

ԵՐԵՎԱՆԻ ՊԵՏԱԿԱՆ ՀԱՄԱԼՍԱՐԱՆ
ԱՐԵՎԵԼԱԳԻՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՖԱԿՈՒԼՏԵՏ

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**Հրատարակվում է Երևանի պետական համալսարանի
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գիտական խորհրդի որոշմամբ**

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Republic of Turkey, Yerevan, 2018, 364 p.141-144

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պատմություն, Երևան, 2018, էջ 364.....141-144

THE UNITED STATES-IRAN POLICY DYNAMICS IN 1993-2016

Keywords: *United States, Iran, D'Amato Act, axis of evil, Nuclear program, sanctions.*

The article discusses Iran-U.S. relations, presents the dynamics of those during presidencies of U.S. Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama. At the same time the author draws parallels with the approaches of the Presidents of Iran Hashemi Rafsanjani, Mohammad Khatami, Mohammed Ahmadinejad and Hasan Rouhani towards normalization of relations with the USA and the process of coping with U.S. pressures. The article also examines the mechanisms of the implemented sanctions and changes of the attitudes of Iran towards the USA in the context of nuclear talks. Furthermore, the author discusses Iran-U.S. relations in the context of interests, objectives and approaches of two major parties in the USA, namely Republicans and Democrats. The article also looks at those insurmountable issues that currently hinder establishment of normal relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the USA.

Since 1979, the relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States of America have seen rises and falls. After the Islamic revolution, once-allies not only severed relations but also turned into foes. *Death to America* or *Death to Big Satan* posters were common in Iran, whereas Iran was often labelled in the USA as *sponsor of terrorism* and *fraudulent state*. This over-tensed atmosphere reached its peak during hostage crisis at US embassy in Tehran and continued in the course of Iran-Iraq war when the United States provided military support to both sides thus procrastinating the war and weakening both. On 3 July 1988, the

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United States Ship Vincennes warship shot down Iranian A-300 Airbus killing 290 civilians including 65 children. This contributed to deepening of the gap between two countries especially in the last period of presidency of Jimmy Carter, and those of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush.

In addition to the fact that Washington and Tehran have not had official relations since 1979, the Islamic Republic's top leadership—namely Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei—has arguably come to see opposition to America (and Israel) as an inextricable part of the revolutionary regime's identity. Iran's leadership is doubtful towards the normalization approaches of the US, as Khamenei believes Washington's underlying goal in Tehran is regime change, not finding solutions in regard to the nuclear programme.²

It is noteworthy that in the last decade of the 20th century the foreign policy of Iran tended to find modus vivendi with Western European countries. President of Iran HashemiRafsanjani's years in power shined with more liberal approaches both in domestic and foreign policy arenas.³ The pragmatist policy of Rafsanjani had two pillars: (a) solving economic problems that Iran-Iraq war had caused, and (b) improving relations of Iran with other countries.⁴

During his first few years in office, Rafsanjani had again tried to explore the possibility of better relations with the United States. He had taken President Bush in his inaugural address at his word and tried to demonstrate some “goodwill”. In 1990-1991, when all the remaining

² Karim Sadjadpour and George Perkovich, *The Iranian Nuclear Threat, Global Ten.* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for Peace, 2012), 45.

³See Gohar Iskandaryan, “Iran-EU Relations in the End of 20th Century and the Beginning of 21st Century”, *The Countries and Peoples of the Near and Middle East: vol. 28, XXVIII* (2011): 273 (in Armenian).

⁴Fakhreddin Soltani and Reza EkhtiariAmiri, “Foreign Policy of Iran after Islamic Revolution”, *Journal of Politics and Law: vol. 3, No. 2*, (2010):202,<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.678.930&rep=rep1&type=pdf>(accessed on February 17, 2019)

American hostages in Lebanon were freed Rafsanjani commented in public that it was Iran that had freed them.⁵

It won't be an overstatement to claim that as of today, the whole international community follows the ups and downs of US-Iran relations that mostly influence the Near and Middle East countries.

Remarkably, as a rule of thumb, the Republicans adopt more hawkish policy towards the Islamic Republic of Iran in contrast to the Democrats. And within this context it is noteworthy if the Iranian counterpart is more biased towards conservative or liberal wing. And the bilateral relations are more constructive when a US President from the Democratic Party is paired with a liberal or reformist from Iran. At the same time, there is an important reservation: not a single president of Iran can lead a foreign policy line independently of the Supreme Leader.

Bill Clinton's Administration and its Approaches to Iranian Problem: Time for Acknowledging the Own Mistakes of the Past

The first period of Bill Clinton's presidency (in office from 20 January 1993) had no changes in its policies towards Iran. In this period the policy of containing Iran is a new approach adopted by the Clinton administration. The US policy of containing Iran, apart of the so-called "Dual Containment" policy which has been applied to both Iran and Iraq, differs from the previous US government's approaches.⁶ Along many factors, the negative attitude⁷ of the State Secretary Christopher Warren was significant and influenced the continuing tough policy towards Iran. As a result of his

⁵Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America* (New York: Random House, 2004), 252.

