation was not developing on behalf of Iran, and the Europeans failed to present an adequate opposition to Americans, the majority of Russian oil and gas companies would probably put cooperation with Tehran on pause or at least reassess their strategies in Iran. Nevertheless, this would not mean the whole disruption of collaboration, as this would inevitably backfire, compromising the political dialogue and relationship between the two countries, which Moscow would try to prevent.

In the worst-case situation, if the Europeans left Iran and the United States imposed secondary sanctions, the field of cooperation would probably be reduced and be limited to the several projects actively protected by the Russian administration, or that were in the zones not covered by sanctions such as the building of the Bushehr nuclear plant, and Sirik power plant and maybe the Russian Railways Company (RZD) projects.

Government oil businesses would also attempt to stay in Iran, and, probably keep their presence hoping to assure their share of the Iranian market until better times.

Yet despite Russia's "wait and see" strategy, Moscow did not mean to stay completely idle and wished to try to protect Iran from external pressures.

¹¹⁸ Aleksandr Andreev, "Rossiya Prizvala ne Ignorirovat Interesy Partnerov Irana v Situacii s Sanktsiyami," *Parlamentskaya Gazeta*, May 10, 2018, <https://www.pnp.ru/politics/rossiya-prizvala-ne-ignorirovat-interesypartnyorov-irana-v-situacii-s-sankciyami.html>.

¹¹⁹ "Lavrov Schel ne Podlezhashchey Peresmotru Otmenu Sanktsiy SB OON protiv Irana," *RBC*, May 10, 2018, <https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/5af430ac9a79471125fe4a64>.

Russian vice prime minister Dmitry Kozak affirmed in May 2018 that Moscow noted difficulties for its companies in Iran, which entailed those caused by the use of dollars for financial operations.¹²⁰

Yet it would seek to reduce the effect on bilateral relations. Kozhanov affirmed: “First, Moscow thought to return to the situation of 2012-2015 when the lion’s share of business between the two countries was done in grey areas by small and medium enterprises that were not affected by sanctions (for some of them, Iran was the only external market). Second, Russia could try to create a legal means to avoid the US sanctions. Trump’s sanctions could boost the use of national currencies in bilateral trade;¹²¹

Novak affirmed also that local currencies could be used by Russia in oil accords with Iran, even though he underlined that this would request the creation of a certain administrative mechanism.¹²²

Russian and Iranian businessmen would open corresponding accounts in Russian and Iranian banks. Moscow also established direct connections between Russian and Iranian banking systems. In addition, in November 2017 Russia and Iran implemented together with the “oil-for-goods” program where Moscow brought Iranian oil in exchange for Russian machinery and investment.

This initiative had been discussed since the early 2010s. Initially, it was intended to support Iran in evading the oil trade embargo imposed by the United States, the European Union, and their partners. This program saved Iran’s economy from a crisis and provided Russian businesses with additional oil reserves to trade abroad.

After the adoption of the JCPOA, the discussion of this agreement was postponed but later renewed. This time, the oil-for-goods program was expected to compensate for the lack of financial reserves in Iran that had blocked Tehran from paying for imports of Russian equipment in hard currency.

If the United States had tried to persuade the buyers of Iranian oil to find alternative suppliers, the oil-for-goods program could be utilized for the needs it had been initially supposed to satisfy. In 2017, Moscow confirmed that in 2018, it planned to continue the implementation of

¹²⁰ “Kozak: Riski dlya Biznesa RF v Irane iz-za Sanktsiy SShA Est, no Ikh Mozhno Minimizirovat,” TASS, May 17, 2018, <http://tass.ru/ekonomika/5208923>.

¹²¹ Kozhanov N. “Foreign Policy of Iran under President Hassan Rouhani’s First Term (2013-2017). Edited by Luciano Zaccara.

¹²² Raschety v Yevro za Iranskuyu Neft ne Okazhut Vliyaniya na Neftyanoy i Valutniy Rynki,” IPrime, May 16, 2018, https://1prime.ru/Financial_market/20180516/828830635.html

this program. It was expected that Moscow would pay 5 million tons of oil annually from Iran. In exchange, the Kremlin had planned to supply Iran with goods of the value of \$ 45 billion. Third, in May 2018, The Eurasian Economic Union and Iran signed a temporary accord on the creation of a free trade zone that implied the reduction of existing trade tariffs and customs duties.¹²³

This move would not be able to have a positive global effect on Iran's economy, indeed the overall volume of trade between the European Economic Union and Iran had been \$ 2.7 billion (the share of Russian-Iranian trade was \$1.7 billion) and this would not dramatically improve. The immediate positive effect was also doubtful. Kozak sustained that Russian business would be able to earn an additional \$150 million.¹²⁴

Yet, this free commerce area would create loopholes for restrictions evasion and still help to develop the Russian- Iranian economic relations under sanctions.

Between 2012 and 2015, Iran had also been actively using the post-Soviet area as the territory from which it could use technologies and funds, and even reach international financial systems.¹²⁵

Finally, Russia and Iran had also talked about exotic ways to evade new United States sanctions.

As a method to compensate for the potential removal of Iran from the SWIFT system, Tehran recommended using crypto-currencies for bilateral financial operations. According to the head of the economic commission of the majlis, Mohammad Reza Pourebrahimi, the Central Bank of Iran had already received a request to study this option.¹²⁶

In May 2018 Pourebrahimi met his Russian counterpart, the head of Duma's economic commission, Dmitry Mezentsev, and suggested utilizing the crypto-currencies for bilateral trade. According to the Iranian MP, the reaction of Russian parliamentarians was positive, although there was no precedent that crypto-currencies had been used in this way before.¹²⁷

¹²³ "Kozak: Riski dlya Biznesa RF v Irane iz-za Sanktsiy SShA Est, no Ikh Mozhno Minimizirovat," TASS, May 17, 2018, <http://tass.ru/ekonomika/5208923>.

¹²⁴ "Kozak: Riski dlya Biznesa RF v Irane iz-za Sanktsiy SShA Est, no Ikh Mozhno Minimizirovat," TASS, May 17, 2018, <http://tass.ru/ekonomika/5208923>.

¹²⁵ Nikolay Kozhanov, "The US Economic Sanctions against Iran: Undermined by External Factors," *The Middle East Policy*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, Fall 2011.

¹²⁶ Mikhail Tetkin, "Iran i Rossiya Mogut Nachat Ispolzovat Kriptovaluty dlya Obkhoda Sanktsiy," RBC, May 17, 2018, <https://www.rbc.ru/crypto/news/5afd4fb69a794757df44fa3a>.

¹²⁷ Mikhail Tetkin, "Iran i Rossiya Mogut Nachat Ispolzovat Kriptovaluty dlya Obkhoda Sanktsiy," RBC, May 17, 2018, <https://www.rbc.ru/crypto/news/5afd4fb69a794757df44fa3a>.

2.4.2 Limitations of Iranian-Russian dialogue

To conclude, it is possible to affirm that Rouhani's presidency underlined two main directions of the Russian-Iranian political relationship: the situation in Syria and the future of the JCPOA. In both cases, the two countries had endeavored to reinforce cooperation and essential effects were achieved. Yet, the Russian-Iranian dialogue also had its limitations. Thus, Moscow and Tehran were obliged to become partners in Syria under different contexts. However, their collaboration was occasionally limited by those cases where they were both involved in this interaction.

The additional further forming of the full-fledged alliance was hindered by shared mistrust and concerns that this could damage the Russian and Iranian relationship with third parties. It could therefore be summed up that the Russian-Iranian dialogue on Syria had already attained the maximum of its potential by the end of the first Rouhani presidential term in the office.

While actively arguing about the issue of United States sanctions with Moscow, Tehran still counted on Russia as the last resort in the JCPOA agreement.

This was given by the fact that Russia could offer Iran only diplomatic sustain and some marginal practical measures to balance the negative results of American sanctions. The latter was large because of the lack of economic potential to support Iran, although, if it could, Moscow would assist Tehran in sanctions evasion. It may be expected that Moscow would be more active in protecting Iran's interests in its stand-off with the United States and try to mobilize the international community against the United States.

Russia and Russian business, contrarily, had decided to follow the "wait-and-see" strategy: Moscow did not want to leave Tehran but needed to limit its economic presence in Iran considering the threat of the American secondary restrictions to be imposed against Russian business.¹²⁸

CHAPTER III: The United States

3.1 Iran and United States' bilateral relationship

¹²⁸ Kozhanov N. "Foreign Policy of Iran under President Hassan Rouhani's First Term (2013-2017). Edited by Luciano Zaccara.

This part of the dissertation aims at analyzing and describing the evolution of the relationship between Iran and the United States over the years, to better understand the interests that the United States had in the Middle East and the different positions taken by Obama and Trump regarding the Iran Nuclear Deal.

3.1.1 An historical analysis of Iran-United States relations until 1953.

It is necessary to analyze the historical framework of US-Israel bilateral relations to comprehend the contemporary relations and the positions taken by the United States' Presidents regarding the Iranian Deal, given the fact that the United States' role in Iranian politics and security has been both crucial and controversial.

The United States started to be engaged in Iran during the 19th century, when American missionaries arrived in Persia. The event signed the beginning of the U.S. diplomatic mission to Iran began in 1883.¹²⁹

It is necessary to mention that the United States' commitment in Iran was not one of the first interests that United States had in the world, until the discovery of oil. Indeed, with the finding of oil in Iran, the American oil giants immediately started to have economic interests there and for this reason, the United States started to focus their attention to Iran.¹³⁰

The American oil giants soon developed economic interests and Iran became the principal point of the United States' interests.¹³¹

The moment in which the interests of the U.S came to the surface, was when, in 1941, Iran started to consider the United States as a natural ally, insofar the U.S sustained it during the Anglo-Soviet invasion through economic and military support.¹³²

The first turning point in their relationship came when Muhammad Reza Shah substituted his father with the sustain of the United States and from that moment on the American commitment in Iran grew stronger.¹³³

¹²⁹ Hussain Nazir. "US-Iran Relations: Issues, Challenges and Prospects". Vol. 12, No. 2 (2015), pp. 29-47

¹³⁰ Hussain Nazir. "US-Iran Relations: Issues, Challenges and Prospects". Vol. 12, No. 2 (2015), pp. 29-47

¹³¹ Barbara Slavin, *Bitter Enemies, Bosom Friends: Iran, The U.S., and the Twisted Path to Confrontation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007).

¹³² Hussain Nazir. "US-Iran Relations: Issues, Challenges and Prospects". Vol. 12, No. 2 (2015), pp. 29-47

¹³³ William R. Polk, *Understanding Iran* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 100-108.

The nationalist forces and the Islamic clergy always looked at the United States' excessive commitment in Iran, negatively. These two reasons pushed Mohammad Mosaddegh to lead a coup which ended with the removal of the Shah of Iran in 1953. Nevertheless, the American response succeeded in putting the Shah back in power and this further strengthened US involvement in Iran. ¹³⁴

When Great Britain left the Gulf in 1969, Iran finally became the most influential, strong and big partner of the United States in the Middle East. The Shah became more assertive in the region but at the same time repressive domestically. ¹³⁵

It has to be noticed that the nationalist coup of 1953 had already awakened the Islamic clergy in Iran, and additionally Ayatollah Khomeini soon became a sign of "resistance and hope" to the common Iranians against Shah's repression and suppression. It took more than two decades for Ayatollah Khomeini to achieve enough sustain to bring a popular revolution and remove the Shah of Iran in 1979 and the United States' commitment. ¹³⁶

In summary, similarities can be seen from this historical analysis: the United States was involved in regime change in Iran in both 1942 and 1953, and still maintains that revolutionary Iranian regime change is possible and important to achieve its interests.

The United States tried regime change in the 2009 presidential election when Mir Hossein Mousavi was endorsed for the presidential race. This option was rejected when it was revealed that Mousavi was a follower of the nationalistic approach. ¹³⁷

Moreover, the permanent American engagement in Iran has aroused popular dissatisfaction and also anti-Americanism, which later turned into the hallmark of revolutionary Iran's foreign policy posture.

Hussain Nazir affirmed: "Also, the US has been unable to understand the Iranian national psyche and character studded with religious ideology in the post-revolutionary Iran. Moreover, the Iranian bellicosity and conflictual posturing brought domestic dividends but at the cost of

¹³⁴ Hussain Nazir. "US-Iran Relations: Issues, Challenges and Prospects". Vol. 12, No. 2 (2015), pp. 29-47

¹³⁵ Shireen T. Hunter, *Iran and the World: Continuity in a Revolutionary Decade*, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 46-54.

¹³⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁷ Hussain Nazir. "US-Iran Relations: Issues, Challenges and Prospects". Vol. 12, No. 2 (2015), pp. 29-47

international isolation, which continued during the rule of Ayatollah Khomeini and later during Mahmood Ahmadinejad's presidency.”¹³⁸

Basically, the United States' behavior which aimed at changing Iran's regime put pressure on the country and generated feelings of annoyance on Iran's population.

3.1.2 Revolutionary Iran phase and the United States

The fall of the Shah of Iran represented a huge loss for the United States' influence in the Middle East.

As a consequence, the Iranian leadership showed a revolutionary fervor, to which the United States reacted with counter-actions that worsened the bitterness of the bilateral relationship.¹³⁹

The United States answered with the following counter-actions: the taking over of the United embassy staff as a hostage in Tehran and freezing the Iranian assets in the United States.

Some events further bothered the Iranian leadership, as the Western support on Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88), and finally the demolition of an Iranian airliner with 370 people on board by the United States in July 1988.¹⁴⁰

In the aftermath of the Kuwait crisis (1990-91), the United States adopted the “dual containment” strategy against Iran and Iraq, which did not lead to the desired aims.¹⁴¹

The Iranian opposition to the United States' engagement in the Middle East and its constant support to Iran had won a lot of sustain for Iran in the region. Iran had found two regional proxies, Hezbollah and Hamas, to undermine the United States and Israeli role in the regional security dynamics. Iranian opposition to the “Peace Process” and continued United States political and military support to Israel against the Palestinians has toughened the Iranian position vis-à-vis the United States.

Furthermore, the application of negative adjectives by Iran as the “Great Satan” and by Iran such as “Great Satan” and by the United States as “Islamic Fundamentalism”, “Rogue State” and lastly “Axis of Evil” turned out as added fuel to the fire in the United States – Iran bilateral

¹³⁸ Hussain Nazir. “US-Iran Relations: Issues, Challenges and Prospects”. Vol. 12, No. 2 (2015), pp. 29-47

¹³⁹ R.K. Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran: Challenge and Response in the Middle East*, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 21-22.

¹⁴⁰ Hussain Nazir. “US-Iran Relations: Issues, Challenges and Prospects”. Vol. 12, No. 2 (2015), pp. 29-47

¹⁴¹ F. Gregory Gause, ‘The Illogic of Dual Containment’ *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 1994.

relations. Therefore, from the “dual containment” strategy to the “regime change” the United States was unable to shape the Iranian idea. ¹⁴²

As affirmed by Nazir Houssani: “The post 9/11 regional security framework brought the United States and Iran closer: the United States defeated two main regional enemies of Iran. Taliban, an ideological and political menace in Afghanistan in 2001, and Saddam Hussein in Iraq, a regional security threat to Iran in 2003. In exchange, Iran offered logistical support for United States’ actions in Afghanistan and eased its positions with the United States’ role in Afghanistan and Iraq” ¹⁴³

However, the detection of the Iranian nuclear program in 2002 became an additional reason of conflict between the two countries. The conflicting position on the nuclear issue from both the countries proved unconvincing for both: Iranian affirmation of “right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy under Article IV of the non-proliferation treaty” and the United States’ position of “Iranian pursuit of Weapons of Mass Destruction”.

The agreement on Additional Protocol to the NPT and the United Nations imposed regime sanctions against Iran since 2006 were seen as counter-productive by Iran. ¹⁴⁴

It is also important to mention the fact that, despite the different approaches of the two countries concerning bilateral and regional concerns, both have tried to make positive overtures. Moreover, both moderate Iran presidents, Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami ¹⁴⁵ kept a “critical commitment” with the United States’ European allies, the EU-3.

Around 1998, there have been positive moves that, however, culminated into any tangible outcome due to the severe “trust deficit” that existed in their relationship: both countries’ attempts to normalize the relations and to promote a better understanding between the two failed.

¹⁴² Donette Murray, *US Foreign Policy and Iran: American-Iranian Relationship since the Islamic Revolution*, (London: Routledge, 2010).

¹⁴³ Hussain Nazir. “US-Iran Relations: Issues, Challenges and Prospects”. Vol. 12, No. 2 (2015), pp. 29-47

¹⁴⁴ Abbas Maleki and Kaveh L. Afrasiabi, ‘Iran’s Foreign Policy After 11 September’ *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Vol. IX, Issue 2, Winter/Spring 2003.

¹⁴⁵ Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *After Khomeini: The Iranian Second Republic* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); and Ghonche Tazmini, *Khatami’s Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

The new United States president Barak Obama came with his policy strategy of “change” in his election campaign and addressed the Iranian issue. Initially, he sustained the normalization of relations between Iran and the United States ¹⁴⁶, nevertheless, the Congressional disapproval of the Presidential actions and its hardened position on the Nuclear Deal between the P5+1 and Iran eclipsed any chances of rapprochement.

With the ending of the first decade of the century analyzed, the event in the Middle East took a different stride: on one hand, the 2010 Arab Spring in the region had the United States lost its credibility, and on the other hand, it gave to the Iranian regional influence due to its democracy against stability generating chaos and unrest in the whole Arab world. This forced the United States to rethink its strategy of “denial” to “engagement” with Iran.

Also, it is important to point out that the continued United Nations’ sanctions, the deteriorating Iranian economy, and the social discontent within Iran also pushed Iran to reconsider its foreign policy strategy.

In 2013 a pragmatist Hassan Rouhani became the Iranian president and with his policy of “prudent moderation”, “constructive commitment” and “heroic flexibility” ¹⁴⁷, led to the interim nuclear deal in November 2013, to the freezing of the Iranian nuclear program and to the easing of sanctions which raised hopes for a long wished rapprochement between the United States and Iran. ¹⁴⁸

Finally, the agreed environment in April 2015 at Lausanne for a comprehensive nuclear deal by June 2015 brought to the historic opportunity for the normalization of relations after 35 years of bitter opposition.