⁶M. Anadi, "Democratic Party of the U.S. and Islamic Republic of Iran". *Amu Darya: Iranian Journal of Central Asia and Caucasus Studies*, No. 23 (2007):138 (in Russian); M.KazemSajjadpour, "Assessing the Policy of Dual Containment: Four Different Perspectives", *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol IX, N 1, Tehran (Special issue on UN Unilateral sanctions against Iran) (1977): 77.

⁷He had negative attitude since he was the chief negotiator during the Hostage Crisis. "The Iranian Hostage Crisis", *Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State*, <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/short-history/iraniancrises>, accessed September 15, 2018; "Putting the hostages' lives first", *New York Times*, May 17, 1981, <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/05/17/magazine/putting-the-hostages-lives-first.html?pagewanted=all>.(accessed on February 14, 2019)

efforts, President Clinton issued Executive Order 12959 (6 May 1995), banning US trade with and investment in Iran.⁸

But that seemed not enough for Clinton's administration, and on 5 August 1996, the US Congress adopted Iran Foreign Oil Sanction Act⁹ introduced by Senator D'Amato that sanctioned all those companies that make an "investment" of more than \$20 million in one year in Iran's energy sector.¹⁰ It concerned mostly non-US companies, since that prohibition had been in force for them since 1995. The activities of those companies non-abiding by the D'Amato Act would be strictly limited in the USA. Thus, numerous contracts between Western European countries and Iran were announced void.¹¹

At the same time, in 1995, Tehran offered its first upstream oil deal since the revolution, and opted to put the offer to an American company in what Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani later described as 'a message to the United States that was not properly understood'.¹²

Quite interesting developments happened around investment projects of several European companies regarding the D'Amato Act. According to Iranian newspaper *Salam*, the president of French company Total refused to abide by the D'Amato Act and in one of his speeches told that his company was following all the international, UN and French laws and at the same time has no responsibility towards US domestic acts that are intended for

⁸ Kenneth Katzman, *The Iran Sanctions Act (ISA)*, CRS Report for Congress, 2007, Order Code RS20871, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS20871.pdf>. (accessed on February 14, 2019)

⁹ On September 8, 1995, Senator Alfonse D'Amato introduced the "Iran Foreign Oil Sanctions Act" to sanction foreign firms' exports (exceeding 20 mln USD) to Iran of energy technology. The bill passed the Senate on December 18, 1995 (voice vote) but, acknowledging the difficulty of monitoring all trade with Iran, sanctioned foreign investment in Iran's energy sector. The House passed its version of the bill, H.R. 3107, on June 19, 1996 (415-0), and then concurred on a slightly different Senate version adopted on July 16, 1996 (unanimous consent). It was signed on August 5, 1996 (Public Law 104-172 <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-110/pdf/STATUTE-110-Pg1541.pdf>). See: Katzman, ISA.

¹⁰ Kenneth Katzman, *The Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA)*, CRS Report for Congress, 2001, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/crs/rs20871.pdf>. (accessed on 14.02. 2019)

¹¹ Iskandaryan, *Iran-EU Relations*, 274-5.

¹² R. Takeyh, S. Maloney, "The self-limiting success of Iran sanctions", *International Affairs* 87:6 (2011):1302 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2011.01037.x>. (accessed on 14.02. 2019)

protection of the interests of a narrow circle. He indirectly hinted towards the Act and added that *Total Company* operates in 100 countries of the world and their operation in Iran is likewise rightful and exemplary: ‘*It is not up to them changing the regime and forcing policies*’.¹³

In parallel with the tougher economic sanctions, the White House considered making steps towards softening tensions. Thus, in contrast to the previous Republicans who never apologized for the 3 July 1988 tragic shooting down of an Iranian A-300 Airbus, the Clinton Administration agreed to make payments in the approximate amount of \$131 million, with nearly \$62 million going to the families of the victims in 1996.¹⁴

At the same time, the West considered that the probability of improving the relations with Iran during the presidency of Rafsanjani was very low¹⁵ and hence pinned hopes on the next president of Iran taking into account that 1997 was an election year in Iran. In May, Seyed Mohammad Khatami from the reformist wing was chosen as the president of Iran. The top task of the newly elected president was rehabilitation of Iran’s rating and normalization of foreign relations. Signing of the Convention on Chemical Weapons by Iran in 1997 was amongst several important steps towards that direction. Another big impression on international community was made by the speech of IRI president Mohammad Khatami at the UN General Assembly in December 1997 when he called for the Dialogue of Civilizations. In addition, Khatami’s statement from the UN platform in 1998 that Iran will not implement the 1989 fatwa of Ayatollah Khomeini

¹³*Salam*, 5 Oct. 1997: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, Historical-diplomatic section (archive), Department of Near and Middle East, Iran section, list 2, case 169, p. 175 (in Armenian).

¹⁴ James A. Beckman, “Nation-State Culpability and Liability for Catastrophic Air Disasters: Reforming Public International Law to Allow for Liability of Nation-States and the Application of Punitive Damages”, *FIU Law Review*:vol. 10, No. 2 (Spring 2015): 600. Available at: <https://collections.law.fiu.edu/lawreview/vol10/iss2/15>; Fred Kaplan, “America’s Flight 17: The time the United States blew up a passenger plane— and tried to cover it up”, *SLATE*, July 23, 2014, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/war_stories/2014/07/the_vincennes_downing_of_iran_air_flight_655_the_united_states_tried_to.html .(accessed on February 1, 2019)

¹⁵In 1997 during the Mykonos trial in Germany, it was declared that Rafsanjani, the then president of Iran, had a role in the assassination of four opposition activists of Kurdish origin in Europe on September 17, 1992. The Berlin court also condemned Iran labeling it as a terrorism-sponsoring state, and stated that this murder could not be implemented without knowledge of Iran’s ruling elite.

regarding Salman Rushdie represented the cherry on the top. After these developments, a number of Western European countries as well as the US tried to bring their relations with Iran to a higher quality level.¹⁶ US foreign policy towards Iran remarkably changed during the second term of Clinton. Some of the influencing factors worth to mention are change of US State Secretary, election of the new president of Iran and subsequently possibility of more discreet approaches towards regional issues, as well as serious lobbying of American oil and agriculture industry representatives on US government to end unilateral sanctions concerning Iran.¹⁷

Iranian decision makers think that unilateral sanctions have at best dubious legal character, while the imposition of unilateral primary and secondary sanctions by the US against Iran clearly constitute violations of international law.¹⁸

Madeleine Albright was appointed State Secretary after re-election of Bill Clinton in 1997 and she implemented more discreet policy towards Iran, even trying to retouch few mistakes and omissions. In November 1999, the United States made a step towards normalization of relations with Iran by proposing to establish an American consulate in Tehran. However, this was rejected by Iran. In November 1999, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei explained that Tehran rejected such a proposal because *'they [the Americans] want to open an intelligence-political site in Tehran to make contact with sold-out elements.'*¹⁹

It is noteworthy, Iran also tried to overcome the problems with small steps, however, Khatami's softer rhetoric often masked unchanged

¹⁶Iskandaryan, *Iran-EU Relations*, 276-7.

¹⁷ Because of the unilateral sanctions the representatives of US oil industry were not able to do any business with Iran. Iran kept buying grain from the US but after the unilateral sanction of 1995 that was also stopped resulting in yet another drop of their income. In 1999, Clinton administration permitted supply of food and medication to Iran.

¹⁸M.J. Zarif and S. Mirzaee, "US Unilateral Sanctions against Iran", *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol IX, N 1, Spring, Tehran, (Special issue on UN Unilateral sanctions against Iran), 6-7.

¹⁹ Abbas William Samii, "Winning Iranian Hearts and Minds" in *Checking Iran's nuclear ambitions*, eds. Henri Sokolski and Patrick Clawson (Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2004), 90.

positions. Khatami was able to create a perception of change that led to a less wary US stance—and he did this without conceding on any of points of substance. For instance, many were satisfied with his comment about the 1979 US embassy hostage crisis during his 7 January 1998, interview with CNN, which expressed regret for hurt feelings (*‘I do know that the feelings of the great American people have been hurt, and of course I regret it’*)²⁰, but not for the egregious violation of international law that the seizure of the embassy represented. Khatami reiterated Iran's rejection of government-to-government dialogue, but the United States persisted, breathing life into its long-standing offer to hold such a dialogue.

In a 17 June 1998, speech at the Asia Society in New York, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright welcomed *‘signs of change’* in Iran, adding, *‘We are ready to explore further ways to build mutual confidence and avoid misunderstandings’*²¹. And on 17 March 2000, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright both acknowledged and expressed regret for the role of the US President Eisenhower’s administration played in Operation Ajax²² which intervened in domestic affairs of Iran and overthrew Iran's Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh who enjoyed great sympathy from the population²³.

And not the least, neither State Secretary Albright, nor US President Clinton left the UN GA session during the speech of Iranian President Khatami in autumn 2000 although that was the traditional case by US leadership. This act further gave positive impetus to the future opportunities of normalization.