3.1.3 Conflict of interests: the Iranian nuclear program issue until Barack Obama’s presidency.

The relations between Israel and the United States are affected by several concerns bilaterally, regionally, and worldly. In particular, three are the key issue areas that mostly undermine their

¹⁴⁶ President Barak Obama’s video greeting to the Iranian people on March 19, 2015, available at www.whitehouse.gov

¹⁴⁷ Mohammad Javad Zarif, ‘What Iran Really Wants: Iranian Foreign Policy in the Rouhani Era’ Foreign Affairs, May/June 2014.

¹⁴⁸ Stephen Kinzer, ‘US-Iran Détente will be biggest Geopolitical Story of 2014’ Aljazeera, January 6, 2014.

ties: Iran's nuclear program, Iran's alleged support to "terrorist entities", and its opposition to Middle East security architecture.¹⁴⁹

Focusing especially on the Iranian nuclear program, it was initiated with the United States' sponsored "Atom for Peace Program" in the early 1950s. At the end of the 1970s, Iran was afraid that its oil reserves will not be able to meet the requests of the burgeoning population and economic development. Indeed, in 1973, the United States-based Sandford Research Institute predicted Iran's need for nuclear energy and recommended the production of 20,000 MW of nuclear electricity by 1990¹⁵⁰

For this reason, the Shah planned to construct 20 nuclear power reactors and to appease the fears, and he took part in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968 and ratified it in 1970.¹⁵¹

The Iran-Iraq war and the revolution led to the full deactivation of the nuclear program in 1979. Nevertheless, subsequently in 1990, due to the recovery of the request for nuclear energy by Iran, the work on the Bushehr nuclear power plant began again, first with German collaboration and later with Russian support.¹⁵²

Since then Iran has constructed several advanced nuclear facilities spread all over Iran, including plants to enhance the number of nuclear power reactors.¹⁵³

In 2002, the Iranian opposition in exile, particularly Alireza Jafarzadeh, a member of the National Council of Resistance on Iran, disclosed several secret nuclear facilities in Iran. As already highlighted by the current study, in 2003 President Mohammad Khatami in a proclamation confirmed the existence of complex nuclear plants at Natanz capable of producing highly enriched uranium (HEU)¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ Hussain Nazir. "US-Iran Relations: Issues, Challenges and Prospects". Vol. 12, No. 2 (2015), pp. 29-47

¹⁵⁰ Ibidem

¹⁵¹ Esther Pan, "Iran: Curtailing the Nuclear Program" Backgrounder, Council on Foreign Relations, May 13, 2004.

¹⁵² Hussain Nazir. "US-Iran Relations: Issues, Challenges and Prospects". Vol. 12, No. 2 (2015), pp. 29-47

¹⁵³ For a detailed account of Iranian nuclear program see Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Good for the Shah, Banned for the Mullahs: The West and Iran's Quest for Nuclear Power" Middle East Journal 60, no.22006, Muhammad Sahimi. "Iran's Nuclear Program, Part-V" Payvand's Iran News, December 22, 2004, and Gawdat Bahgat "Nuclear Proliferation: The Islamic Republic of Iran" Iranian Studies 39, no.3 (2006).

¹⁵⁴ Hussain Nazir. "US-Iran Relations: Issues, Challenges and Prospects". Vol. 12, No. 2 (2015), pp. 29-47

In 2003, the IAEA inspectors unearthed very developed which had been unrevealed earlier. The IAEA warned Tehran to disclose all supposed activities in the country and open all its nuclear facilities for inspection, or it should be ready to manage the consequences.¹⁵⁵

These revelations gave alarm bells around the world and the Iranian nuclear program became a huge global concern. Despite Iranian affirmations that their nuclear program was purely made for peaceful aims, the Western powers, especially the United States did not trust the Iranian stance and points towards its advanced facilities such as the Enrichment Plant.

The world apprehensions were shown in the United Nations Security Council, which passed a series of resolutions, resulting in military-economic sanctions against Iran from 2006.¹⁵⁶

This was, although Iran signed and ratified all international arms control treaties and constraints including the Additional Protocol, suggested by the EU-3 and the IAEA in 2004.

Direct negotiations on Iran's nuclear ambitions started in early 2013 between the P5+1 and Iran with the final objective of resolving the controversy. The direct talks began with Barack Obama's telephonic talk with President Hassan Rouhani in September 2013. From that specific moment, an interim deal was reached between the two sides in November 2013, which was extended twice for six months until November 2014, to arrive at a definitive deal by June 2015. As it has been mentioned yet, the deal entailed the possibility for Iran to keep nuclear facilities that are insisted were made for peaceful and civilian aims, but they would be subject to strict production limits.¹⁵⁷

Also, Iran got relief from decade-long economic sanctions, especially embargo place on the sale of its oil, and impeded access to the international financial system.¹⁵⁸

While most Iranians celebrated the finalizing of the deal positively, United States' hawkish allies as Israel and Saudi Arabia judge it as a grave danger to the region and the world.

¹⁵⁵ See Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Good for the Shah, Banned for the Mullahs: The West and Iran's Quest for Nuclear Power" Middle East Journal 60, no.22006.

¹⁵⁶ UNSCR 1696 of 21 July 2006, 2) UNSCR 1737 of 23 December 2006 3) UNSCR 1747 of 24 March 2007, 4) UNSCR 1803 of 3 March 2008, 5) UNSCR 1835 of 27 September 2008, 6) UNSCR 1929 of 9 June 2010; see Paul K. Kerr, 'Iran's Nuclear Program: Tehran's Compliance with International Obligations' CRS Report for Congress, December 21, 2011.

¹⁵⁷ Hussain Nazir. "US-Iran Relations: Issues, Challenges and Prospects". Vol. 12, No. 2 (2015), pp. 29-47

¹⁵⁸ "The Iran Nuclear deal: What You Need to Know," New York Times, April 03, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/04/world/middleeast/the-iran-nuclear-deal-what-you-need-to-know.html>."

Besides the mentioned problem areas, there were some more challenges to the normalization of bilateral relations between the United States and Iran: mainly the United States regional allies, the domestic political structures, and institutional hardline approach of the Congress and Iranian majlis towards each other.¹⁵⁹

However, the “existential threat” to Israeli security was represented by the nuclear program. Therefore, Israel was against any normalization of the relationship between Israel and the United States. After the nuclear talks between Iran and the P5+1, Israel launched a diplomatic offensive against the deal. The Israeli premier, Benjamin Netanyahu, ventured to address United States Congress against signing a deal with Iran.¹⁶⁰

As it has already been claimed, in 2015 after long negotiations between Iran and the P5+1, the Iranian nuclear agreement has been dealt with. The deal entailed a lot of measures as the reduction of the number of centrifuges or the break of enrichment at Fordow. However, according to the deal, United States sanctions on Iran regarding security and human rights abuses would remain in place: it provided that AIEA would make inspections on Iranian facilities and sanctions would have been re-imposed if Iran breached the deal.

Generally, the deal seemed to ensure a win-win position for both sides as they had come out of their fixated positions to give diplomacy a possibility for bringing an end to the nuclear controversy that started in 2002.¹⁶¹

The overall context was hailed by Obama who defined it as “a good deal that would address concerns about Iran’s nuclear ambitions. We have reached a historic understanding with Iran.”

¹⁶²

However, President Obama called his regional ally King Salman of KSA, inviting him to Camp David to talk about Iran and the turmoil in the region, and he also talked with Benjamin Netanyahu ensuring that the Iranian deal significantly diminished the Iranian pathway to the nuclear bomb.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Hussain Nazir. “US-Iran Relations: Issues, Challenges and Prospects”. Vol. 12, No. 2 (2015), pp. 29-47

¹⁶⁰ Editorial, ‘Sabotaging a Deal with Iran’ New York Times, March 7, 2015.

¹⁶¹ Hussain Nazir. “US-Iran Relations: Issues, Challenges and Prospects”. Vol. 12, No. 2 (2015), pp. 29-47

¹⁶² Michael Gordon and David Sanger, ‘Iran Agreed to Detailed Nuclear Outline, First step Toward a Wider Deal’ New York Times, April 2, 2015.

¹⁶³ Michael Gordon and David Sanger, ‘Iran Agreed to Detailed Nuclear Outline, First step Toward a Wider Deal’ New York Times, April 2, 2015.

The Iranian foreign minister defined the deal as a “win-win outcome” and he also claimed that “ they would not allow a return to the old system”. ¹⁶⁴

He affirmed that the two countries would have tried to overcome distrust, but he also added that the Iran-United States relationship did not deal with the agreement, given the fact that the two countries had several divergences. ¹⁶⁵

The direct negotiations between John Kerry and Javad Zarif gave the opportunity for mutual understanding between the countries after 35 years of hostility, giving a possibility of a new beginning in the negotiations.. During the 35 years analyzed of the United States and Iran relations, both states have been on a conflicting path with each other, on issues as Iran-Iraq War, Terrorism, Israel, etc.

From Ayatollah- Khatami to Rouhani, Iran and United States have seen contrasting approaches, and finally had firstly considered their national security objectives as a regional power. Likewise, from hostility to amity and containment to engagement, the United States realized that their regional security purposes are interwoven with Iranian regional actions. ¹⁶⁶

From Carter to Reagan and Bush to Obama, strategies of containment to dialogue, the United States came to the power politics in its relations with Iran. Therefore in the regional security complex of the Middle East needed each other. ¹⁶⁷

Despite several challenges and concerns, both sides had shown their will to collaborate and stabilize their relations being circumvented by third parties and a dynamic regional security environment. The start of direct negotiations over the Iranian nuclear issue in September 2013 was a try of their political acumen and diplomacy. The intense extensions of deadline beyond March 31, for reaching an agreed context of understanding for an eventual definitive deal by June 2015 was the clear demonstration of new realities and news beginnings. Despite strong opposition from domestic institutions and key decision-makers, the leadership of Iran and the United States have demonstrated that the road to normalization stands in dialogue, debate, and diplomacy. ¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Iran and world powers strike initial nuclear deal’ Aljazeera, April 3, 2015.

¹⁶⁵ Michael Gordon and David Sanger, ‘Iran Agreed to Detailed Nuclear Outline, First step Toward a Wider Deal’ New York Times, April 2, 2015.

¹⁶⁶ Hussain Nazir. “ US-Iran Relations: Issues, Challenges and Prospects”. Vol. 12, No. 2 (2015), pp. 29-47

¹⁶⁷ Hussain Nazir. “ US-Iran Relations: Issues, Challenges and Prospects”. Vol. 12, No. 2 (2015), pp. 29-47

¹⁶⁸ Hussain Nazir. “ US-Iran Relations: Issues, Challenges and Prospects”. Vol. 12, No. 2 (2015), pp. 29-47

However, the new start in the United States and Iran relations had to resist the baggage of conflictual history, hardline parliaments, dissatisfied allies, and changing regional security environment.

It is necessary to mention the fact that, as will be explained by this study in the following sections, the relationship between Iran and the United States especially regarding the JCPOA changed with the election of the new United States President Donald Trump in 2017. Moreover, in 2018 Trump decided to withdraw from the JCPOA, attacking frontally Iran as it hasn't happened in a long time since the American presidency.

In the following parts, there will be analyzed the American interests in signing the JCPOA, the two different and opposed approaches of Obama and Trump, particularly the United States' position before and after the withdrawal, and the possible future scenarios.

3.2 United States' interests in signing the deal and the Obama administration.

In this section of the research there will be analyzed the interest that the United States had in the Middle East region that led to the sign of the JCPOA. More specifically, there will be analyzed Obama's policy and strategy toward Iran in his two mandates, to better understand his decisions regarding the nuclear issue.

3.2.1 Obama's first mandate

Barack Obama was elected in 2008 and starting from that moment he was supposed to face a situation characterized by the existence of a sanctions regime and the failure of diplomatic efforts to find a solution. As previously analyzed the chance of reaching a deal had been further reduced since 2005, due to the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who belonged to the most intransigent current of the Iranian political class.¹⁶⁹ Thus, Iran was in 2008 disinclined to collaboration and dialogue.

However, the Iranian issue, especially regarding its nuclear program, did not interest only the United States but a multitude of state actors. First of all, the views of the United States' allies in the Middle East region are relevant: in particular, Israel and Saudi Arabia that originally

¹⁶⁹ Parsi T., *Losing an Enemy: Obama, Iran and the Triumph of Diplomacy*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2017.

have not been allies, supported an aggressive policy towards Tehran. Israel particularly proposed, referring to the Iranian nuclear program, the zero enrichment solution: this policy was shared, until 2008, also by the United States' administration consistent with Bush's point of view. This strategy would have entailed that the United States remain involved in the Middle East scenario, to contain potential responses from Iran: basically, it did not consider the possibility to find a diplomatic solution.

Contrarily, European allies preferred a diplomatic solution for a different reason. The first one was economic: since the time of the Clinton presidency, the United States' sanctions have also applied to European companies that sought to create a business with Iranian oil companies.¹⁷⁰

These countries sustained and implemented the sanctions regime but only because they considered sanctions as a useful incentive to push Iran to negotiate a lasting solution to the problem of its nuclear development program.¹⁷¹

On the other hand, the Bush administration favored unilateral action and did not exclude a military operation. For this reason, the so-known EU-3 (the United Kingdom, Germany, and France) decided to initiate individual negotiations in Iran starting from 2003.¹⁷²

However, these negotiations did not lead to any desired objectives and they have been interrupted in 2005 after the resumption of activities at the Isfahan site.¹⁷³

Obama's election in 2008, gave hope for a change in United States policy toward Iran. In his five years in office, Barack Obama never intended to completely reverse the line that Bush followed in his two mandates at the White House that led to the adoption of international sanctions against the Iranian regime. Obama as a democratic candidate shared some assumptions that triggered the policy of the Republican administration then in power: he was clearly against any weaponization of the Iranian nuclear program and sustained that he would do anything in his power to prevent Iran from buying the bomb.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Benjamin, D. & Simon, S., "America's Great Satan. The 40-year Obsession With Iran", in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 98 (6), 2019, pp. 56-66.

¹⁷¹ Parsi, T., *Losing an Enemy: Obama, Iran and the Triumph of Diplomacy*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2017.

¹⁷² Nikmoeen, J., "A Review of Iran's Nuclear Negotiations with the E3 + 3 (2003-2015)", in *World Journal of Research and Review*, Vol. 4 (4), 2017, pp. 29-33.

¹⁷³ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁴ Castiglioni C. 2013. "Obama's policy toward Iran: Comparing First and Second Term". ISPI.

Obama affirmed that he wanted to pursue a serious, coordinated diplomatic effort able to modify global opinion about the American strategy to Iran and strengthen the United States' position and credibility in the region. The final goal was, on the one hand, to apply to the Iranian case the logic of "diplomacy first" that it tried to communicate during his electoral campaign as one of the key points of his foreign policy strategy; on the other hand, it was to change the policy of the previous administration and its rejection to dialogue as a form of punishment to the hostile regime.¹⁷⁵

It is possible to say that both Bush and Obama wished Iran to halt uranium enrichment and to abandon its nuclear program, and to adopt the diplomatic option instead of choosing a military intervention, yet Obama always refused Bush's hard-line approach of diminishing contacts with Tehran as a form of pressure on the Iranian regime, and in the combination of diplomacy and sanctions generally known as "dual-track approach", tried to put more emphasis on the first compared to his predecessor.¹⁷⁶

When Obama took office, the crisis over Iran's nuclear program entered in an extremely difficult moment. Moreover, he had to put all his efforts in the initial stage not only on engaging Tehran but also on preventing Congress from adopting tougher restrictions before the administration had exhausted the option of direct negotiations.¹⁷⁷

The centrality of the nuclear concern in the diplomatic overture to Iran was re-established in the policy review that the State Department produced in April 2009 under the direction of Hilary Clinton's special reporter for the Middle East, Dennis Ross. The review was carried out at the initiative of Obama to recognize how best to implement the new strategy toward Iran launched by the administration and its promise for diplomacy. Thus, he ratifies the so-known "hybrid option" preferred by Ross, a new form of the dual-track strategy based on the mixture of tightening restrictions, providing benefits to Russia and China to support sanctions, while engaging Iran without preconditions.¹⁷⁸

However, this plan has proven difficult to be followed, not only for the difficulties that it presented on the internal sphere but also as a consequence of the particularly bad timing it had to face. As already cited previously, the win of the ultra-conservative Mahmud Ahmadinejad,

¹⁷⁵ Castiglioni C. 2013. "Obama's policy toward Iran: Comparing First and Second Term". ISPI.

¹⁷⁶ Castiglioni C. 2013. "Obama's policy toward Iran: Comparing First and Second Term". ISPI.

¹⁷⁷ Castiglioni C. 2013. "Obama's policy toward Iran: Comparing First and Second Term". ISPI.

¹⁷⁸ Ibidem.

and the widespread allegations of irregularities in the vote brought to the explosion of a popular protest all over the country.¹⁷⁹

Obama denounced the strong repression and the human rights violation, but the priority is given to the negotiations on the nuclear issue consistently limited the tone and the scope of his statements. Eventually, the final result was to attract criticism from those, in Iran and more generally in the international community, who were expecting a more decisive stance in favor of the protesters and, simultaneously, to further complicate the involvement with the leadership in Tehran.¹⁸⁰

Domestically, the election fallout led to the possibility for opponents of diplomacy in Washington to minimize the political area for maneuvering and strengthen the limits of his strategy of commitment, providing strong impetus to revisit the issue of sanctions in the Congress.¹⁸¹

3.2.2 Obama's "Dual Track Strategy into Practice"

The limits highlighted in the previous paragraph, became clear when the administration tried to realize one of the crucial pillars of its approach with Tehran: diplomacy without preconditions. In October 2009, there was a new round of restrictions, that was the first since Obama took office. The event gave the chance for the first bilateral meeting between representatives of the two parties in decades who specifically were the Undersecretary of State William Burns and the Iranian chief negotiator Saeed Jalili; they had individual talks during the meetings, making the most essential bilateral contact between the two countries for 30 years.¹⁸²

The discussions led to a preliminary agreement regarding the so-called fuel-swap proposal, according to which in exchange for a supply of fuel for the Tehran Research Reactor, Iran would embark on an equivalent quantity of uranium enriched to 4 % totaling about 1,200 kilograms and accounting for roughly 80 % of Iran's low-enriched-uranium (LEU) stockpile

¹⁷⁹ Castiglioni C. 2013. "Obama's policy toward Iran: Comparing First and Second Term". ISPI.