The major modifications to the ban came in 1999, with a lifting of a ban on commercial sales of food and medical products to Iran; and 2000, with a modification of the ban on imports to allow importation of Iranian luxury goods such as carpets, caviar, fruits and nuts, permitted supply of

²⁰“Transcript of interview with Iranian President Mohammad Khatami”, *CNN*, January 7, 1998, <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/9801/07/iran/interview.html>.(accessed on 14.02.2019)

²¹ Patrick Clawson, “The Khatami Paradox” in *Iran under Khatami: A Political, Economic, and Military Assessment*, eds. P.L. Clawson et al. (Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998), 5.

²² “Madeleine Albright on Operation Ajax”, *AICBroadcast*, 2000, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5HYUtYa3wI> (accessed on February 14, 2019).

²³Ibid.

grain, medicine, medical equipment, and several types of parts for civic airplanes to Iran.²⁴

Remarkably, Iranian ruling elite viewed Albright's regret and acknowledgement and the overall new approaches by the United States equivocally. The politicians who had liberal bias or were positive towards having somewhat better relations with the United States affirmed these approaches.

However, unfortunately, Iranian leadership was also not ready to continue dialogue with the United States and continuously anticipated clear steps confirming positive dynamics in the relations. The decision-makers in Iran believed that both the Democrats and the Republicans adopt same strategic approaches when it comes to the American image in the foreign policy or its national interests. At the same time their tactics might be totally different according to the issues.²⁵ It was also evident that during this period Iranian ruling circles were not ready to reciprocate to the United States' offer of discussions with no preconditions and were applying the old methods of spreading doubt and hatred.

The Approaches of George W. Bush towards Iranian Problem: Iran as the axis of evil state

George W. Bush from the Republican Party won the presidential election in 2000 and became the 43rd President of the United States. Few months after his inauguration, on 11 September 2001, America was stroke by the unprecedented terrorist attack that was responded by Bush waging his global 'war on terror'.

Although the Islamic Republic of Iran was among the first ones to condemn the terrorist attack on the US and to pass its condolences to the American nation, Tehran did not avoid accusations from Washington. George W. Bush delivered the State of the Union Address at the United

²⁴Major Treasury Department Regulations Implementing or Modifying the Trade Ban' in *U.S.-Iranian Relations: An Analytic Compendium of U.S. Policies, Laws and Regulations*. Washington: Atlantic Council, 2011), 94-102.

²⁵ M. Anadi, "Democratic Party of the U.S. and Islamic Republic of Iran", 132.

States Capitol building on 29 January 2002. An "*axis of evil*" was a term first used by President Bush in this address. The so-called "*axis of evil*" was said to be made up of three countries: Iran, Iraq, and North Korea. These countries were cited as countries pursuing chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons and having terrorist training camps.

The situation with Iran further worsened in 2002 when Mujahideen-e Khalq group that is in opposition to the leadership in Tehran declared that Iran is secretly engaged in uranium enrichment and, more importantly, is working towards development of a nuclear weapon.

It was clear that sanctions against Iran were going to get tougher although the then-president Mohammad Khatami was rather constructive during nuclear talks with Western countries. He even signed the Additional Protocol²⁶ along with the Safeguards agreement on 18 December 2003. This supposedly made Iranian nuclear program totally open for IAEA.

However, this was not enough to dispel US concerns about Iran. The United States were also alarmed with the presence of modernized missiles in Iran. '*The United States has intelligence that Iran is working to adapt missiles to deliver a nuclear weapon, further evidence that the Islamic republic is determined to acquire a nuclear bomb*', Secretary of State Colin L. Powell said in one of his speeches in 2004.²⁷ He meant *Shahab-3* missiles that could reach the borders of Israel.

2005 State of the Union Address of President Bush had the following wording regarding Iran: *Today, Iran remains the world's primary state sponsor of terror - pursuing nuclear weapons while depriving its people of the freedom they seek and deserve. We are working with European allies to make clear to the Iranian regime that it must give up its uranium enrichment program and any plutonium reprocessing, and end its support*

²⁶ According to the Additional Protocol the representatives of IAEA could enter the country and implement monitoring without prior notification.

²⁷ Robin Wright and Keith B. Richburg, "Powell Says Iran Is Pursuing Bomb", *Washington Post Foreign Service*, November 18, 2004, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A57465-2004Nov17.html>. (accessed on February 12, 2019)

*for terror. And to the Iranian people, I say tonight: As you stand for your own liberty, America stands with you.*²⁸

It was an actual call for rebellion to Iranians in the wake of presidential elections in Iran.

Interestingly, in the result of 2005 presidential elections in Iran and in the light of utmost anti-Iranian rhetoric by the US, ultra conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected. The harsh speeches of Ahmadinejad reinforced the hard-line policy of America against Iran.

Tension towards Iran got more intense especially after the prominent speech of president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad pledging to wipe Israel off the map etc. Certainly, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's remark was subsequently the subject of dispute blaming media to manipulate the words, but the image of a hard-line politician was already depicted.