¹⁸⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁸¹ Parsi T., *A Single Roll of the Dice*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 2012.

¹⁸² Castiglioni C. 2013. "Obama's policy toward Iran: Comparing First and Second Term". ISPI.

at the time. United States officials retained the deal as a success and the parties agreed to meet again to finalize the swap deal.¹⁸³

Yet, the positivity raised by the Geneva dialogues has only been temporary. Indeed, during the meeting organized some weeks later in Vienna that was necessary to elaborate the details of the deal, the Iranians have called into question the fundamental proposal, complaining about the lack of certainties from the P5+1. At the same time, Congress enhances its push on the White House to speed up on the sanctions track, despite the initial diplomatic success in Geneva.¹⁸⁴

Washington gave an ultimatum to Tehran, also due to the pressure coming domestically, which ended up accelerating the failure of the negotiations. The Iranian leadership eventually failed to provide a final solution to the swap proposal, most of all as a consequence of the domestic opposition to the deal, and the division among the Iranian decision-makers emerged after the June 2009 events¹⁸⁵

Parsi argued: “The Obama administration took a calculated risk when it chose to engage the Iranian government so soon after the electoral scandal. Success could open up significant space for additional diplomacy, but failure, particularly if caused by repercussions of the election dispute, could risk giving the impression that diplomacy as a whole has been exhausted. At the end of the day, it was a risk that did not pay off for the president’s desire to resolve tensions with Iran through diplomacy”¹⁸⁶

The announcement of the failure of negotiation to justify the decision to begin the enrichment of uranium at the 20 percent level in early 2010, has been proved that the climate had changed and the time for negotiations was over. The decision paved the way for the progressive increase of the stockpiled of low-enriched uranium and the enlargement of Iran’s enrichment activities. From that specific moment on, also as a result of the poor outcome of the talks around the swap deal, Washington stepped back from the frontline of negotiations with Iran, moreover from 2010 to 2012 the major suggestions to Iran would be made under the initiative of alternative actors such as Brazil, Turkey, and Russia with limited or no sustain from Washington. In February, the Iranian decision to refuse the United States’ offer to help Tehran purchase

¹⁸³ Castiglioni C. 2013. “Obama’s policy toward Iran: Comparing First and Second Term”. ISPI.

¹⁸⁴ Castiglioni C. 2013. “Obama’s policy toward Iran: Comparing First and Second Term”. ISPI.

¹⁸⁵ Castiglioni C. 2013. “Obama’s policy toward Iran: Comparing First and Second Term”. ISPI.

¹⁸⁶ Parsi T., *A Single Roll of the Dice*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 2012.

medical isotopes on the world market, generated Obama's reaction and with the failure of the Vienna dialogues, marked the beginning of a new phase in the United States' policy strategy toward Iran, based on the so-called "second track": pressure and sanctions.

This was not a sudden change, but rather a gradual realization that the initial attempt at dialogue had not given any result, further alimented by the Congress' pressure to give a firm response to Tehran's provocations.¹⁸⁷

This new stage still comprehended a great effort of diplomacy, but this time toward the other members of the United Nations Security Council, fore and foremost China and Russia, asked to endorse the adoption of multilateral sanctions targeting Tehran's nuclear program. Then the United Nation' Resolution would consequently provide a legal basis for Washington and its allies to give additional measures on Iran.¹⁸⁸

The diplomatic campaign was, most of the time, led personally by Obama and by his trusted Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice. In this context, in May 2010, the Brazilian President Lula da Silva and Turkish Prime minister RecepTayp Erdogan announced that they had stricken an agreement with Iran properly based on the swap proposal of the previous October.¹⁸⁹

The Obama administration was taken by surprise as it enlisted the help of Russia and China in a new round of UN sanctions. The State Department denied the relevance of the agreement the administration was almost entirely opposed to the agreement considered as an unnecessary concession to Tehran in a phase of cohesion between the P5 + 1.¹⁹⁰

By acting as such, the Obama government was clarifying that the negotiations over the Iranian nuclear dispute should have been run by either in the framework of the United Nations Security Council through the means of sanctions or in bilateral dialogue between Washington and Tehran, without external actor entitled to intervene in the concern.¹⁹¹

The United Nation resolution 1929 which imposed tougher restrictions on Iran was passed in early June 2010. The adoption of international means cleared the ground for the action of the

¹⁸⁷ Castiglioni C. 2013. "Obama's policy toward Iran: Comparing First and Second Term". ISPI.

¹⁸⁸ Castiglioni C. 2013. "Obama's policy toward Iran: Comparing First and Second Term". ISPI.

¹⁸⁹ Ibidem

¹⁹⁰ Castiglioni C. 2013. "Obama's policy toward Iran: Comparing First and Second Term". ISPI.

¹⁹¹ Ibidem

United States Congress that two weeks later overwhelmingly approved extensive sanctions that went beyond the United Nation resolution.¹⁹²

To some extent, the passing of Resolution 1929 marked both the highest point and the end of Obama's diplomacy strategy on the Iranian nuclear concern in his first term in office.

Parsi claimed that "A year and a half into his presidency, President Barack Obama was celebrating not the diplomatic victory he had been seeking, but rather the imposition of sanctions he had hoped to avoid" ¹⁹³

By securing the approval of United Nations' sanctions before an intervention of the Congress that would strongly undermine his position as a negotiator, he demonstrated the strength vis-à-vis its domestic and international interlocutors.¹⁹⁴

It is true that at the beginning of his presidency he tried to avoid the negative language used by his predecessor had been accused of, preferring a style of communication-based on shared respect. Though, when he was asked to put in practice this approach and enter the negotiations without precondition, Obama fulfilled this goal only partially. Thus, he never abandoned the idea of Iranian suspension of all its enrichment facilities and he never accepted to recognize Tehran's nuclear rights under the NPT, as the Europeans counterpart did in the early 2000s. ¹⁹⁵ All these elements tested to be essential in the failure of the negotiations as the Iranians used them to justify their refusal of the P5+1 proposals. As has been claimed, some gestures marked his departure from the Bush years, yet the degree of the departure should not be excessive. ¹⁹⁶ When Obama became president, he was intrigued by what would later be identified as the "grand bargain," or the idea that diplomacy with respect to the nuclear issue should involve broader negotiations that took into account other issues such as Iran's role in the region, its involvement in the Syrian war, Iraq and Afghanistan. ¹⁹⁷

Within two years of taking office, some limitations both domestic and international, bad timing, and some fragilities in his overall strategy thwarted his efforts, turning him into what has been

¹⁹² Castiglioni C. 2013. "Obama's policy toward Iran: Comparing First and Second Term". ISPI.

¹⁹³ Parsi T., *A Single Roll of the Dice*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 2012.

¹⁹⁴ Castiglioni C. 2013. "Obama's policy toward Iran: Comparing First and Second Term". ISPI.

¹⁹⁵ Castiglioni C. 2013. "Obama's policy toward Iran: Comparing First and Second Term". ISPI.

¹⁹⁶ S.M. WALT, *Restoring Solvency. Barak Obama's Foreign Policy Priorities*, «American Review», November 2009.

¹⁹⁷ Castiglioni C. 2013. "Obama's policy toward Iran: Comparing First and Second Term". ISPI.

described as a "progressive pragmatist," progressive when possible, pragmatic when necessary.¹⁹⁸

The Iranian nuclear issue proved to be a major manifestation of this. Several factors led the president to do so: pressure from regional allies, particularly Israel and Saudi Arabia; the difficult search for compromise with other UN Security Council actors, especially Moscow and China; and the drain on resources and energy on many other initiatives the administration has undertaken.¹⁹⁹

Still, the more serious challenge that the Obama administration had to cope with was internal, specifically the pressure coming from Capitol Hill that, as the result of the 2010 Congressional elections, was dominated by the Republican party. Indeed, as affirmed by Jay Solomon in the Wall Street Journal "The Obama administration has fought Congress on Iran sanctions for much of its time in office".²⁰⁰

The other crucial restraint came from the interlocutor, which was the Iranian government.

The Iranian government seemed to be a very tough counterpart to deal with, strict to keep its nuclear policy but also bound to a growing isolation, due to its internal cohesion by the struggle between its main centers of power, both internally and globally delegitimized by the scenarios of June 2009.²⁰¹

The outbreak of the Arab Spring in early 2011, tough adding incentives for Tehran's commitment to the stabilization of the region, further deflected energies and resources from the Iranian dossier.

In January 2012, Obama gained European backing for a new round of restrictions that included an embargo on Iranian oil, which entered into force in July. In April the P5+1 and Iran renewed negotiations after more than two years after the failure of the swap proposal and agreed to work together on a step-by-step process with reciprocal actions of confidence-building.²⁰²

Nevertheless, the upcoming elections in the United States and Iran complicated the negotiations and made it difficult for both presidents to get involved in any deal during the electoral

¹⁹⁸ M.S. INDYK, K.G. LIEBERTHAL – M.E. O'HANLON, Scoring Obama's Foreign Policy. A Progressive Pragmatist Tries to Bend History, «Foreign Policy», vol. 91, no. 3, May/June 2012

¹⁹⁹ Castiglioni C. 2013. "Obama's policy toward Iran: Comparing First and Second Term". ISPI.

²⁰⁰ J. SOLOMON, White House, Congress Clash on Iran, «Wall Street Journal», 25 October 2013.

²⁰¹ Castiglioni C. 2013. "Obama's policy toward Iran: Comparing First and Second Term". ISPI.

²⁰² Castiglioni C. 2013. "Obama's policy toward Iran: Comparing First and Second Term". ISPI.

competition; in this framework, the stalemate emerged as the only possible choice for both actors.

3.2.3 Obama's second mandate

During the 2012 electoral campaign, a good deal of attention was devoted to the Iranian issue. Obama was accused by some United States' Republican candidates of passiveness and repeatedly claimed their willingness to act militarily to avoid that Iran could buy nuclear weapons.

Obama, though without presenting a new strategy of involvement, reiterated his reluctance to this course of action trying, simultaneously, to defend himself from the accusation of not having done enough to prevent Iran from joining this nuclear club.²⁰³

The P5+1 negotiations renewed in Istanbul in April 2012, although they gave a sign of slight hope, still seemed limited by the preconditions of both sides. After months of hostility, and on the eve of the 2013 elections, the struggle between President Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, key players in the Iranian political scene, was still ongoing.

Against this somewhat negative backdrop, and with the administration's failures that had occurred over the previous four years, Obama's victory was interpreted as an opportunity to capitalize and a sign of hope. At the beginning of the second term, the Obama administration was asked to change the U.S. strategy towards Tehran that had proven to be unsuccessful. Therefore, it was asked to achieve the goals set in 2008 and not achieved either because of the administration or because of the events of 2009.

Yet with the pressure coming from the Congress and the allies and with the upcoming vote in Iran, Obama and his very new upcoming vote in Iran, Obama and John Kerry, who was his very active new Secretary of State, could do not a lot in the aftermath of the elections to get the negotiations out of the stalemate.

Both the United States and Iran's inability to renounce to some of their preconditions, first of all, the United States' request for the suspension of all Iranian enrichment facilities and Tehran's demand to acknowledge Iran's nuclear rights, proceeded to make any progress nearly impossible.

The months that preceded Obama's victory had witnessed an escalation of tension between the two parties, with the Republicans increasingly determined to put in practice a policy of obstructionism, as already analyzed previously. Even arguments as measures with traditional

²⁰³ Ibidem

bipartisan support, as subsidies to the agricultural sector, had indeed become a battleground and were not approved.²⁰⁴

For the Democrats, therefore, it was important to regain control of the House. In the previous paragraph, the tendency of the Congress to approve with great majorities measures against Iran, in contrast to the strategy pursued by Obama, was highlighted.

It must be added, however, that these proposals were initially presented in the appropriate Committees; thus, having a Democratic chairman at the head of the key committees could avoid the presentation in the House of bills being too hostile to the President. Additionally, the chairman has an influential role in determining which hearings to schedule and which issue to concentrate and work on.

The presence of John Kerry at the head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, therefore, had a protective effect regarding the presidential action (even though he obviously could not block all economic sanctions proposals, since there was almost an anonymous consensus).

Moreover, the obstructionist behavior of the Republican Party has provided Obama with the opportunity to reunite his party around his Iran policy, thus undermining the approach of the Congress. The first results were seen as early as February 2012, when many Democratic Senators showed skepticism towards authorizing military action against Iran- especially in case Romney won.²⁰⁵

However, the 2012 elections delivered a scenario – in Congress – very similar to the previous one: the Democrats maintained control of the Senate with a three-seat advantage; in the House, however, while narrowing the gap, they still had more than 30 seats fewer than the Republicans.

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To what concerns another of the intervening variables, however, the new Obama administration has been more cohesive than in the first term. John Kerry replaced Hilary Clinton in the role of Secretary of State. Kerry was more inclined towards using diplomacy with Iran rather than

²⁰⁴ Rudalevige, A., 2015, “Executive Agreements and Senate Disagreements”, in *Washington Post.com*. Accessed on 24 April 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/03/10/executive-agreements-and-senate->

²⁰⁵ Bolton, A., 2012, “Democrats Split on Handling Iran Threat”, in *The Hill.com*, ultimo accesso 23 aprile 2020, <https://thehill.com-homenews/senate/210471-dems-split-on-handling-iran-threat>

²⁰⁶ Del Pero, M., *Era Obama. Dalla Speranza del Cambiamento all'Elezione di Trump*, Feltrinelli Editore, Padova, 2017.

his predecessor, as also claimed by Parsi, the former First Lady's presidential aspirations prompted her not to expose herself personally on politically divisive issues.²⁰⁷

Additionally to Kerry's appointment, other changes in the administration healed the existing dissent on one of the key negotiating issues: recognizing Iran's right to have a uranium enrichment program. In 2013, also other officials, as Gary Samore (White House Coordinator for Arms Control and Weapons of Mass Destruction), were replaced.

In the second mandate, then, the intervening variable of dissension within the administration became a factor in favor of Obama's strategy. All of the factors analyzed were fundamental in positively influencing Obama's action. The turning point, nevertheless, came with a change in the independent variable of the international scenario: in June 2013, the moderate Hassan Rouhani was elected president of Iran in the first round.²⁰⁸

Differently from 2009, Khamenei decided not to intervene, thus recognizing Rouhani's win.²⁰⁹

This event is crucial not only because of the victory of a moderate candidate but also because the favorite Saeed Jalili, conservative and former head of the Iranian delegation who negotiated, without much success, with the P5+1 group was defeated. Due to Jalili's uncompromising stance, his victory would have further complicated the diplomatic solution.²¹⁰

Moreover, Rouhani's victory affected the behavior of Congress and, therefore, one of the two intervening variables. Before his election, indeed, both chambers had kept their strategy of open hostility to the Islamic Republic. On May 8, a bill had been proposed and it would have further tightened sanctions against the Iranian financial system.

Moreover, on July 31, shortly before Rouhani's inauguration, the House had almost unanimously approved a new bill that would impose new sanctions.

It has to be noted that, for the objectives of the intervening variable of unified or divided government, this bill never made it to the Senate floor for a vote.

As pointed out earlier, the benefits of unified government should not be analyzed in comparison to votes, but also by considering the votes that do not occur.

²⁰⁷ Parsi, T., *Losing an Enemy: Obama, Iran and the Triumph of Diplomacy*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2017.

²⁰⁸ Asgari, M., 2013, "Hassan Rouhani wins Iran presidential election", in *Bbc.com*, ultimo accesso 23 maggio 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-22916174>

²⁰⁹ Hurst, S., "The Iranian Nuclear Negotiations as a Two-Level Game: The Importance of Domestic Politics", in *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 27 (3), 2016, pp. 545-567.

²¹⁰ Parsi, T., *Losing an Enemy: Obama, Iran and the Triumph of Diplomacy*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2017.

After his inauguration, Rouhani has taken a very conciliatory approach; moreover, in September 2013 he wrote an editorial in the *Washington Post*, in which he vindicated his programmatic platform based on hope and prudence and also invited the international actors for a constructive commitment with Iran.²¹¹

These openings affect both at the international level because they have instilled optimism in some European countries, and at the level of the United States Congress: within the Chambers, indeed, advocates of diplomacy have been able to pursue their strategy more forcefully, not having a controversial counterpart as Ahmadinejad.²¹²

Obama's strategy, based on reconciliation with the Muslim world and diplomacy, made additional steps forward in September 2013, during a plenary session of the United Nations General Assembly. Indeed, on that occasion, he affirmed his willingness to resolve Iranian and Pakistani concerns, and, as a sign of de-escalation, cited Khamenei's fatwa against the development of atomic weapons.²¹³

Moreover, in these months, while the P5+1 group negotiations did not produce many results, Oman's secret channel had allowed the two delegations to make much progress and reach a tentative agreement.

Despite some tensions with European countries - which challenged the United States' decision to negotiate in secret in Oman, without informing anyone, Iranian Foreign Minister Javid Zarif announced on November 24 that the parties had approved a tentative agreement, Joint Plan of Action (JCPOA).²¹⁴

Although it was only tentative, the deal was a considerable achievement in several respects: first, it confirmed the soundness of the approach pursued by Obama, as it was indeed possible to negotiate even with historically enemy countries. Moreover, it undermined one of the

²¹¹ Rouhani, H., 2013, "President of Iran Hassan Rouhani: Time to Engage", in *Washington Post.com*, ultimo accesso 24 aprile 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/president-of-iran-hassan-rouhani-time-to-engage.html>

²¹² Parsi, T., *Losing an Enemy: Obama, Iran and the Triumph of Diplomacy*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2017.

²¹³ The White House, 2013, *Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly* (Transcript), ultimo accesso 25 aprile 2020, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/24/remarks-president-obama-address-united-nations>

²¹⁴ Parsi, T., *Losing an Enemy: Obama, Iran and the Triumph of Diplomacy*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2017.

assumptions promoted by Israel and accepted by almost a member of Congress, meaning that Iran was not a rational actor and, therefore, should not be treated as such.²¹⁵

This rebuttal could further contribute to aligning more and more Democratic congressmen with the line taken by the president, undermining bipartisan unity in the legislative body.

Moreover, to achieve this ideal, Obama's actions were driven to a greater extent by his principles. Obviously, a decisive role was also played by Rouhani, but the change from the first mandate was evident: in this case, it was almost exclusively the international scenario that guided the presidential action in foreign policy. Alone, the new Iranian president would not have been sufficient.