IAEA adopted a strict position towards Iran on 24 September 2005, demanding from Tehran to stop the restart of experiments on uranium enrichment and otherwise threatening to pass the case to the UN Security Council. The resolution was adopted by majority of votes, with Russia and China abstaining.

In this context, the following circumstance is interesting. On 31 May 2006, IAEA director Muhammed el-Baradei gave interview to Italian RAI TV, noting that *'Iran does not constitute a certain and immediate threat for the international community.'*²⁹

Given the hard-line policy of George W. Bush towards Iran and no less hawkish rhetoric and non-flexible policy of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, UN SC adopted a number of resolutions concerning Iran: No. 1696, No. 1737 in 2006, No. 1747 in 2007, No. 1803 in 2008, No. 1929 in 2010. All of those were imposed during the rule of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and seriously hit the Iranian economy and deepened its isolation. But it is also worth of mentioning that while being isolated, Iran expanded its uranium

²⁸ George W. Bush, State of the Union Address, *Social Security Administration*, 2 Feb. 2005, <https://www.ssa.gov/history/gwbushstmts5.html#02022005>. (accessed on February 14, 2019)

²⁹ "Iran not an "immediate threat", says IAEA chief", *The Daily Star*, 22 Sep. 2007, <http://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-4904>(accessed on February 14, 2019)

enrichment programs and developed considerable amount of own enriched uranium that brought qualitative change both in knowledge and experience of uranium enrichment and strengthened its hand during 5+1³⁰ subsequent talks. We can claim that amount of enriched uranium contributed in 2014 talks to ensure Iran's right to enrich its own uranium for peaceful purposes.

But one of the main problems was the rough and disrespectful attitude of president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad towards international bodies and their decisions. Thus, regarding the UN SC resolution in 2007, Ahmadinejad said that the West had lost its chance to improve relations with Iran: *They seek to mobilise a group of their agents on the pretext of this piece of paper in order to sow seeds of discord among the Iranian nation. No matter [whether] they accept it or not, Iran is now an established nuclear state and it is in their interest to live alongside the Iranian nation.*³¹

And this type of approach was not conducive to problem-solving, and it was already clear that Iran was not going to implement the demands of UNSC and the sanctions were to get stricter. He commented on the UNSC resolution of 2010 as well. *"From right and from left, they adopt sanctions, but for us they are annoying flies, like a used tissue,"* he said.³²

One could understand from his words that Iran was not going to implement anything regarding the resolution within next 90 days, i.e. the timeframe given by the UNSC resolution. America ran out of patience and Washington decided to proceed without UN mediation. The United States started to persuade the oil-buying states to stop their trade with Iran and look for alternative sources of hydrocarbons.

The atmosphere of hate deepened from both sides. On 10-13 December, the Gallup poll updated a question from earlier the same year that asked Americans to name, in their own words, the single country they considered to be the greatest threat to stability in the world. Iran continued

³⁰ UNSC permanent members plus Germany were negotiating with Iran in regard to the nuclear programs.

³¹"Ahmadinejad rejects UN sanctions", *BBC*, December 24, 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6207319.stm.(accessed on February 10, 2019)

³² "Iran dismisses new UN sanctions as "a used hanky", *The Telegraph*, June 10, 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/7816395/Irandismisses-new-UN-sanctions-as-a-used-hanky.html>.(accessed on February 11, 2019)

to top the list, with 31% of Americans then saying it was the greatest threat to world stability.³³

The public also believed that Iran's nuclear program posed a serious threat to America. According to the poll, 61% of Americans said the Iranian nuclear program posed a threat to the United States, with 33% saying it posed a "very serious" threat. Thirty-seven percent said Iran's nuclear program did not pose a threat to the United States. To another question on public's perception of Iran's nuclear program posing a serious threat to the United States, 33% of responders answered 'Yes, very serious threat', 28 % of them 'Yes, somewhat serious threat', 37% of them 'No, does not pose a threat', and just 1% had no opinion.³⁴

The Approach of Barack Obama's Administration towards Iran: Negotiations with no Preconditions

Since the commencement of the first four-year term of Barack Hussein Obama, bringing a solution to the Iranian nuclear issue has been perhaps the highest one on the foreign policy agenda of the President. During his first term, Barack Obama clearly stated that the Iranian nuclear problem should be solved through negotiations, at the same time not excluding the possibility of applying the military power in case of need. The Democrats, in contrast to the Republicans, have always been prone to solution options that include negotiations. The Obama administration knew well what type of issues would bring military strike against Iran. This made Washington DC to put all possible efforts to evade military conflict. However, normalization of relations with Iran is not an easy task, either.

Still, at that period heading for the toughest negotiations was more favourable for the United States than engaging in military actions. At the same time, we should state that Obama's administration was not a yielding one and the strictest sanctions against Iran were imposed during Obama.