The United States needed to compromise and recognize Iran's right to enrich uranium, subject to the NPT treaty. This provision is present in the interim agreement. The Bush administration, which followed a unilateralism in both domestic politics and the international arena, would not compromise with a militarily inferior nation that was part of the Axis level of Evil.

The Obama doctrine, on the other hand, was based on an awareness of the limits of the United States, and the JPOA reflected this view.²¹⁶ Additionally, it is important to remember that Obama wanted to reduce the commitment in the Middle East.

Another difference from the first term is that this time, Obama acted more decisively toward Congress. Moreover, even though in the first years of his presidency he had acted several times one-sidedly and using a broad interpretation of the president's powers, as in the case of participation in Libya.²¹⁷

However, to what concerns the Iranian case, he had been more cautious. A confirmation of the change in approach can be noted in the State Union speech delivered in January 2014. Indeed, one month earlier, Minister Zarif had clarified that if the United States imposed new sanctions, then negotiations for a final agreement would immediately stop for good.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Goldberg, J., 2009, "Netanyahu to Obama: Stop Iran – Or I Will", in *The Atlantic.com*, ultimo accesso 23 aprile 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com-magazine/archive/2009/03/netanyahu-to-obama-stop-iran-or-i-will/307390/>

²¹⁶ Beinart, P., 2015, "Why the Iran Deal Makes Obama's Critics So Angry", in *The Atlantic.com*, ultimo accesso 23 aprile 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/07/iran-nuclear-deal-obama/398450/>

²¹⁷ Ackerman, B., 2016, "Is Obama Enabling the Next President to Launch Illegal Wars?", in *The Atlantic.com*, ultimo accesso 23 aprile 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/08/obama-illegal-wars/497159/>. Hendrickson, R. C., *Obama at War: Congress and the Imperial Presidency*, University Press of Kentucky, 2015.

²¹⁸ Parsi, T., *Losing an Enemy: Obama, Iran and the Triumph of Diplomacy*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2017.

Yet, a few days later, Senators Robert Menendez and Mark S. Kirk had introduced a bill to strengthen the restrictions regime. During the State of the Union, Obama has responded to the action of the two senators and made clear that he would veto it.²¹⁹

The president's bet, then, was that the Republicans would not find enough Democrats to grant the bill a larger majority than two-thirds.

Until a few years earlier the bet would likely have been lost, but after the JPOA, nevertheless, more and more congressmen began to sustain the diplomatic effort. Partly due to this, the bill's co-sponsors stopped at 59, not even sufficient to pass the filibuster.²²⁰

Obama's strategy toward Tehran was based on progressive disengagement in the Middle East. During his eight years as president, this conviction has grown stronger and stronger, in part due to the political leaders in the region, including Netanyahu and the Saudi royal family²²¹.

Regarding the Israeli Prime Minister, the disagreement over the approach to be used toward Iran was stark from the beginning but gradually enhanced as it became clear that diplomacy was producing results.

Instead, as far as the Saudis were concerned, the issue was not just about Iran. Indeed, already in 2002, Obama had clearly expressed concerns toward Iran by affirming: *"You want a fight, President Bush? Let's fight to make sure our so-called allies in the Middle East, the Saudis, and the Egyptians, stop oppressing their people, and suppressing dissent, and tolerating corruption and inequality, and mismanaging their economies so that their youth grow up without education, without prospects, without hope, the ready recruits of terrorist cells"*²²²

Its openness to the historical enemies of the United States, therefore, has been immediately related to the will to question some of the decades-old paradigms of the United States. Also, with time, and therefore, with the failure of the Arab Springs and the rise of new contracts, the

²¹⁹ The White House, 2014, *President Barack Obama's State of the Union Address* (Transcript).

²²⁰ Parsi, T., *Losing an Enemy: Obama, Iran and the Triumph of Diplomacy*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2017.

²²¹ Goldberg, J., 2016, "The Obama Doctrine", in *The Atlantic.com*.

²²² NPR, 2009, "Transcript: Obama's Speech Against the Iraq War", in *Npr.org*.

president became more skeptical of the opportunity of improving the situation in the Middle East.²²³

Obama's intervention, eagerness to find a deal with Iran, was also influenced by the independent variable of the international scenario. Indeed, despite restrictions, Iran was continuing with its uranium enrichment program. According to Parsi, the Islamic Republic acted in this way precisely to demonstrate to the international community the frivolity of sanctions and thus, to convince the P5+1 group to negotiate more favorable terms.

More specifically, the objective was to end the Middle East regional order based on the containment and isolation of Iran.²²⁴

Moreover, Israel by showing its hostility to the diplomatic attempt ended up favoring it albeit not intentionally. Netanyahu has repeatedly affirmed that, if sanctions did not convince Iran to give up its uranium enrichment program, then military action would have to be considered.²²⁵

Former Israel Defense Minister Ehud Barak confirmed that, on at least two occasions, Netanyahu had decided to engage Iran, but had been blocked by the military forces.²²⁶

As pointed out by Parsi, should Israel declare war, Iran would necessarily respond, sparking a new conflict in the Middle East. In such a situation, the United States would have had to support its historically. The prospect of being involved in the third war, always in the same region, in less than two decades was in line with Obama's strategic design. Israeli threats, therefore, provided an additional incentive to pursue the diplomatic approach.²²⁷

To sum up, at the time of his election, Barack Obama wished to operate a disengagement from the Middle East, in favor of a more incisive role in the Far East. Moreover, he preferred a multilateral approach and he wanted to prevent a conflict with Iran at all costs. For this reason, his two mandates were characterized by a long negotiation process with the Islamic Republic, to find a deal that would prevent it from developing and using an atomic bomb.

To achieve this aim, the variable of the international context has been decisive: the election of Hassan Rouhani and the open hostility of Israel have represented, for different motives,

²²³ Goldberg, J., 2016, "The Obama Doctrine", in *The Atlantic.com*.

²²⁴ Ibidem.

²²⁵ Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012, *PM Netanyahu Addresses UN General Assembly*.

²²⁶ Staff, T., 2015, "Barak: Netanyahu wanted to strike Iran in 2010 and 2011, but colleagues blocked him", in *Times of Israel.com*,

²²⁷ Parsi, T., *Losing an Enemy: Obama, Iran and the Triumph of Diplomacy*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2017.

incentives to pursue the diplomatic effort. Another factor that has to be considered is that, compared to the four years, in the second term Obama was able to benefit from a much more cohesive government. Moreover, over the years the president has taken a less cautious and more unprejudiced approach. If he decided to give the JCPOA the form of a treaty, congressional approval would have been unlikely. Instead, having opted for an executive agreement, it was the Republican-led Congress that had to find a strategy to get veto-proof majorities, thus putting the administration in a strong position.

The Republican party checked on both houses but did not have enough majority in the Senate to avoid a filibuster. Moreover, the presence of a divided government paradoxically helped Obama: Netanyahu's speech in the House pushed many Democrats to be more supportive of the President's effort. Iran was historically a bipartisan issue, but the actions of the aforementioned domestic and international actors changed the scenario, affecting the intervening variable of party polarization.

In Iran, Obama was able to change the paradigm of the United States' policy and obtain a deal with a historical enemy.²²⁸

The JCPOA, however, contains several critical aspects, previously highlighted, generated by some factors: first, the divided government still produced limitations for Obama because he could not promise the removal of sanctions, but could only rely on waiver authority, which has a temporary effect and to be constantly renewed. Moreover, Israeli rhetoric has increased the risk of the fight, weakening and the U.S. negotiating position and strengthening that of the Iranians (aware of the U.S. president's desire to avoid a new war at all costs).

Lastly, the weaknesses of the agreement, have played a fundamental role in recent years: the Trump presidency, indeed, has leveraged precisely those factors to lend legitimacy to its strategy towards Iran, which as it will be described in the current research, differs. Significantly from that of its predecessor.

3.3 Trump administration and the effects on the JCPOA.

Before analyzing Trump's foreign policy towards Iran and his strategy over the JCPOA is necessary to summarize what happened until his election.

²²⁸ Harris, P. "President Obama's Partisan Foreign Policy", in *National Interest.org*. 2016.

Generally, it can be affirmed that the provisions of the JCPOA exclusively concerned the Iranian nuclear issue and, therefore, had the precise purpose of avoiding Iran from developing its nuclear program to the point where it could generate an atomic bomb. Simultaneously, a lot of Iran deal' supporters, hoped that this diplomatic success would lead to a relaxation of bilateral relations between Iran and the United States, thus fostering a more cooperative approach on fundamental topics.²²⁹

Despite this hope, the framework immediately showed to be more complex. Indeed, for instance, in October 2015 Iran successfully tested a ballistic missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead.²³⁰

The Obama administration deemed this action non-compliant with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231. For this reason, in January 2016, the president imposed restrictions against those involved in the missile test. Despite the full implementation of the agreement, tensions between the two countries continued to persist. On March 8 and 9, Iran conducted additional missile tests.²³¹

Again, several members of the United States administration, including Secretary of State John Kerry, and Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif provided two different perspectives of analysis: for the former, Iran violated the United Nation Resolution 2231. For the latter, the test is not forbidden by the JCPOA and involved missiles that are developed for the sole aim of self-defense. The latter view was also shared by High Representative Federica Mogherini.²³²

Another breach of the deal was reported on November 8, when the IAEA reported that Iran's stockpile of heavy water was 130.1 tons and, therefore, slightly exceeded the 130-ton limit under the JCPOA; however, subsequently, it was claimed that Iran had performed a transfer of 11 tons of heavy water outside of its national territory, thus falling within the limits of the agreement.²³³

²²⁹ Benjamin, D. & Simon, S., "America's Great Satan. The 40-year Obsession With Iran", in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 98 (6), 2019, pp. 56-66.

²³⁰ The Iran Primer, 2016, "Iran Launches Ballistic Missiles, US Reacts", in *Iran Primer.usip*,

²³¹ The Iran Primer, 2016, "Iran Launches Ballistic Missiles, US Reacts", in *Iran Primer.usip*,

²³² European External Action Service, 2016, *Remarks by High Representative Mogherini Following the Ministerial Meeting of the Joint Commission on the Implementations of the JCPOA*,

²³³ IAEA, 2016c, *Verification and Monitoring in the Islamic Republic of Iran in Light of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231 (2015), Report by the Director General*.

At the time of Trump's election, therefore, Iran had overall complied with the provisions of the JCPOA, although it had committed a violation on at least two occasions.²³⁴

3.3.1 Trump's strategy towards the Middle East.

To what specifically regards Trump's strategy over the deal it is important to mention two crucial elements. Firstly, Trump was against the JCPOA from the beginning and he wanted to renegotiate it. In particular, he had often talked about a new agreement that could also resolve the issue of ballistic missiles: indeed, they could reach Europe and have been one of the reasons why the United States had installed anti-missiles defenses on the continent, which have been a source of tension with Russia.²³⁵

Trump's objective then is twofold. First, he wished to improve relations with the government in Moscow.²³⁶ Additionally, he believed that such a deal could foster United States' disengagement from the Middle East. Surprisingly, he was in favor of reducing commitment in the region.²³⁷ Second, at the same time, some of his believe complicated the achievement of this aim. Moreover, Trump adopted very harsh rhetoric towards Iran and claimed that the new deal should have involved the zero enrichment solution.

As pointed out by Parsi, the two fundamental factors of successful diplomacy during Obama's government was the acceptance of Iran's right to uranium enrichment and the adoption of less aggressive language by the United States. Trump, by not respecting these two conditions, had since the election campaign diminished the chances of engaging in a new negotiation process. In addition, Trump has repeatedly expressed criticism of NATO; As a proponent of an anti-value approach, he retained that allies should act as such and contribute equally to the maintenance of the Atlantic Alliance.²³⁸

²³⁴ Landau, E. B., 2018, "In the Aftermath of the JCPOA: Restoring Balance in the US-Iran Deterrent Relationship", in Litvak, M., Landau, E. B. & Kam, E. (eds.), "Iran in a Changing Strategic Environment", in *Institute for National Security Studies*, Memorandum n. 173, pp. 23-32.

²³⁵ Dottori, G., *La Visione di Trump: Obiettivi e Strategie della Nuova America*, Salerno Editrice, Roma, 2019

²³⁶ Saunders, E. N., 2016, "What a President Trump Means for Foreign Policy"

²³⁷ Gordon, P. H., Doran, M. & Alterman, J. B., "The Trump Administration's Middle East Policy: A Midterm Assessment", in *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 26 (1), 2019, pp. 5-30.

²³⁸ Anton, M., 2019, "The Trump Doctrine", in *Foreign Policy.com*,

Incidentally, this principle had also been expressed a lot of times by Obama.²³⁹ Unlike Obama, Trump adopted a sharper language and, in April 2016, defined NATO as obsolete.²⁴⁰

Trump, so, has from early on risked reducing his possibilities of success in the international arena. The Atlantic alliance and European allies were crucial in combating and resolving various global problems.²⁴¹ This was also true for Iran, especially since three European countries are part of the JCPOA and so is the European Union, which was equally criticized by the Republican presidential candidate during his campaign.²⁴²

Finally, his promise of a tougher approach to Iran was welcomed by Israel and several other Arab countries, but his rhetoric also risked alienating the part of the Muslim world that opposed the regime in Tehran. On several occasions, Trump criticized Obama for his refusal to use the term “*Radical Islamic terrorism*.”²⁴³

Furthermore, Trump wanted to place himself in stark opposition to Obama and the reason was mainly electoral. Indeed, his predecessor’s policies were approved by the majority of the population, but not by Republicans.²⁴⁴

At the same time, his rhetoric on Islam further reduced the possibility of negotiating a new agreement with Iran and had the potential to damage the Middle East alliance system on which the U.S. strategy was based. As will be analyzed, this risk was avoided because the Trump administration transformed its hostility against all forms of Islamism into opposition to political Islam. This allowed him to strengthen ties with states such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia.²⁴⁵

3.3.2 The first Trump’s presidential phase: from the settlement to the JCPOA withdrawal

²³⁹ Goldberg, J., 2016, “The Obama Doctrine”, in *The Atlantic.com*.

²⁴⁰ Dews, F., 2016, “Making Sense of NATO on the US Presidential Campaign Trail”, in *Brookings.edu*,

²⁴¹ Kahl, C. & Brands, H., 2017, “Trump’s Grand Strategic Train Wreck”, in *Foreign Policy.com*,

²⁴² Dottori, G., *La Visione di Trump: Obiettivi e Strategie della Nuova America*, Salerno Editrice, Roma, 2019

²⁴³ Starr-Deelen, D. G., *Counterterrorism from the Obama Administration to President Trump*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2018.

²⁴⁴ Harris, P., 2016, “President Obama’s Partisan Foreign Policy”, in *National Interest.org*,

²⁴⁵ Dottori, G., *La Visione di Trump: Obiettivi e Strategie della Nuova America*, Salerno Editrice, Roma, 2019

After his election, Trump had to select the members of his administration and he decided not to consider all the experts who criticized him in the months leading up to his election.²⁴⁶ For this reason, he was forced to choose much military personnel or people without the necessary experience.²⁴⁷

For example, Trump assigned the role of National Security Advisor to General Michael T. Flynn, who is best known for his positions on Islam. Specifically, he has said that Islam is a political ideology that hides behind religion, and he has also stated that being afraid of Muslims is a rational sentiment.²⁴⁸

In February 2017, twenty-four days after his appointment, Flynn decided to resign following the publication of reports regarding his meeting with Russia's ambassador to Washington, Sergey Kislyak. In his place, another general, Herbert R. McMaster, was appointed. The difference between the two military men is notable: McMaster, following the thinking of former general and CIA director Michael H. Petraeus, has often stated that - to win conflicts in the Middle East - it is necessary not only to kill terrorists, but also to show cultural sensitivity, protect the population, and change social conditions.²⁴⁹

Within the administration, nevertheless, Trump had not only selected conservatives, realists, and internationalists like McMaster.²⁵⁰ Indeed, he had placed them alongside figures considered more nationalists and in line with the president's electoral base.

Due to the presence of two ideologically contrasting groups, and taking into consideration the inexperience of the president and several members of his administration, foreign policy decision-making was often ineffective and did not allow for clear strategies.²⁵¹

²⁴⁶ MacDonald, P. K., "America First? Explaining Continuity and Change in Trump's Foreign Policy", in *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 133 (3), 2018, pp. 401-34.

²⁴⁷ Saunders, E. N., 2018, "Is Trump a Normal Foreign-Policy President?", in *Foreign Affairs.com*, ultimo accesso 20 maggio 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2018-01-18/trump-normal-foreign-policy-president>

²⁴⁸ Kahl, C. & Brands, H., 2017, "Trump's Grand Strategic Train Wreck", in *Foreign Policy.com*,

²⁴⁹ Dottori, G., *La Visione di Trump: Obiettivi e Strategie della Nuova America*, Salerno Editrice, Roma, 2019

²⁵⁰ Pfiffner, J. P., "The Contemporary Presidency. Organizing the Trump Presidency", in *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 48 (1), 2018, pp. 153-167.

²⁵¹ Gans, J. "Trump Finally Has the Dangerous Foreign-Policy Process He Always Wanted", in *Foreign Policy.com*, , <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/02/04/trump-foreign-policy-interagency-process-nsc-dangerous/> . 2020.

The lack of a course of action was also evident in the Iranian case. In the first few months of his presidency, Trump acted in contradiction to his election promises. Conforming to the views of the deal's supporters, the White House certified Iranian compliance with the JCPOA provisions in both April and July of 2015.²⁵²

At the same time, Trump began to lay the groundwork for a marked change in strategy. First, the president acted on the variable of the international system. In May 2017, he attended a summit in Riyadh along with fifty-five leaders and representatives of Muslim-majority states. On that occasion, he called on those present to strive to eradicate religious extremism, promising that the United States would support them in their efforts.²⁵³

In the following months, Trump continued with his strategy towards Iran. Indeed, in September, during a speech delivered during a session of the United Nations General Assembly, he broadly criticized the JCPOA: "*The Iran Deal was one of the worst and most one-sided transactions the United States has ever entered into. Frankly, that deal is an embarrassment to the United States*"²⁵⁴

These were later amplified and confirmed by Netanyahu, indeed in his speech he said that he could not have agreed more with Trump's description of the Iran nuclear deal.²⁵⁵

The two leaders, then, seemed to agree on the strategy to be adopted towards Iran.

On October 13, the president announced that he would not send Congress the quarterly certification on the JCPOA.²⁵⁶ This action-known as decertification-is not in violation of the agreement, but it does grant the legislative body a sixty-day time frame within which canceled

²⁵² MacDonald, P. K., "America First? Explaining Continuity and Change in Trump's Foreign Policy", in *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 133 (3), 2018, pp. 401-34.

²⁵³ The White House, 2017a, *President Trump's Speech to the Arab Islamic American Summit* (Transcript), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-trumps-speech-arab-islamic-american-summit/>

²⁵⁴ The White House, 2017b, *Remarks by President Trump to the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly* (Transcript). <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-72nd-session-united-nations-general-assembly/>

²⁵⁵ Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017, *PM Netanyahu Addresses the United Nations General Assembly* (Transcript).

²⁵⁶ The White House, 2017c, *Remarks by President Trump on Iran Strategy* (Transcript). <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-iran-strategy/>

sanctions could have been reimposed under an expedited procedure ²⁵⁷. Moreover, in his speech, Trump also called on Congress and allies in the P5+1 group to propose solutions (and enact legislation) that would correct the many flaws in the agreement. To underscore the urgency of the situation, Trump also reminded that, if the problem was not resolved, then the United States could exit the JCPOA at any time.

However, his words did not have the effects desired and so, in January 2018, he had to execute the certification again.²⁵⁸

To understand the failure of Trump's strategy it is necessary to consider the variable of the international system. Indeed, Saudi Arabia welcomed Trump's speech. ²⁵⁹

At the same time, nevertheless, European allies reacted differently. A few hours after the United States president's speech, the leaders of Germany, France, and the United Kingdom issued a statement in which they confirmed their support for the JCPOA and recalled that Iran respected and complied with the provision of the agreement.²⁶⁰

Moreover, the leaders still shared concerns about Iran's ballistic missile program and said that they were ready to collaborate with the United States. ²⁶¹ On the other hand, High Representative Mogherini claimed that the deal was working and, therefore, the European Union would continue to implement it. ²⁶²

In addition to allied countries, even within the United States administration, Trump's position was not shared by everyone. For example, on October 3, ten days before the president's speech,

²⁵⁷ Davenport, 2017b, "Understanding the U.S. Compliance Certification and Why It Matters to the Iran Nuclear Deal". <https://www.armscontrol.org/blog/2017-08-29/understanding-us-compliance-certification-why-matters-iran-nuclear-deal>

²⁵⁸ MacDonald, P. K., "America First? Explaining Continuity and Change in Trump's Foreign Policy", in *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 133 (3), 2018, pp. 401-34.

²⁵⁹ Shine, S. & Shavit, E., 2017, "President Trump's Speech on Iran: Goals Without Clear Means of Implementation", in *Institute for National Security Studies.org*.<https://www.inss.org.il/publication/president-trumps-speech-iran-goals-without-clear-means-implementation/>

²⁶⁰ Prime Minister's Office, 2017, *Declaration by the Heads of State and Government of France, Germany and the United Kingdom*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/declaration-by-the-heads-of-state-and-government-of-france-germany-and-the-united-kingdom>

²⁶¹ Ibidem.

²⁶² Davenport, K. & Sanders-Zakre, A., 2017, "The P5+1 and Iran Nuclear Deal Alert, October 20, 2017", in *Arms Control.org*, <https://www.armscontrol.org/blog/2017-10-20/p51-iran-nuclear-deal-alert-october-20-2017>

Mattis was heard by the Senate Armed Service Committee. On that occasion, he stated that remaining within the JCPOA was in the national interest of the United States.²⁶³

Once again, it is possible to note that there is not an unambiguous position on the matter: international and internal events within the administration have surely influenced the inaction of congressmen that, in the sixty days provided by decertification, did not even present a bill to reimpose the sanctions.

Congress did not act for different reasons: first, no one has tried to reimpose sanctions because Trump in his speech did not explicitly refer to them. Instead, the President has talked about fixing the JCPOA's problems. In this case, however, any bill would have had to override filibuster attempts in the Senate. Realizing this, European leaders reached out to Democratic senators, especially non-supporters of the JCPOA, to convince them not to sustain any Republican proposal.²⁶⁴

This attempt succeeded in part because the polarization in Congress reached its highest level ever at that time.²⁶⁵ Thus the failure of decertification was given by the meeting of several variables in the analysis project: the lack of cohesion within the administration generated confusion among congressmen, including Republicans. Moreover, European powers criticized Trump's speech and leveraged a polarized Congress and a Senate controlled by Republicans, but with an insufficient majority to avoid the danger of filibuster. At this juncture, the president's convictions did not play a prominent role, which is why he had to send Congress a new quarterly certification on January 12, 2018.²⁶⁶

3.3.3 Trump's final decision

²⁶³ U.S. Senate, 2017b, *Political and Security Situation in Afghanistan (Transcript)*, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/17-82_10-03-17.pdf

²⁶⁴ Alcaro, R., 2018, "All Is Not Quiet on the Western Front. Trump's Iran Policy and Europe's Choice on the Nuclear Deal", in *IAI.it*, IAI Paper n. 18/07. <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaip1807.pdf>

²⁶⁵ Edwards, G. C. III, "'Closer' or Context? Explaining Donald Trump's Relations with Congress", in *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 48 (3), 2018, pp. 456-479.

²⁶⁶ MacDonald, P. K., "America First? Explaining Continuity and Change in Trump's Foreign Policy", in *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 133 (3), 2018, pp. 401-34.

On January 12, however, Trump issued an ultimatum: if Congress did not enact legislation that would address the many problems with the JCPOA, he would announce his exit from the agreement.²⁶⁷

Again, the presidential strategy was at odds with the position of the European allies, indeed, the day before, High Representative Mogherini and the foreign ministers of France, Germany, and the United Kingdom met the Iranian Foreign minister Zarif, and on that occasion, they reiterated that the JCPOA had made the world safer.²⁶⁸ Unlike other times, Trump has made his campaign promise a reality: indeed, on May 8 he officially affirmed that he was leaving the agreement.²⁶⁹

During his speech, he reasoned his choice by claiming that, after a month of negotiations with European allies, it was clear that the JCPOA could not prevent Iran from coming into possession of atomic weapons.²⁷⁰

He also reiterated that the United States had stopped making empty threats: this is consistent with his ideological beliefs, moreover, Trump during the electoral campaign affirmed that other countries considered the United States weak.²⁷¹

From the domestic point of view, it is necessary to consider the administration variable. Indeed, in March, the president relieved Secretary of State Tillerson of his duties, replacing him with

²⁶⁷ Davenport, K., “Trump Sets Up to Violate Iran Deal”, in *Arms Control Today*, Vol. 47 (9), 2017a, pp. 20-21.

²⁶⁸ Feierstein, G. M., 2018, “Trump’s Middle East Policy at One Year. Policy Lacks Strategic Coherence Despite Rhetoric”.http://education.mei.edu-files/publications/PF2_Feierstein_US_Foreign_Policy_0.pdf

²⁶⁹ Beck, M. & Richter, T., “Fluctuating Regional (Dis-)Order in the Post-Arab Uprising Middle East”, in *Global Policy*, Vol. 11 (1), 2020, pp. 68-74.

²⁷⁰ The White House, 2018a, *Remarks by President Trump on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action* (Transcript). <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-joint-comprehensive-plan-action/>

²⁷¹ The New York Times, *Transcript: Donald Trump’s Foreign Policy Speech* (Transcript). 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/28/us/politics/transcript-trump-foreign-policy.html>

CIA Director Michael Pompeo.²⁷² Compared to his predecessor, is more hostile towards Iran.²⁷³

Additionally, in March, Trump announced that McMaster would be replaced by John Bolton, who serves as Permanent Representative to the United Nations from 2005 to 2006.²⁷⁴

Bolton is a proponent of U.S. interventionism abroad. Concerning Iran, in 2017 he formulated an action plan to exit the JCPOA.²⁷⁵

The new configuration of the Trump administration, then, is more cohesive and in favor of leaving the agreement.

Lastly, in addition to the administration, the international system has also favored the president's actions. Israel and Saudi Arabia have intensified their relations with the U.S. administration. As noted above, in May 2017, Trump proposed to the Saudis a strategy for joint action against Iran. Moreover, the President officially recognized Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel and ordered the relocation of the embassy there.²⁷⁶

The choice to abandon the Iran nuclear deal, then, was coherent with Trump's course of action in the Middle East, indeed Netanyahu has publicly praised the president for his decision.²⁷⁷

As for congress, nonetheless, its role was not prominent. Moreover, Trump was able to make the decision unilaterally because the JCPOA took the form of an executive agreement.

In the last chapter there will be analyzed European Union's position toward the JCPOA, and the possible future perspectives after Biden's election.

²⁷² Baker, P., Harris, G. & Landler, M., 2018, "Trump Fires Rex Tillerson and Will Replace Him with C.I.A. Chief Pompeo", in *The New York Times.com*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/13/us/politics/trump-tillerson-pompeo.html>

²⁷³ Azodi, S. & Slavin, B. "What the Departure of James Mattis Could Mean for Trump's Iran Policy", in *Atlantic Council.org*. 2018. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/what-the-departure-of-mattis-could-mean-for-trump-s-iran-policy/>

²⁷⁴ Elliott, P., 2018, "Donald Trump Just Hired John Bolton. Here's Why That Makes Some Nervous", in *Time.com*. <https://time.com/5212129/john-bolton-hr-mcmaster-donald-trump/>

²⁷⁵ Bolton, J. R., 2017, "How to Get Out of the Iran Nuclear Deal", in *National Review.com*. <https://www.nationalreview.com/2017/08/iran-nuclear-deal-exit-strategy-john-bolton-memo-trump/>

²⁷⁶ The White House, 2017c, *Remarks by President Trump on Iran Strategy* (Transcript)., <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-iran-strategy/>

²⁷⁷ Newman, M. "Netanyahu: Israel 'Fully Supports' Trump's 'bold' Pullout from Iran Deal". [Article]. *The times of Israel.com*. 2018.

Chapter IV: The European Union.

4.1 European Union relations with Iran

This part of the analysis aims at summarizing the relations between Iran and the European Union from the 1990s with the initial commitment to the following containment. Containment was followed by the signature of the JCPOA by the Permanent Members of the Security Council plus Germany representing the European Union, the so-called P5+1.

4.1.1 A brief history of European Union-Iran relations: from “critical dialogue” to a “comprehensive dialogue”.

Since the mid-2000s the controversy over the nuclear deal has dominated the relationship between the European Union and Iran. The European Union’s policy aim in this regard has always been to “achieve a comprehensive, negotiated, long-term settlement which restores international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear program while respecting Iran’s legitimate right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy under the Non-Proliferation Treaty.”²⁷⁸

This declared goal was not different from that of the United States. Brussels, nevertheless, had initially followed another strategy from Washington.

Since the early days of the 1979 Revolution, as already anticipated, relations between Iran and the United States have been marred by shared hostility and mistrust. Washington tried to isolate and contain Iran. For their side, the Europeans have taken a more diplomatic approach and sought to positively intervene in Iran’s domestic and foreign policies by committing the country in commercial and diplomatic relations.²⁷⁹

The two roles became equivalent at the beginning of this decade and Brussels followed Washington’s approach in imposing strict economic restrictions on Iran and suspending most of the means of cooperation.

Since the signing of the JCPOA, nonetheless, the European institutions and members states have vigorously sought to reinsert Iran economically and strategically, while the United States approach has been much more restrained.

²⁷⁸ Council of the EU, “Factsheet: The European Union and Iran”, doc. 5555/2/12 REV2, 23 March 2012.

²⁷⁹ Blockmans S., Ehteshami A., Bahgat G. 2016. “*EU-Relations after Nuclear Deal*”.

The difference between the American and European strategies toward Iran can be explained by historical, commercial, and geopolitical elements.²⁸⁰

Since the 1979 revolution, Iranian-United States relations have been marked by mutual antagonism, while those with Europe have witnessed several up and down scenes.

Generally, nevertheless, Tehran has had better relations with the European Union and some individual countries than with the United States. The European Union has also been Iran's major trade partner for many years: indeed, Iran exported a large share of its oil and petroleum commodities to European markets in return for machinery, transport equipment, and chemicals. There is another element which has to be taken into consideration, that is proximity: Iran and the broader Persian Gulf/ Middle East region are in the EU's wider neighborhood, whatever happens, there has a stronger and more clearer impact on Europe than on the United States.

Against this background, Tehran and Brussels tried to establish a cooperative approach in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq war. These efforts, nonetheless, were hampered by disagreements over the fatwa (religious ruling) against Salman Rushdie and allegations of Iranian involvement in terrorist activities.²⁸¹

As it was affirmed by Blockmans: "Despite these obstacles and setbacks, the Iranian and European sides initiated the so-called "critical dialogue", which later evolved into a comprehensive one. The European Union sought to use growing trade and commercial ties as well as flourishing political dialogue to change Iran's policy in four fields: human rights, the Arab-Israeli conflict, allegations of sponsoring terrorism, and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction."²⁸²

Gradually, the nuclear question has been the key point in the relations between the two countries, particularly since the revelation of previously undeclared nuclear activities in 2002. Those nuclear activities were accompanied by two other developments. First, the United States invasion of Iraq in 2003 increased tensions in the Middle East. European Union member states were deeply divided, also because of the chance that Washington might start another war against Iran, and thus it would further destabilize the European Union's neighbors. Second, to

²⁸⁰ The academic literature on Iran's relations with the United States and Europe is quite extensive. For official perspectives, see US Department of State, Diplomacy in Action: Iran (www.state.gov/p/nea/ci/ir/index.htm); European Union External Action, The EU's Relations with Iran (eeas.europa.eu/iran/index_en.htm); European Commission, Trade: Iran (ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/Iran).

²⁸¹ Blockmans S., Ehteshami A., Bahgat G. 2016. "EU-Relations after Nuclear Deal".

²⁸² Ibidem

close ranks, in December 2003 the European Union provided a huge plan against the proliferation of WMD, signaling a growing role for Europe. Those events laid the foundation for European-Iranian nuclear talk. Diplomatic efforts have been carried on by France, Germany, and the United Kingdom (the “E3”) and begun in 2003. Afterwards, Javier Solana, the then High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, joined the negotiation on behalf of the EU.²⁸³

In November 2004 the Europeans and Iranians signed a deal known as the Paris Agreement, under which Tehran agreed to stop uranium enrichment and the “E3/EU” recognized that the temporary pause was a voluntary confidence-building instrument and not a legal obligation. As already deeply explained in the previous chapter, this deal did not last long because the two actors accused each other of not living up to their engagements.

After the election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005, Tehran resumed its enrichment of uranium and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported Iran to the United Nations Security Council. In 2006 and 2008, Solana tried to reach a negotiated outcome to the nuclear issue that included several economic and diplomatic incentives.²⁸⁴

These incentives were minor than Iran’s expectations and request, nonetheless.

In this framework, the United Nations Security Council issued four resolutions (1737 of December 2006, 1747 of March 2007, 1803 of March 2008, and 1929 of June 2010). These resolutions imposed strict and comprehensive economic sanctions on Iran, and at the same time, the European Union took a similar decision to that of the United States and adopted a range of autonomous sanctions. However, it is important to mention that the negotiating track was never completely abandoned.

Between 2010 and 2014, European Union High Representative Catherine Ashton led several meetings to negotiate with Iran in a format that became, as it has been already mentioned, the “P5+1” or ‘E3+3’ (France, Germany, the UK, China, Russia, and the US).

Her successor Federica Mogherini and the team at the European External Action Service (EEAS) led by Helga Schmid, kept trading with Tehran and eventually, along with other global powers, concluded the JCPOA.

As it was affirmed by Cronberg “The Great Balancing Act: EU policy choices during the implementation of the Iran deal”, in it is possible to highlight different conclusions regarding

²⁸³ Ibidem

²⁸⁴ W. Posch, “Iran and the European Union”, in R. Wright (ed.), *Iran Primer*, USIP Press, 2015 (<http://iranprimer.usip.org>).

the ties existing between the European Union and Iran. First, the European Union has always kept a unified voice, throughout this long negotiating process for a nuclear agreement with Iran. Occasionally, some minor disagreement arose between the individual European actors, but eventually, Iran was always shown with a coherent European policy. Moreover, some European Union analysts have sustained that the outcome of the negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program was a success for the European Union diplomatic institutions that were put in place with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. Second, it is possible to affirm that the signing and the further implementation of the JCPOA shows that a new chapter in Iran and EU relations was about to be written: indeed, it is possible to argue that the European Union, with its proven history as a successful economic player, is well-positioned to substantially increase investments and trade ties with Iran.²⁸⁵

During a visit to Tehran of Federica Mogherini and other fellow European Commissioners, the European Union and Iran defined a wide program which involved bilateral cooperation which comprises political, human rights, macro-economic and finance talks, as well as collaboration on agriculture and the agri-food industry, transports.²⁸⁶

Third, both the European Union and Iran are suffering from regional fights and instability in several Middle Eastern and South Asian states, entailing also Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq.²⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the implementation of the JCPOA was likely to ease and strengthen strategic collaboration between Brussels and Tehran, as seen in the Geneva dialogues on Syria.

4.2 European interests in Iran

This part of the research there will analyze the interests that the EU had in Iran, which influenced European Union's choice to sign the JCPOA. The European Union has had several interests with the Islamic Republic mainly in three sectors: security, energy, and trade. Security interests generally entail the regional activities carried on by Iran, ranging from engagement in

²⁸⁵ T. Cronberg, "The Great Balancing Act: EU policy choices during the implementation of the Iran deal", Non-Proliferation Papers No. 50, April 2016; and E. Geranmayeh, "Engaging with Iran: A European Agenda", ECFR Policy Brief No. 139, July 2015.

²⁸⁶ Cf. the Joint Statement by the High Representative/Vice-President of the European Union, Federica Mogherini and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Javad Zarif, Tehran, 16 April 2016, reproduced in the annex to this report.

²⁸⁷ Contributions by Zamirirrad A., Florensa S., Ponzone E., Modrall J., Abruzzini Arnaldo, Golpour M., Rashedan N. in " *EU-Relations after Nuclear Deal* ". 2016.

regional conflicts as the civil war in Syria and Yemen; regarding the energy sector, since the extraction of oil and its use became the engine of the world, Iran has the fourth-largest oil reserves along with considerable gas ones as well, that have attracted global and regional actors to the energy supplies of the Western Asian countries. Finally, the Iranian economy despite some of its structural conditions imposed by the isolation from the international financial system and international institutions like the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund still had economic opportunities in a spectrum of different fields ranging from the airplane and the automotive industry to the clothing and luxury goods ones.