³³ Joseph Carroll, "Public: Iran's Nuclear Program Poses Threat to US'", *GALLUP News*, December 20, 2007, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/103402/Public-Irans-Nuclear-Program-Poses-Threat-US.aspx>.(accessed on February 15, 2019)

³⁴ Ibid

These sanctions had much influence on the Iranian economy. Meanwhile, both the content and the strictness of the sanctions before Obama were remarkably much weaker.

Decision makers in the US came to the understanding that Iran has influence on a number of the most important US foreign policy issues, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestinian issue, war on terror, energy security. They could manage these issues only in case they have a dialogue with Iran. Grasping this fact, the President Obama did more than any other US President after 1979 Islamic Revolution to introduce changes in Iran-American relations.

During his first inauguration speech Obama, while openly hinting Iran, offered *'we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.'*³⁵ Even before his election, in contrast to his predecessors as well as his rivals, as a candidate for the US presidency Barack Obama publicly campaigned on the exigency of a more effective approach to Iran; during the Democratic primary race, he embraced the need for direct negotiations without preconditions.³⁶

On 19 March 2009, via a special video-message Obama extended his congratulations to the Iranian people and the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the occasion of the New Year – Nowruz. In the message, Obama said that his administration is aiming establishment of constructive ties between the US and Iran: *'This process will not be advanced by threats. We seek instead engagement that is honest and grounded in mutual respect.'*³⁷

In spite of the opinions on the possibility of breaking the ice between the two states, the Supreme leader of Iran declared that Obama's speech regarding the change is a mere tactical trick. He also reminded the long list of historical injustices made by the US towards Iran and called the

³⁵ Barack Obama's Inaugural Address. *The New York Times*, January 20, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/20/us/politics/20text-obama.html>.(accessed on 14.02. 2019)

³⁶ Takeyh and Maloney, "The self-limiting success of Iran sanctions", 1304.

³⁷ Remarks by the President in celebration of Nowruz. *The White House*, March 20, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/VIDEOTAPED-REMARKS-BY-THE-PRESIDENT-IN-CELEBRATION-OF-NOWRUZ(accessed on February 5, 2019)

administration of Obama to take several unilateral steps ahead in order to prove their sincere devotion to the change.³⁸

Nevertheless, Obama's initiative did have its indirect influence on Iran. Whereas George W. Bush's administration was making hawkish statements and thus unintentionally helping the different and opposing political wings in Iran to join efforts against the shared threat, the peaceful calls of Obama gave opportunity to those powers to focus on domestic issues of Iran. This became more evident after the presidential elections in 2009 when Mahmud Ahmadinejad got re-elected and Iran experienced the largest wave of political protests after the 1979 Revolution. During his first term, Obama clearly showed that the US is not the trouble-maker party in the Iranian issue by continuing to propose direct negotiations even after the authorities suppressed the Green movement. At the same time, Obama succeeded at gaining Russia's and China's agreement to implement the toughest ever sanctions against Iran.³⁹

In 2010 the Iranian issue again found itself in the UNSC agenda since no advancement had been registered in relation to the previously adopted resolutions.⁴⁰ Any vessel, plane or any other vehicle could be checked in case of doubt. Moreover, according to the 29th para of this resolution, a group of eight professionals was established in order to research to issue and present their report to IAEA. This resolution also included all points of the previous resolutions that were not implemented by Iran.⁴¹

Barack Obama wanted to include another point in this resolution according to which Iran would be sanctioned also in oil industry. This would lead to limitation of purchase of oil and gas from Iran whereas the

³⁸ Sadjadpour and Perkovich, *The Iranian Nuclear Threat*, 46.

³⁹ Andrew Sullivan, "Obama's handed them the rope. Will Iran or Israel hang itself first?", *The Sunday Times*, January 20, 2013, <http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/comment/columns/andrewsullivan/article1197473.ece> (accessed on February 7, 2019)

⁴⁰ UNSC adopted the following resolutions: 1696 on 31 July 2006, 1737 on 23 Dec. 2006, 1747 on 24 March 2007, 1803 on 3 March 2008. Iran ignored all those resolutions.

⁴¹ "Security Council Imposes Additional Sanctions on Iran, Voting 12 in Favour to 2 Against, with 1 Abstention", *UN, Security Council SC/9948*, Security Council 6335th Meeting* (AM), June 9, 2010, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2010/sc9948.doc.htm> (accessed on February 10, 2019)

budget of Iran is replenished mostly from hydrocarbon revenues. This would be a very big strike on Iranian economy. The United States imposed tougher sanctions on Iran. In addition to UNSC resolution regarding Iranian nuclear issue, heavier unilateral sanctions were imposed by the US and EU. In December 2011, the US Senate unanimously voted for sanctioning the central bank of Iran⁴², thus making many countries and the organizations working in the area of energy, basically, to choose cooperating either with Iran or with the United States.