4.2.1 Security interests

European Union security interests in Iran were mainly shaped by the chance of Iran developing a military nuclear program that would have been against the Non-Proliferation Treaty. During the 1990s European Union engaged in critical and constructive dialogues with the Islamic Republic to boost overall relations. As in the early 2000s, following the ratification of the JCPOA, the European Union has been involved in dealing with the security risks posed by Iran through integration and normalization in the international system, which would distance Iran from pursuing nuclear military capacities, as was mapped out in the European Union non-proliferation strategy in 2003²⁸⁸ and the recent years, reiterated in the 2016 European Union Global Strategy.²⁸⁹

Vice President Federica Mogherini, reaffirmed this message to the United States in 2017, when the chance of the return of sanctions loomed in Brussels by highlighting the multilateral rather than bilateral nature of the deal, by claiming that: *“This is not a bilateral agreement. This is not an agreement that involves six or seven parties. This is a UN Security Council Resolution with an annex. And as such, all Member States of the United Nations is considered to be bound*

²⁸⁸ EU Strategy against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction 2003, available at: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST%2015708%202003%20INIT> and EU Global Strategy, 2016 available at: http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf

²⁸⁹ EU Global Strategy, 2016 available at: http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf and cited by Tarja Cronberg, ‘No EU, No Iran deal: The EU’s choice between multilateralism and the transatlantic link’ *The Non-Proliferation Review* 2017, 243- 259 p. 257

to the implementation of it. So, it doesn't belong to one country, to six countries, to seven countries, to the European Union—it belongs to the international community."²⁹⁰

On the other hand, the European Union is skeptical regarding Iranian regional activities and development of the regional missile program, nevertheless, European Union policymakers retained that they consist of a set of other several interests subordinated to the maintenance of the JCPOA. Indeed, European Union policymakers affirmed that they were favorable to the idea of discussing and potentially reaching another deal that would allow the settling of European Union and United States security interests and worries. Moreover, additionally to the development of a military nuclear program, the European Union is engaged in a regional war between the United States and Iran that would cause further humanitarian concerns to be addressed.

European Union policymakers believed that Iran has to be involved in the talks with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), to have a peaceful solution to the regional conflicts. Indeed, despite the isolation and the pressure along with a violent war with Iraq that lasted 8 years, the Islamic Republic is a stable regime. After the discovering of the Arak heavy water reactor and Natanz uranium enrichment plant the chance of a military confrontation between the United States and Iran became highly concrete ²⁹¹ and the European Union did not want to repeat the Iraq experiment, which obstructed transatlantic relations along with creating fragmentation inside the European Union itself, with Germany and France contrary to United States strategies while the United Kingdom was more favorable and aligned with them. Finally, the situation has become very volatile and similar to that of the critical dialogue in recent years in light of the United States withdrawal from the JCPOA and the maximum pressure campaign. Indeed, in January 2020 the menace of a military conflict became concrete as both Iran and the United States were engaging in a game of *brinkmanship* with some extraterritorial military strikes on both sides.

²⁹⁰ Remarks by High Representative/Vice President Federica Mogherini following the Ministerial Meeting of the E3/EU3 + 3 and Iran available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_az/32546/RemarksbyHighRepresentative/Vice-PresidentFedericaMogherinifollowingtheMinisterialMeetingoftheE3/EU+3andIran and cited by Tarja Cronberg, 'No EU, No Iran deal: The EU's choice between multilateralism and the transatlantic link' p. 258

²⁹¹ Ibidem p.245

The oil facilities on the East coast of Saudi Arabian-owned Aramco were victims of drone missile attacks. The Houthis, the Zayd religious minority in Yemen committed in the Yemeni civil war against the Saudi-led coalition, affirmed to be responsible for the attacks. On the other hand, the United States told that the real entity perpetrator of the attacks was Iran due to the technology used as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) along with the ballistic computations that indicated that the drones were coming from Iran rather than Yemen. Iran denied the United States charges but the European Union is sure that even though the attack did not originate from Yemen there must have been some Iranian engagement in the process, as the Houthi rebels are considered to be an instrumental proxy group of Iran through which it carries out foreign policy aims in the region. The E3 on this occasion made a joint statement condemning the activities carried out by Iran, even if the United Nations could not independently verify that Iran was engaged in the attacks. Furthermore, the situation worsened when in January 2020 Trump authorized a strike in Iraq which ended with the death of General Soleimani, the leader and strategist of the Quds forces, the foreign operations section of the IRGC. The attack was justified in light of Soleimani's designation as a terrorist, that he was posing an imminent menace to the United States security interests and that it was part of a broader strategy of deterrence.²⁹²

The death of Soleimani and the attacks launched against the coalition troops including European ones in Iraq raised the scenario of a direct military conflict between Iran and the United States. On this occasion, French President Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson issued a joint statement²⁹³ in which they encouraged both sides to immediately de-escalate tensions and to resort to diplomatic channels to solve their differences rather than military force.

4.2.2 Energy cooperation

²⁹² Statement by Department of Defense (2nd January, 2020) at <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2049534/statement-by-the-department-of-defense/>

²⁹³ Joint statement from President Macron, Chancellor Merkel and Prime Minister Johnson on the situation in Iraq available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-from-president-macron-chancellor-merkel-and-prime-minister-johnson-on-the-situation-in-iraq>

In terms of energy, the European Union has crucial issues that it has been trying to solve for decades. The issue of energy security was inserted in the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 under art. 194 (1), which affirms that the European Union energy policy aims to “ensure the security of energy supply in the Union’ even if each Member State enjoys the right to determine the energy sources to use and the general structure of the energy supply.”²⁹⁴

The general picture is not good for the European Union for different reasons: firstly, in 2010 the European Union dependency rate was at 53.7 percent, a figure that shows the constraints in exerting its foreign policy in light of the need to import energy sources from outside the Union, even though the situation differs from member state to member state.²⁹⁵

In 2016, DG energy of the European Commission estimated that around 40 % of the gas imported by the European Union, came from Russia which confers leverage on the latter in the negotiation of energy prices along with favorable contracts.²⁹⁶

Forecasts about the nature of European Union gas imports are not promising either. Moreover, according to Energy Agency, the European Union's gas importance will increase and reach 77% of the gas request in 2025 and 83 % of the gas request in 2040.

These factors explain why the European Union searched for new suppliers in the Caspian Sea and the Middle East such as Azerbaijan and Iran. Regarding energy diplomacy, energy security is conceptualized as “forms of state power used to secure access to foreign energy supplies’ and as a political problem caused by the overreliance on markets and lack of strategic vision.”²⁹⁷

Thanks to its multilevel conduct of external relations “the EU energy diplomacy is a complex blend of multi-stakeholder and state-centered diplomacies, participants and communication modes”.²⁹⁸

The European Union, like every other state in the international scenario, pursues the policy aim of ensuring the supply of energy through strategic diversification and maintaining political trust with foreign suppliers.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁴ Stephan Keukeleire and Tom Delreux, ‘The Foreign Policy of the European Union’, p. 223

²⁹⁵ Alexandra-Maria Bocse, ‘EU Energy Diplomacy: Searching for new suppliers in Azerbaijan and Iran’, *Geopolitics* 2019, Vol. 24 No. 1, 145 173 p. 146

²⁹⁶ Ibidem.

²⁹⁷ Ibidem.

²⁹⁸ Ibidem p. 148

²⁹⁹ Ibidem p. 149

Ukraine- Russian stand-offs in which Russia prevented the flow of natural gas through Ukraine pipelines as the “epiphany” of the energy vulnerability the European Union suffers.³⁰⁰

As a consequence, the crisis led to the commencement of a new policy of diversification related to energy sources and routes, which would then be confirmed by subsequent crises like the one that happened in 2014.³⁰¹

This engagement has been reiterated in the European Union Global Strategy of 2016, in which the differentiation of energy sources and suppliers was a strategic aim to be reached.³⁰²

In 2015, the European Union created the Energy Union, an institutional platform to intensify its efforts and this engagement has pushed the European Union to find access to energy supplies to countries as Azerbaijan and above all Iran. Simultaneously, the European Union has been trying to limit the share of gas coming through the South Stream and Nord Stream 2 from Russia, and European Union diplomats strengthened their ties with Azerbaijan to accede its gas through the Southern Corridor, which could be joined by Iranian gas as well. A crucial challenge is given by the reluctance of European Union Member States to give more competencies in the field of energy, which inevitably leads to a fragmentation of member states' actions. The European Council, to encourage the security interests regarding the regional “hot war”, In 2016 verbally engaged in the balanced purchase in the energy sector from both sides of the Persian Gulf.

This decision would involve an increase in the acquisition of Iranian oil and gas along with a decrease in the two goods coming from members of the GCC.³⁰³

Indeed, European Union imports of oil from Gulf Arab Countries as Saudi Arabia have prevented it from reacting to systematic breaches of human rights. Moreover, this engagement was reiterated in the 2016 European Union Global Strategy,³⁰⁴ as energy is explicitly cited as one of the areas in which the European Union wanted to commit with Iran.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁰ Ibidem p. 150

³⁰¹ Ibidem p. 151

³⁰² Alexandra-Maria Bocse, ‘EU Energy Diplomacy: Searching for new suppliers in Azerbaijan and Iran’, *Geopolitics* 2019, Vol. 24 No. 1, 145 173

³⁰³ Ibidem p.160

³⁰⁴ EU Global Strategy, 2016 p. 35 available at:
http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf

³⁰⁵ Alexandra-Maria Bocse, ‘EU Energy Diplomacy: Searching for new suppliers in Azerbaijan and Iran’, p. 160

In 2016, the buying of Iranian oil from European Union member States skyrocketed reaching almost 4 billion barrels per day, close to the one before the European Union aligned with the United States and United Nations sanctions.³⁰⁶

This higher increase of Iranian oil from European Union members states was followed by high-ranking visits of the European officials to Iran, with Vice President Mogherini traveling there at different times. In an official visit after the implementation of the JCPOA, Mogherini claimed that Iran over the following years would become a fundamental partner for allowing the development of the European Union energy mix and improving its overall energy security.³⁰⁷ At the same time, there has been made an official and joint institutional framework named the European Union - Iran Dialogue on Energy in which the European Union Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy, along with the Iranian Ministers of Petroleum and Energy issued a joint statement.³⁰⁸

On the other hand, Iran's legislator softened the requirements for foreign companies to access renovation and investment procurements to attract also European capital and technology.³⁰⁹

Among these, many European multinationals as Total, Shell and Eni took immediately the opportunity to invest in Iran to improve Iranian oil and gas production.

Some days after the implementation of the JCPOA, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani left for Europe to deepen economic ties with European Union member states and visited different European capitals. He first went to Rome, to Italy where he received a heap welcome and during the meeting, Iran and Italy signed cooperation deals worth 14 billion Euros in industrial fields including gas industry.³¹⁰

ENI, the Italian oil multinational signed a deal with Iranian authorities to resume the development of the Dakhokhin Oilfield e South Pars and one of its subsidiaries Saipem signed

³⁰⁶ Remarks by the High Representative/Vice President Federica Mogherini at the Joint Press Conference with Mohammed Javad Zarif, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/5240_fr and cited by Alexandra-Maria Bocse, 'EU Energy Diplomacy: Searching for new suppliers in Azerbaijan and Iran', pp. 160-161

³⁰⁷ Alexandra-Maria Bocse, 'EU Energy Diplomacy: Searching for new suppliers in Azerbaijan and Iran', p. 160

³⁰⁸ Ibidem p. 162

³⁰⁹ Ibidem

³¹⁰ Iran, Renzi incontra Rohani: "Siglati i primi accordi, è solo l'inizio", *Il Sole 24 Ore* available at: https://st.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2016-01-25/iran-rohani-italia-decisi-ad-aumentare-rapporti-l-ue-095408.shtml?uuid=ACsngeGC&refresh_ce=1

a deal with Persian Oil and Gas Development to upgrade different refineries as the Pars Shiraz and Tabriz ones.³¹¹

According to media reports, Saipem and the Iranian Government were talking about the idea of a pipeline contract worth approximately \$ 4.3 billion and Saipem would have directly controlled about 40 % of any bilateral arrangement in the Iranian market.³¹²

Similarly, during the French visit of Rouhani the French oil company Total signed an agreement with the Iranian government that would have committed the former to buy 200,000 barrels of oil from Iran for its refineries.³¹³

These are two examples that provide deeper insight into European Union energy interests with Iran and its endeavor to improve European Union energy security. The European Union investments in the Iranian energy field were not limited to conventional energy resources but included also renewable energies.

During his visit, the Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy in April 2017, took part in the first Iran-European business forum about sustainable energy, in which investment opportunities were discussed in terms of energy efficiency and energy conservation.³¹⁴

Finally, the European Union investment of technology and capital would have improved the overall efficiency of the extraction of energy resources: this result would have been ideal for both Iran and the European Union with the former enhancing its revenues and the latter diversifying its energy sources and routes.

4.2.3 Economic interests

The European Union interests however were not only circumscribed to the energy sector, even if it represented a considerable share of overall European Union interests in Iran. Within the

³¹¹ Italy's Eni signs deal with Iran on oil and gas field studies, *Reuters* available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-energy-eni-idUSKBN19B1Z8> and Iran advances refinery, pipeline projects, *Oil and Gas Journal* available at: <https://www.ogj.com/refining->

³¹² Italy's Saipem signs Iran deal on major oil and gas projects, Business & Human Rights Resource Centre available at: <https://www.business-humanrights.org/pt/%C3%BAltimas-not%C3%ADcias/italys-saipem-signs-iran-deal-on-major-oil-and-gas-projects/> and Farhad Rezaei, *Iran's Foreign Policy after the Nuclear Agreement: Politics of Normalisers and Traditionalists*, Palgrave, 2019 p. 90

³¹³ France signs billion-dollar deals with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, *Financial Review* <https://www.afr.com/world/france-signs-billiondollar-deals-with-iranian-president-hassan-rouhani-20160129-gmgoma> and Farhad Rezaei, *Iran's Foreign Policy after the Nuclear Agreement: Politics of Normalisers and Traditionalists*, p. 91

³¹⁴ European Commission DG Energy, *Commissioner Arias Cañete in Iran for the first-ever Iran-EU Business Forum on Sustainable Energy*, 28 April 2017, <https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/node/133229>

structure of the EEAS, the Iran task Force was generated to deepen collaboration in different dimensions, entailing energy, migration, and security. The Iranian economy and society, despite being still based on the export of energy sources as oil and gas, involves solid industrial productions in other industry sectors if compared with the Gulf monarchies. Moreover, the socio-economic and political model that represents the functioning of these states is called the rentier state, which reverses the maxim 'no taxation without representation' in 'no representation, no taxation' by underlying how the government subsidizes all public services in exchange for no political rights and an authoritarian form of government.

The cost of public services is paid through the export of commodities.

The Iranian economy is still highly dependent on the export of energy facilities but it also had developed during the decades' other industries. Indeed it is important to mention that the Iranian President, during his visits, did not only concluded energy contracts and collaboration deals but also ones in the airplane and financial fields. For example, regarding the infrastructure sector, Italian companies were ready to give important financial resources into the infrastructures of Iran, as Condotte d'Acqua and Ferrovie Dello Stato (FS). Moreover, the former made a contract with the Iranian government worth \$ 4 billion for the construction of a port complex in Bander Abbas, whereas the latter engaged in assisting in the development of both high-speed and conventional rail lines with projects to educate the operative personnel.³¹⁵ Finally, it can be concluded that the European Union interests were not only limited to the security and energy ones but involved a spectrum that would have incentivized European businesses to seek profits.

As already said, all the investments done, have been stopped by the reintroduction of the United States secondary sanctions by the Trump administration.

4.3 The European Union's response to the withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA

³¹⁵ Italy's Renzi signs potentially huge business deals with Iran, *Reuters*, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-italy/italys-renzi-signs-potentially-huge-business-deals-in-iran-idUSKCN0X91I2> and Farhad Rezaei, *Iran's Foreign Policy After the Nuclear Agreement: Politics of Normalisers and Traditionalists* p. 91

This part of the analysis will explain what has been the answer of the European Union after Trump decided to withdraw from the Iranian deal, the instruments taken by the European Union to face the future of the JCPOA without the United States, and the resumption of dialogue after Biden's election.

4.3.1 United States withdrawal: the European Union strategy

Trump's decision to leave the deal on 8 May 2018 found an instantaneous and firm response in Brussels: the European Union, according to what was expressed by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini in a statement following Trump's one, accounts the Iranian nuclear agreement not as a bilateral deal but as "a crucial building block in the international nuclear non-proliferation regime and, as such, crucial for the security of the Middle East region, Europe and the world."³¹⁶

Mogherini then claimed that "as long as Iran continues to fulfill the obligations contracted with the JCPOA, the European Union will continue to implement the agreement, seeking to ensure the continuity of economic benefits". To this aim, the High Representative expressed the intention to act "to protect the security and the economic interests of the European Union".

In the following week, there has been the first post-United States exit meeting after the USA exit from the JCPOA, between the Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, High Representative Mogherini, and the Foreign Ministers of the three E3 countries (France, Germany, United Kingdom).³¹⁷

The aim of this meeting as well as the following statements and meetings was to give adequate assurances to Iran concerning the European willingness to do everything possible to safeguard the existence of the deal.³¹⁸

Also, Mogherini indicated nine areas of cooperation between the European Union and Iran to be maintained to ensure the continued implementation of the JCPOA: the maintenance and

³¹⁶ "Remarks by HR/VP Mogherini on the statement by US President Trump regarding the Iran nuclear deal (Jcpoa)", European Union External Action Service, 8 may 2018, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/44238/remarks-high-representativevicepresident-federica-mogherini-statement-us-president-trump_en

³¹⁷ Petregghella A. 2018. L'Uscita degli Usa dall'accordo sul nucleare iraniano: conseguenze e implicazioni per l'Italia. N.139. ISPI.