On 23 January 2012, the European Union made its final decision to stop purchasing oil from Iran. A while later, Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) declared that it freezes its relations with Iranian financial institutions.

‘The international pressure, coupled with Iran’s endemic mismanagement, has caused economic conditions in the country to severely deteriorate. During Obama’s presidency, Iran’s oil production has dropped from 4.2 million barrels per day (mbpd) to 2.7 mbpd. Its oil exports have dropped equally precipitously, falling from 2.5 mbpd to .9 mbpd. The country’s official inflation rate has risen to 29 percent, though some unofficial estimates are double that number. Unemployment and underemployment remain rampant. And Iran’s currency, the *rial*, has lost nearly 80 percent of its value vis-à-vis the US dollar.’⁴³

The continuous character of the nuclear program constantly kept the US alert since at any moment Iran could break the agreements and increase the percentage of the enrichment. The leadership of both countries do not trust each other. For example, Khamanei is sure that the main target of Washington DC is the regime change. According to several Iranian analysts, the US strategy is not in military attack but in ripening a soft revolution or coup d’état through cultural and political steps. To them, US criticism of Iran’s human rights record, its sponsorship of Persian language media broadcasts such as Voice of America, and the power of Hollywood

⁴² “Senator Menendez Praises Conference Committee for Staying Tough on Iran”, *Official website of Senator Menendez*. December 13, 2011, <https://www.menendez.senate.gov/news-and-events/press/senator-menendez-praises-conference-committee-for-staying-tough-on-iran>.(accessed on February 5, 2019)

⁴³Sadjadpour and Perkovich, *The Iranian Nuclear Threat*, 48.

are all symbols of America's cultural-cum-political subversiveness. It's noteworthy that both countries scare their people by seeding fear and hatred against each other through different information.

In 2012, a Gallup poll in the United States revealed that most of the US citizens think that Iran is the top one enemy of the United States. The following question was asked: 'What one country anywhere in the world do you consider to be the United States' greatest enemy?'. Here are the answers: 32% of responders answered 'Iran', 23% of them China, 10%- North Korea, 7%- Afghanistan, 5%- Iraq, 2%- Russia, 2%- Pakistan, 1%- the US, 1- Japan, 1%- Saudi Arabia.⁴⁴

By the way, in 2011 only 25% of the respondents viewed Iran as the greatest enemy, meaning a seven-point increase in one year. At the same time, since 2014 these dynamics have stopped and Iran did not lead the list for the following years.

Islamic Republic of Iran also tries to infuse the deepest hatred and fear against the US and Israel. Large billboards with words 'Death to the US' and terrifying pictures symbolizing the US can be seen all over Tehran and other towns.

Certainly, this reciprocal hatred does not support to the normalizing of bilateral relations. Moreover, Israel's anti-Iranian politics and influential Jewish lobby in the US impede that process. In its anti-Iranian propaganda, Israel brings seal argument on the table.

- Iranian nuclear program, including Tehran's active efforts in missile-building.
- Anti-Israel, anti-Zionistic rhetoric of Ahmadinejad,
- Rejection of the existence of Israeli state and support to the Palestine,
- Raise of the role of Iran in the region.

Israel has always been sensitive towards Iranian nuclear programme and persistently called for the United States' attention on its potential

⁴⁴ F Newport, "Americans Still Rate Iran Top US Enemy", *GALLUP News*, February 20, 2012, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/152786/Americans-Rate-Iran-Top-Enemy.aspx> (accessed on 5.02.19)

threats. Thus, every year Israel declared that if Iranian nuclear program is not prevented, then after Tehran crosses the red line it would be meaningless doing anything against Iran. However, Obama's administration decided to negotiate until they reach to a result. The United States publicly decries Iran as a threat to Israel and to other countries in the region, particularly Saudi Arabia, but expresses reservations about military action out of fears that Iran would respond to a strike by destabilizing the region and because it does not believe the Iranian nuclear program is as advanced as the Israelis say it is.⁴⁵

Anyway, given the continuous animosity and absence of trust for nearly three decades, it is impossible to reach to solution of the issues between the United States and Iran promptly, but Washington DC should continue its efforts to keep the dialogue with Iran going on.