³¹⁸ "Brussels: Iran's Zarif says talks with European countries on right path", Reuters, 15 may 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-europe-zarif/brussels-irans-zarif-says-talks-with-europeancountries-on-right-path-idUSKCN1IG1FA>

deepening of EU-Iran economic relations; the continuation of the sale of gas, oil, and petrochemical products from the Iranian petrochemical sector; banking transactions; transportation by sea, land, air, and rail; export credit and transport by sea, land, air, and rail; export credit and financial cooperation, with the launching of investment support measures; further signing of contracts between European companies and Iranian counterparts; greater investment in Iran; protection of European economic operators and the guarantee of legal certainty; the development in Iran of a transparent and business environment based on shared rules.³¹⁹

On the same day, the High Representative highlighted that the action of mechanism and tools for the protection of the deal would not only be the prerogative of the E3 but would also entail other member countries and would take place not only at the European Union level but also at the national level, especially concerning the creation of measures to protect national economic operators.

However, from May to September 2018, the most important initiatives have been taken by Brussels at the instigation of the High Representative and the E3s, while at the national level the strategy that seems to have prevailed has been on of “wait- and- see”, which means waiting to see what measures were chosen at the European Union level.

4.3.2 European Union’s instruments to preserve the deal.

Immediately after the announcement of the United States withdrawal, the European Union developed tools to make up for the agreement, keeping the negotiating table with Tehran open and, above all, protecting European companies that would have been overwhelmed by the extraterritorial reach of United States sanctions.

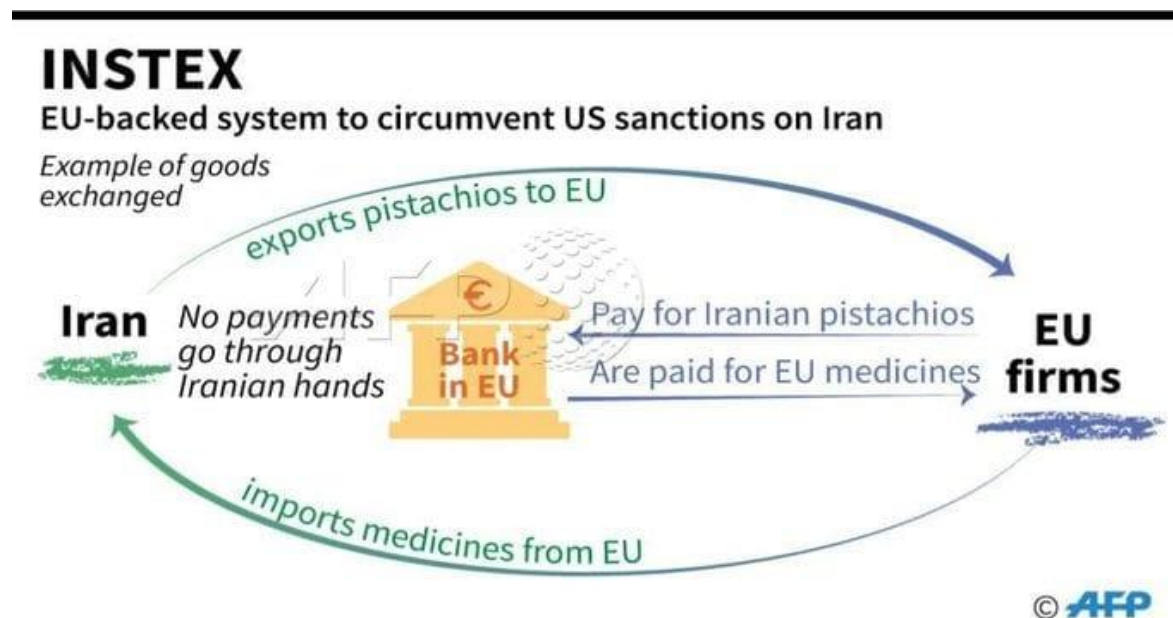
Given the contingency of the time available to try to stem the effects of US sanctions, before the first tranche scheduled came into force, the European Union activated a tool first tried in 1996: the "Blocking Statute" (Regulation no. 2271/96). This instrument was intended to prohibit European companies from complying with extraterritorial effects of United States sanctions, guaranteeing them compensation for the damages suffered and neutralizing in the European Union the effect of foreign court rulings on such restrictive measures.³²⁰

³¹⁹ “Iran nuclear deal: EU, France, Germany, UK and Iran meet to discuss way forward”, European Union External Action Service, 16 may 2018, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquartershomepage/44663/iran-nuclear-deal-eu-france-germany-uk-and-iran-meet-discuss-way-forward_en

³²⁰ Rutigliano S. 2021. La ripresa dei dialoghi sul JCPOA. Il caffè geopolitico. Avallabile online at: “<https://ilcaffegeopolitico.net/383262/la-ripresa-dei-dialoghi-sul-jcpoa>”

However, the blocking statute was immediately found to be weak and not adequate as it had little effect on restrictive measures other than sanctions as confiscation, freezing of assets, or prohibition of market access. Properly, for this reason, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom approved a new policy in February 2019: the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) through the creation of the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX).³²¹

The SPV working is based on the exchange, which means an exchange of goods between European and Iranian companies without the use of financial transactions, to circumvent the direct exchange of money. The financial channel created through INSTEX would have implied a tripartite system: European companies wishing to buy goods from their Iranian counterparts would have had to make the payment through INSTEX, which would then have been responsible for the actual payment from its headquarters in Iran, to circumvent the sanctions.³²²



³²³Image. 1 – Source: Twitter AFP News Agency

Despite that INSTEX is indicative of a concrete European effort to keep alive the commercial dialogue with Tehran by preserving the JCPOA, this initiative has not been taken kindly

³²¹ Ibidem.

³²² Rutigliano S. 2021. La ripresa dei dialoghi sul JCPOA. Il caffè geopolitico. Avallabile online at: “<https://ilcaffegeopolitico.net/383262/la-ripresa-dei-dialoghi-sul-jcpoa>”

³²³ Image. 1 - The Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX), also known as the Special Purpose Vehicle: a legal mechanism to protect EU companies trading with Iran from US sanctions. Photo from Twitter by AFP News Agency

considered by the Iranian government, which, indeed, has not yet been decided on necessary mirror system in Iran.

First of all, the reasons for Iranian reticence could be found in the field of application of INSTEX, which still results as scarcely diversified, with only medicines, food, and humanitarian aid being included in the list of commercial goods. Secondly, the European Union has demanded to Iran which conditions were needed for the full implementation of the tool, membership of the “Financial Action Task Force” (FATF), and a negotiation plan regarding the much-discussed Iranian ballistic missile program. The first clause would be necessary since the FATF in February 2020 included Iran in the list of “high-risk jurisdictions”, reinserting its countermeasures, which are in force until Iran implements the necessary measures to fill the gaps in the fight against the financing of terrorism.

The Iranian government has rejected both of the imposed clauses: about the former, it is plausible that the Iranian government is not in favor of subjecting itself to more pervasive supervisory scrutiny for its financial institutions; about the latter clause, Tehran has not been silent since the 2015 JCPOA about its opposition to negotiating domestic ballistic missile programs aimed at enhancing conventional military capabilities.³²⁴

Therefore, although INSTEX was used for the first time in March 2020 to import into Iran medical equipment necessary to contain the Sars-Cov-2 epidemic, the Iranian government does not hide its discontent, having, last January, accused Europe of “little courage” for not maintaining its economic sovereignty and having also declared that, given the ineffectiveness of INSTEX, the State will import the goods promised by the Union from other channels.³²⁵

4.3.3 What’s next? The necessary resumption of dialogue.

United States extraterritorial restrictions, in the absence of a unanimously applied tool capable of counteracting them, keep having a crucial impact on the Iranian and European economy, forcing trade partners to tighten their dialogue. Indeed, many European companies have severed their commercial relationship with Tehran, as the French multinational Total, the Italian steel giant Danielli, the German insurer Allianz, the Franco-German aircraft

³²⁴ Rutigliano S. 2021. La ripresa dei dialoghi sul JCPOA. Il caffè geopolitico. Avallabile online at: “<https://ilcaffegeopolitico.net/383262/la-ripresa-dei-dialoghi-sul-jcpoa>”

³²⁵ Ibidem.

manufacturer Airbus, the aircraft manufacturer ATR, and the car manufacturers Peugeot, Renault, and Volkswagen.³²⁶

In light of this context, the return to the full application of the JCPOA, as it was created originally, would be the only possibility able to bring the negotiating partners closer to a concrete dialogue and to revive the Iranian economy, whose GDP has sunk since 2018, reaching a maximum contraction of -6.8% in 2019. For this reason, in April 2021, the Joint Commission, which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the JCPOA, met a lot of times in Vienna and resumed its work with representatives of all negotiating parties except the USA.

The parties involved discussed the measures necessary for the lifting of restrictions, nuclear implementation for the possible return of the USA to the JCPOA, and its full and effective implementation.

Even though the several meetings have been defined as “constructive” by the participants, it is clear that there are crucial obstacles to the full reactivation of the JCPOA: the first among all, the condition imposed by Iran to negotiate with the United States only through the mediation of the other participants, which will result in an inevitable slowdown of the negotiations.³²⁷

Additionally, Iran formulated a specific condition for agreeing to abide by the clauses of the nuclear program, the prior removal by the United States of all sanctions imposed by former President Trump in a single tranche. However, the U.S. expressed its readiness to lift only the sanctions related to the JCPOA, suggesting a willingness to confirm those imposed for reasons outside the nuclear deal (terrorism, human rights violations, interference with elections).

According to Carlo Trezza, the European Union should follow these objectives: “Consolidate consensus around returning to full implementation of the JCPOA agreement; to avoid modifying the agreement or applying it only partially. This would be an unattainable goal given that the text is implemented by Security Council Resolution 2231 which has made it legally binding; ensuring the simultaneous withdrawal of the sanctions contemplated by the JCPOA agreement and the retaliatory measures introduced by Iran in the nuclear field. As of January 20, 2021, the United States should commit to freezing the implementation of any new sanctions and Iran to freezing any further retaliatory nuclear activities. Agree, once the agreement is

³²⁶ Rutigliano S. 2021. La ripresa dei dialoghi sul JCPOA. Il caffè geopolitico. Avallabile online at: “<https://ilcaffegeopolitico.net/383262/la-ripresa-dei-dialoghi-sul-jcpoa>”

³²⁷ Ibidem.

reactivated, on the launch of further negotiations to address, hopefully at the regional level, the many unresolved issues that still stand in the way of a return to normalcy in the Gulf region.”³²⁸ To sum up, it seems clear that there is a willingness on both sides to reactivate the JCPOA. The United States decided that willing for a bigger deal would not work and that an early reactivation of the deal is the best tool to calm things down and then use the other sanctions as leverage on the other issues. For its side, Iran sees an advantage in the agreement as it would gain economic benefits.

³²⁸ Trezza C. 2020. “Tocca all’Unione Europea rilanciare l’accordo sul nucleare iraniano”. Istituto Affari Internazionali. Available online at: “<https://www.affarinternazionali.it/2020/12/tocca-allunione-europea-rilanciare-laccordo-sul-nucleare-iraniano/>”

CONCLUSION

Analyzing in detail Iran's 2015 nuclear plan and the positions of three major players was the goal of this work.

As a result of this research, it is possible to say that each actor participating in the agreement had strong incentives: on the one hand, Iran obtained the interruption of a part of the sanctions, on the other hand, it allowed cooperation between all the states involved in the field of nuclear energy. Moreover, cooperation led to more transparency on Iran's nuclear program and standardization of Tehran's security practices.

By analyzing the single actors and comparing their interests and strategies, it has been possible to observe that Russia has always preferred a diplomatic approach, attempting to adapt to the behaviors and tactics of the others actors: it has always preferred dialogue to military intervention.

As for the European Union, it is possible to say that it has been fundamental for the survival of the JCPOA for different reasons: firstly, the EU has always had good relations with Iran, and this facilitated the dialogue on nuclear energy; then, its presence has been crucial after Trump decided to exit: moreover, together with Russia it has been decisive in its choice to continue implementing the deal and tried to put in place tools that would facilitate the continuation of the JCPOA. The European Union has always adopted a diplomatic strategy and approach, such as Russia.

Finally, the United States, as demonstrated, has pursued two contrasting strategies: while Obama's strategy has been more in line with Russia's and European's, Trump adopted an opposite approach: an aggressive policy towards Iran that led to the exit from the plan.

The work concludes by setting out the general context following Trump's exit and by exposing in particular the positions of Iran and the USA. Finally, it mentions possible future scenarios.

First of all, it is necessary to underline that the new US president, after initial uncertainties about the resumption of the agreement, said he was in favor of negotiations with Iran. At the same time, the Iranian leadership, after having seen the chance of a new diplomatic course, tried to convince the USA not to delay the re-entry into the nuclear plan stating that, otherwise, it would have reduced the access of the UN inspectors to its nuclear program.

However, both countries remained firm on their conditions: Iran said it would only return to compliance with the conditions imposed by the agreement if the US lifted economic restrictions as provided by the Iran deal, whereas the US said it would lift sanctions only after Iran stopped over-enriching uranium in violation of the agreement.

A possible reconciliation lays in both Biden's foreign policy and the willingness to reopen negotiations of the new Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi who has been elected in June 2021.

However, to date, the sabotage of the nuclear power plant in Natanz pushed Iran to take this path. Therefore, Tehran decided to further enrich uranium to 60%, approaching the threshold of military use, just on the eve of the consultation at the IAEA in Vienna, and to scale back the access of UN inspectors to its nuclear program.

Nevertheless, these events have not slowed down the diplomatic process: after Easter, the Joint Commission of the JCPOA met in Vienna for the first time since 2018 in the presence of a US delegation. This phase did not lead to direct talks between US and Iranian representatives but was nevertheless described as "encouraging" after months of standstill.

However, after the Iranian presidential elections of June 2021, which saw the radical Ebrahim Raisi prevail, the resumption of negotiations on the JCPOA seems to be far away. The new Iranian president declared that he does not want to meet the US president to resume negotiations.

On the one hand, Raisi stands firm on his positions, and on the other hand, Biden is up against Republican opposition to lifting the sanctions imposed by his predecessor: to do so, he would have to spend political capital that he might need for his domestic political agenda, and Israel, with which Iran has tense relations, does not facilitate its decision.

It can be concluded that possible future scenarios may entail a reconciliation between the United States and Iran, which depends both on their willingness to negotiate and on their foreign policy priorities or the eventual failure of the JCPOA, that would inevitably lead to negative consequences, including a possible conflict in the Middle East as a result of the hostility between the US and Iran. Given the current situation, however, it would seem difficult to think of an imminent reconciliation between the two partners.

Despite this, the fundamental objective of the international community should be and remain only one: to contain the tension in the Middle East as much as possible to preserve world security.

All scenarios, therefore, remain open and in evolution.

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SUMMARY

This work aims at analyzing and comparing the approaches of three principal global powers Russia, the United States, and the European Union regarding the Joint Comprehensive Action Plan of 2015. I decided to cover in this research, the case study of Iran's 2015 nuclear deal, due to the importance of nuclear energy in the international context.

Specifically, I decided to consider three of the main actors participating in the nuclear deal, and analyze their interests, strategies, and positions relating to the case study of Iran.

Therefore, after laying out the historical context in which the agreement was signed between the various actors and highlighting their reasons and incentives, the work considers three parameters for each actor taken into consideration. These are the Country's interests with Iran, their strategies regarding the JCPOA, and what position they have decided to adopt after the US left the JCPOA in 2018.

The first chapter describes precisely all the negotiations' phases that go from 2003 to 2015. The first period of negotiations went from 2003 until 2008: during these years, the E3 (France, Germany, UK), tried to negotiate with Iran to obtain a suspension of uranium enrichment. However, despite all the attempts to find a shared solution, that could have brought both sides together, no compromise could be reached until 2008. A new phase of negotiations started in 2008. Moreover from that moment on, several events laid the ground for a possible agreement between Iran and the other powers: the election of Obama as United States President in 2009, Russia's Foreign Minister Lavrov proposal to follow a "step by step" approach agreed by the P5+1, and finally the election of Hassan Rouhani as Iranian President in 2013. All those facts led to the adoption of the Joint Plan of Action in November 2013, which signed the final phase in the negotiations before the adoption of the JCPOA. The JPOA had the aim to prepare the ground to a "mutually agreed long-term comprehensive solution establishing that Iran's nuclear program would only be peaceful". All the provisions agreed upon in the negotiation were respected: on the one hand, Iran met all the deadlines and implemented all the requirements outlined in the JPOA, and the IAEA recognized its report in 2014; on the other hand, the participants respected their promises by removing the sanctions covered in the JCPOA and by releasing of oil payments.

Finally, on 14 July 2015, the negotiators claimed that they had reached the JCPOA. The official document comprehended a principle text and five technical annexes on nuclear-related commitments, sanctions-related commitments, civil nuclear collaboration, the Joint

Commission, and an implementation project. Eventually, the arrangement was reached: the JCPOA instituted the most intrusive controlling regime activated by the IAEA ever. The JCPOA provided that Iran would implement the requirements of the IAEA Additional Protocol, according to which the Agency can check on Iran's compliance with the agreement, by accessing any site at which he has reason to have doubts regarding activity involving fissile material. On 20 July 2015, the UNSC unanimously adopted resolution 2231 which endorses the JCPOA. As it was affirmed by the UNSC, the JCPOA signed a turning point for the relationship between Iran and the other powers regarding the nuclear issue. In particular, this resolution provides four "days": the adoption day which occurred on 18 October 2015, 90 days after the endorsement of the plan; the implementation day when the SC received the report from the IAEA; the transition day, which will occur eight years after the adoption day or upon receipt by the Security Council of the report from the IAEA stating that the IAEA has concluded that all nuclear material in Iran stays in peaceful activities; and lastly the termination day that will occur ten years later from adoption day and it implies that all the provision of the 2231 resolution shall be ended. The first chapter ends by highlighting the benefits that the deal offered to incentivize the participation of the actors. Among the "carrots", two are the most important: sanctions relief and civil nuclear cooperation. Concerning the sanctions relief, the 2231 resolution provided that the previous resolution would be annulled and therefore most of the sanctions that were imposed on Iran were lifted, to encourage Iran to respect the agreement. Regarding civil nuclear cooperation, the JCPOA promotes this collaboration between the powers of the agreement and other foreign countries' providers.

The presence of a list of civil nuclear cooperation projects with Iran, presented in the deal, is important for the long-term application and respect of the agreement. Apart from giving legitimacy to Iran's civil nuclear development which is necessary to have domestic support of the agreement, collaboration provision also entails Iranian scientists and engineers with plans that they can keep working on. Knowing Iran's civilian nuclear program could be a way to know how Teheran works on its program and also to know what are its priorities. Moreover, cooperation will lead to more transparency on Iran's nuclear program and standardization of Tehran's security practices. Also, it would lead Iran to establish a steady relationship which could be useful after the expiration of the JCPOA, letting Iran expand its program faster.

The second chapter focuses on one of the three powers analyzed: Russia.

The chapter summarizes the relationship between Russia and Iran until the JCPOA was reached, analyzes in detail the existing interests between Iran and Russia, and finally highlights

the position and strategy followed by Russia after the United States withdrew from the deal in 2018. In more detail, it aims to explain how the Iranian Nuclear deal has placed Tehran in a stronger strategic position and is capable of changing the balance in the Persian Gulf area and the Middle and Near East. The election of Vladimir Putin as the President of the Russian Federation marked the beginning of a new period in Iranian-Russian relations. Putin and his Iranian counterpart Ahmadinejad met to discuss several common regional issues as the instability in Syria, bilateral relations, and their position toward the nuclear issue. In particular, the dialogue and the interests between Tehran and Moscow strengthened.

In this context, the relations between Iran and Russia from the economic, commercial, and financial points of view, wound in different channels of collaboration.

Therefore, this part of the research focuses on four main interests underlying the bilateral relationship between Iran and Russia which are: economy, security, energy, and geopolitical.

In terms of economic interests, after the achievement of the JCPOA and then after the gradual reduction of sanctions, many economic opportunities opened up for Russia that strengthened relations between the two countries. In particular, the area of greatest interest for both was military technology: Russia wanted to consolidate supremacy in arms sales to Iran, while Iran wished to reduce the military technology gap with rivals in the region.

As for the energy sector, Russia feared that Iran's return as an oil and gas supplier to the energy market, would threaten its position. However, Iran needed at least a year to increase its oil production, and even longer to enhance the gas one. Nor there is no guarantee that oil and gas prices would still be at the same low levels when important Iranian supplies come online. Meanwhile, Russia at that time had already begun taking steps to balance the potential damages arising from Iran's return to the energy markets. In any event, if this agreement has complied, it would theoretically enable Russia to maintain this extra oil off the market until prices return to a lower and more acceptable level. To conclude, the main Russian concern regarding the energy sector, on the subject of Iran's international rise was the question of oil, moreover, in the medium term, the Vienna agreements would allow Iran to return to being an adequate energy provider, potentially undermining some positions of pre-eminence matured over time by the Kremlin, at least as far as Europe is concerned. In conclusion, the principal Russian worry on the issue of Iran's international rise was the concern of oil.

On the geopolitical level, Russia and Iran shared the same goals, in particular they both supported the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria and were opposed to Saudi initiatives in the region. Russia and Iran both were strong supporters of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria. Syrian Civil War indeed appeared to be the main game-changer in the relationship between

Iran and Russia. Russia's military involvement in the Syrian conflict in late 2015 became the main element that brought the two countries together. From Tehran's point of view, the start of Moscow's engagement in Syrian affairs gave to Iranian authorities what they had been searching for a decade: a solid military base for the development of bilateral relations. Since the 2000s, Tehran had been searching for a leading world power that could be a counterweight to the US pressure on Iran, and Russia was one of the best candidates for this role and for this reason, Russia remained the most favorable candidate for the Iranian authorities as a potential counterweight to the US influence in the Middle East.

Tehran wanted to build a strong political cooperation with Russia and so, both of them attempted at finding political issues of common interest whose discussion could lead to long-term cooperation between the two countries.³²⁹

The unique point where they disagreed was Israel: Iran remained a rival of Israel while Russia tried to maintain a more nuanced approach.

From a security perspective, the JCPOA would benefit from this aspect as well. Russia remained far more vulnerable to a possible Iranian nuclear attack than any other actor among the P5+1 member states. However, the reduction of the Iranian nuclear threat was certainly not the most important advantage that Russia would receive from a concluded nuclear agreement. It was thus even more important the fact that the accord virtually assured the long-term survival of Iran's Islamic Republic, which had long been one of Russia's first aims in the Middle East. Russia's willingness to preserve the regime that existed at that time did not arise out of any crucial affinity it might hold for mullahs, instead, it reflected Russia's view that Iran's regime could guarantee stability in the Middle East that was already hit by several unrests and also that instability in Iran could also negatively affect Russia's interests in the region.

Additionally, it also reflects Russia's belief that Iran could be a favorable partner for Russia in the region since, from a geopolitical point of view, Iran's interests aligned more with Russia's ones rather than with those of the Western powers.

So a nuclear deal provided Russia with a safeguard against an Iranian nuclear attack, something it would not have been able to achieve on its own.

To sum up, Russia retains that Iran could be a favorable partner for Russia in the region since, from a geopolitical point of view, Iran's interests aligned more with Russia's ones rather than

³²⁹ Kozhanov N. "Foreign Policy of Iran under President Hassan Rouhani's First Term (2013-2017). Edited by Luciano Zaccara.

with those of the Western powers, and also because they have common viewpoints towards political, regional and global issues.

Lastly, regarding the position of Russia after the exit of the United States from the JCPOA, the research shows how it faced a difficult position: on the one hand, Russia wanted to continue to maintain relations with Iran so that it could replace western companies, while, on the other hand, it was concerned that new sanctions imposed could negatively affect the Iranian economy and generate destabilization, also leading Russian companies to withdraw from the market. For these reasons Russia decided to continue to implement the JCPOA and to support Iran, remaining faithful to the deal.

It is possible to affirm that Russian companies wanted to adopt the "wait and see" strategy: wait for the action of European leaders and the reimposition of sanctions by the United States, and then decide how to act.

The Kremlin tried to reassure Iran allies regarding its readiness and willingness to maintain business there. However, Russia's presence in Iran depended on two factors: first, Europeans' actions; moreover, Moscow wanted to make sure that Europeans politicians supported their statements on European readiness to maintain relationship with Tehran without leaving Moscow alone against the United States. The second element was Trump's determination in restoring sanctions and implementing new measures against Iran. By 2019, none of these elements could persuade Russia that it should keep its business in Iran. Moscow's leverage to affect the United States' attitude was negligible. This was officially recognized. In early May 2018, Lavrov claimed that Russia could do nothing about new restrictions that would be imposed by Trump.³³⁰

The Kremlin was not enough ready to fight for Iran: if Moscow saw that the situation was not developing on behalf of Iran, and the Europeans failed to present an adequate opposition to Americans, the majority of Russian oil and gas companies would probably put cooperation with Tehran on pause or at least reassess their strategies in Iran. Nevertheless, this would not mean the whole disruption of collaboration, as this would inevitably backfire, compromising the political dialogue and relationship between the two countries, which Moscow would try to prevent.

In the worst-case situation, if the Europeans left Iran and the United States imposed secondary sanctions, the field of cooperation would probably be reduced and be limited to the several

³³⁰ "Lavrov Schel ne Podlezhashchey Peresmotru Otmenu Sanktsiy SB OON protiv Irana," RBC, May 10, 2018, <https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/5af430ac9a79471125fe4a64>.

projects actively protected by the Russian administration, or that were in the zones not covered by sanctions such as the building of the Bushehr nuclear plant, and Sirik power plant and maybe the Russian Railways Company (RZD) projects. Basically, Russia preferred to follow a “diplomatic” strategy.

The third chapter focuses on the United States. This part provides an overview of the relationship between Iran and the United States since 1953. It then points out Obama's first two terms and the rise of Trump, explaining how these two different administrations have affected the JCPOA.

In summary, the United States has been involved in regime change in Iran both in 1942 and 1953 and still believes that regime change in revolutionary Iran is possible even today to achieve its own interests. Moreover, the permanent American engagement in Iran has aroused popular dissatisfaction and also anti-Americanism, which later turned into the hallmark of revolutionary Iran's foreign policy posture. Basically, the United States' behavior which aimed at changing Iran's regime put pressure on the country and generated feelings of annoyance on Iran's population. The fall of the Shah of Iran represented a huge loss for the United States' influence in the Middle East.

Consequently, the revolutionary fervor demonstrated by the Iranian leadership and the United States counter actions worsened the bitterness of the bilateral relationship. The immediate actions and counter-moves from Iran and the United States respectively were: the taking over of the United embassy staff as a hostage in Tehran and freezing the Iranian assets in the United States.

The Iran-Iraq war (1980-88), and the Western sustain on Iraq, and finally the demolition of an Iranian airliner with 370 people on board by the United States in July 1988, further annoyed the Iranian leadership. Furthermore, the application of negative adjectives by Iran as the “Great Satan” and by Iran such as “Great Satan” and by the United States as “Islamic Fundamentalism”, “Rogue State” and lastly “Axis of Evil” turned out as added fuel to the fire in the United States – Iran bilateral relations. Therefore, from the “dual containment” strategy to the “regime change” the United States was unable to shape the Iranian idea.³³¹

³³¹ Hussain Nazir. “US-Iran Relations: Issues, Challenges and Prospects”. Vol. 12, No. 2 (2015), pp. 29-47

With the ending of the first decade of the century analyzed, the event in the Middle East took a different stride: on one hand, the 2010 Arab Spring in the region had the United States lost its credibility, and on the other hand, it gave to the Iranian regional influence due to its democracy against stability generating chaos and unrest in the whole Arab world. This forced the United States to rethink its strategy of “denial” to “engagement” with Iran.

One of the most important issue that mostly undermine the ties between those two countries is the Iran nuclear Program: in 1979, the nuclear program was completely deactivated due to the revolution and the Iran-Iraq war. However in 1990, the Iranian demand for nuclear energy recovered and the work on the Bushehr nuclear power plant began again, first with German collaboration and later with Russian support. In 2003, the IAEA inspectors unearthed very developed which had been unrevealed earlier. The IAEA warned Tehran to disclose all supposed activities in the country and open all its nuclear facilities for inspection, or it should be ready to manage the consequences.

These revelations gave alarm bells around the world and the Iranian nuclear program became a huge global concern. Despite Iranian affirmations that their nuclear program was purely made for peaceful aims, the Western powers, especially the United States did not trust the Iranian stance and points towards its advanced facilities such as the Enrichment Plant. Direct negotiations on Iran’s nuclear ambitions started in early 2013 between the P5+1 and Iran with the final objective of resolving the controversy. The direct talks began with Barack Obama’s telephonic talk with President Hassan Rouhani in September 2013. From that specific moment, an interim deal was reached between the two sides in November 2013, which was extended twice for six months until November 2014, to arrive at a definitive deal by June 2015. As it has been mentioned yet, the deal entailed the possibility for Iran to keep nuclear facilities that were made for peaceful and civilian aims, but they would be subject to strict production limits. In 2015 after long negotiations between Iran and the P5+1, the Iranian nuclear agreement has been dealt with. The deal entailed a lot of measures as the reduction of the number of centrifuges or the break of enrichment at Fordow. However, according to the deal, United States sanctions on Iran regarding security and human rights abuses would remain in place: it provided that AIEA would make inspections on Iranian facilities and sanctions would have been re-imposed if Iran breached the deal.

Generally, the deal seemed to ensure a win-win position for both sides as they had come out of their fixated positions to gibe diplomacy a possibility for bringing an end to the nuclear controversy that started in 2002.

During his first term, Obama sought to adopt an opposite strategy to that of his predecessor Bush: following a diplomatic approach which did not involve military intervention. Obama has consistently pushed a plan of action known as "dual-track" that combines diplomacy with sanctions rather than pursue a hardline approach.

During his second term, Obama maintained a soft line on Iran, increasingly spying on the disposal of Iran's international isolation and containment. To sum up, at the time of his election, Barack Obama wanted to operate a disengagement from the Middle East, in favor of a more incisive role in the Far East. Moreover, he preferred a multilateral approach and wanted to prevent a conflict with Iran at all costs. For this reason, his two mandates were characterized by a long negotiation process with the Islamic Republic, to find a deal that would prevent it from developing and using an atomic bomb.

With the rise of Trump, the scenario completely changed. Indeed, unlike Obama, Trump has always adopted harsh rhetoric towards Iran and always claimed to be against the JCPOA and in favor of the signing of a new pact. However, he continued to adopt the sharper language and state that he would implement an increasingly tough approach to Iran. Unlike his predecessor, he did not respected two crucial conditions for maintain a good relationship with Iran: respecting Iran's right to uranium enrichment and using not an aggressive language. The American president often reiterated that if no changes to the JCPOA were made or if no new solution was proposed, the United States would withdraw from the plan: in 2018 therefore the President officially declared the withdrawal of the United States. He reasoned his choice by claiming that, after a month of negotiations with European allies, it was clear that the JCPOA could not prevent Iran from coming into possession of atomic weapons.

The last chapter focuses on the European Union.

In particular, this part describes the existing relationship between the two powers, the interests between the EU and Iran, and finally to analyze the European position after the United States' exit from the deal in 2018.

First of all, it is possible to observe how, unlike the United States, the European Union has always had good relations with Iran trying to include it economically and strategically at the international level. In addition, it is crucial to note how the European Union has been for years one of the considerable Iranian partners with Iran that exported a large share of its oil and petroleum products to European markets in return for machinery, transport equipment, and chemicals. Since the mid-2000s the controversy over the nuclear deal has dominated the

relationship between the European Union and Iran. The European Union's policy aim in this regard has always been to "achieve a comprehensive, negotiated, long-term settlement which restores international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear program while respecting Iran's legitimate right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy under the Non-Proliferation Treaty." as affirmed by the Council of Europe.³³²

As for the interests of the European Union in Iran, the chapter describes three of them : security, energy, and economy. Since the signing of the JCPOA, nonetheless, the European institutions and members states have vigorously sought to reinsert Iran economically and strategically.

As it was affirmed by Blockmans: " Despite these obstacles and setbacks, the Iranian and European sides initiated the so-called "critical dialogue", which later evolved into a comprehensive one. The European Union sought to use growing trade and commercial ties as well as flourishing political dialogue to change Iran's policy in four fields: human rights, the Arab-Israeli conflict, allegations of sponsoring terrorism, and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction." ³³³

As also for Russia and for the United States, the nuclear question has been the key point in the relations between the two actors, particularly since the revelation of previously undeclared nuclear activities in 2002.

From the point of view of security, the JCPOA guaranteed Europe greater tranquility about the possible development of a military nuclear program. However, on the one hand, Europe ensured Iran regarding the nuclear deal, on the other hand the European Union was skeptical regarding Iranian regional activities and development of the regional missile program: nevertheless, European Union policymakers retained that they consist of a set of other several interests subordinated to the maintenance of the JCPOA.

From the energy point of view, Vice President Mogherini affirmed that Iran would be a fundamental partner for Europe for energy security.

From the economic point of view instead, it is possible to claim that the ties between Iran and the EU focus on infrastructure, financial, and airplane sectors. Moreover, the Iranian economy is still highly dependent on the export of energy facilities but it also had developed during the decades' other industries. In fact, the Iranian President, during his visits concluded energy contracts and collaboration agreements as well as ones in the airplane and financial fields.

³³² Council of the EU, "Factsheet: The European Union and Iran", doc. 5555/2/12 REV2, 23 March 2012.

³³³ Blockmans S., Ehteshami A., Bahgat G. 2016. " *EU-Relations after Nuclear Deal*".

The crucial point covered in this chapter is the European strategy after Trump's exit: keep the agreement alive, and maintain the areas of cooperation already existing between Iran and the European Union to continue to implement the JCPOA. Mogherini sustained that until Iran fulfill the obligations and followed the conditions imposed by the JCPOA, then the European Union would continue to implement the deal and to protect the security and economic interests that it had.

Among the instruments conceived by the European Union to adequately address the critical situation caused by the increase in sanctions, there are the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) through the foundation of the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX). However, Iran has shown its discontent with these instruments accusing Europe of not being very brave in maintaining its economic sovereignty.

The work concludes by setting out the general context following Trump's exit and by exposing in particular the positions of Iran and the USA. Finally, it mentions possible future scenarios. First of all, it is necessary to underline that the new US president, after initial uncertainties about the resumption of the agreement, said he was in favor of negotiations with Iran. At the same time, the Iranian leadership, after having seen the chance of a new diplomatic course, tried to convince the USA not to delay the re-entry into the nuclear plan stating that, otherwise, it would have reduced the access of the UN inspectors to its nuclear program.

However, both countries remained firm on their conditions: Iran said it would only return to compliance with the conditions imposed by the agreement if the US lifted economic restrictions as provided by the Iran deal, whereas the US said it would lift sanctions only after Iran stopped over-enriching uranium in violation of the agreement.

A possible reconciliation lays in both Biden's foreign policy and the willingness to reopen negotiations of the new Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi who has been elected in June 2021.

However, to date, the sabotage of the nuclear power plant in Natanz pushed Iran to take this path. Therefore, Tehran decided to further enrich uranium to 60%, approaching the threshold of military use, just on the eve of the consultation at the IAEA in Vienna, and to scale back the access of UN inspectors to its nuclear program.

Nevertheless, these events have not slowed down the diplomatic process: after Easter, the Joint Commission of the JCPOA met in Vienna for the first time since 2018 in the presence of a US delegation. This phase did not lead to direct talks between US and Iranian representatives but was nevertheless described as "encouraging" after months of standstill.

However, after the Iranian presidential elections of June 2021, which saw the radical Ebrahim Raisi prevail, the resumption of negotiations on the JCPOA seems to be far away. The new

Iranian president declared that he does not want to meet the US president to resume negotiations.

On the one hand, Raisi stands firm on his positions, and on the other hand, Biden is up against Republican opposition to lifting the sanctions imposed by his predecessor: to do so, he would have to spend political capital that he might need for his domestic political agenda, and Israel, with which Iran has tense relations, does not facilitate its decision.

It can be concluded that possible future scenarios may entail a reconciliation between the United States and Iran, which depends both on their willingness to negotiate and on their foreign policy priorities or the eventual failure of the JCPOA, that would inevitably lead to negative consequences, including a possible conflict in the Middle East as a result of the hostility between the US and Iran. Given the current situation, however, it would seem difficult to think of an imminent reconciliation between the two partners.

Despite this, the fundamental objective of the international community should be and remain only one: to contain the tension in the Middle East as much as possible to preserve world security.

All scenarios, therefore, remain open and in evolution.