Barack Obama got re-elected on 6 November 2012. We highly appreciate his message to the regional countries in his inauguration speech saying, *'We will defend our people and uphold our values through strength of arms and rule of law. We will show the courage to try and resolve our differences with other nations peacefully -- not because we are naïve about the dangers we face, but because engagement can more durably lift suspicion and fear.'*⁴⁶

Although Iran was not named, but we think that this was a real call to Iran to start direct negotiations and solve issues in a try to discharge the tension that has chased the leaders of the two countries for already 30 years. The first media briefing of the re-elected President was also noteworthy. Here he also reflected on Iran. *'With respect to Iran, I very much want to see a diplomatic resolution to the problem. [...] we're not going to let Iran get a nuclear weapon. But I think there is still a window of time for us to resolve this diplomatically. We've imposed the toughest sanctions in history. It is having an impact on Iran's economy. There*

⁴⁵ George Friedman, "War and Bluff: Iran, Israel and the United States", *Stratfor*, September 11, 2012, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/war-and-bluff-iran-israel-and-united-states>.(accessed on February 10, 2019)

⁴⁶ "Inaugural Address by President Barack Obama", *The White House, Office of the Press Secretary*, January 21, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/01/21/inaugural-address-president-barack-obama>.(accessed on February 5, 2019)

*should be a way in which they can enjoy peaceful nuclear power while still meeting their international obligations and providing clear assurances to the international community that they're not pursuing a nuclear weapon. If Iran is serious about wanting to resolve this, they'll be in a position to resolve it.*⁴⁷

Thus, it was clear that the United States will wait for the results of the upcoming Iranian presidential elections and only then will take on real steps through direct negotiations. If the negotiations were fruitless or Iran continued its protraction policy, then possibly the US would apply to its plan B of implementing more tough policy against Iran, including probability of military strikes. But one thing was for sure. Through all this process, Iran was to be under the heaviest sanctions that would slowly deteriorate its economy, would bring in largescale outcry of discontent among the population and would make the Iranian leadership to go for drawbacks in order to reach agreement.

Presidential elections in the Islamic Republic of Iran took place on 14 June 2013 and resulted in election of Hasan Rouhani, a representative of the moderate wing. After his election, the tension in the US-Iran relations seemed to get weaker. As another sign of it, two presidents had a conversation over the phone, an unprecedented one between the heads of government of the two nations since 1979.⁴⁸ The desire to go for cooperation was clearly observed in the actions of both presidents. This was further strengthened by the statement of Rouhani twitted by him on 6 August: *'If US shows goodwill & intentions based on mutual respect & equal footing without hidden agenda way for interaction will be open.*⁴⁹

⁴⁷ "Remarks by the President in a News Conference", *The White House, Office of the Press Secretary*, November 14, 2012, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/11/14/remarks-president-news-conference>.(accessed on February 14, 2019)

⁴⁸ Jeff Mason and Louis Charbonneau, "Obama, Iran's Rouhani hold historic phone call", *Reuters*, September 28, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-un-assembly-iran-idUSBRE98Q16S20130928>.(accessed on February 14, 2019)

⁴⁹ Constance Duncombe, "Twitter and transformative diplomacy: social media and Iran-US relations", *International Affairs* 93:3 (2017): 545-562, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix048> (accessed on February 10, 2019)

The negotiation process related to the Iranian nuclear issue got more constructive outlines. Finally, after prolonged discussions of the foreign ministers of 5+1 and Iran bringing in clarifications to a range of issues, on 14 July 2015, the sides came to a final agreement. The signed Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was justly called as a historic one and the agreement of the century.⁵⁰

Iranian foreign minister also described the agreement between Iran and the six superpowers in Vienna as ‘historical’. President Rouhani in his address on television told that this opens a new page in the Iran’s relations with the world and added that the prayers of Iranian people ‘got realized’ at last. Correspondingly, in Twitter Rouhani wrote, *‘Today is a new chapter to work towards growth and development of our dear Iran; a day for our youth to dream again for a brighter future.’*⁵¹

After ten years of negotiations, and eight days of Iran and the six powers talking in one room the sides at last succeeded coming to the agreement regarding the future of Iranian nuclear program.

- The West reached the agreement that the IAEA will have a team of 130-150 designated inspectors for Iran. According to the agreement, Tehran *‘will generally allow the designation of inspectors from nations that have diplomatic relations with Iran’*⁵²—and since Iran has no diplomatic relation with the United States it meant that no inspector with US citizenship would enter the country.

- Iran got the permission to enrich uranium. That was the greatest achievement for Iran although it could not exceed the threshold of three and half percent.

- According to the agreement, Iran would have no right to import military equipment for five years, however in case of any force major and acute need for military equipment this can be overruled by UNSC decision.

⁵⁰ “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action”, *US Department of State*, <https://www.state.gov/e/eb/tfs/spi/iran/jcpoa/>.

⁵¹ “The Final Deal: Rouhani Statement”, *The Iran Primer*, July 14, 2015, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2015/jul/14/final-deal-rouhani-statement>; Hassan Rouhani (@HassanRouhani) July 14, 2015, *Twitter*, <https://twitter.com/hassanrouhani/status/620926429740576768>. (accessed on February 14, 2019)

⁵²JCPOA, Annex I, Section N

It is noteworthy that again there were hopes for changes in US-Iran relations after the signature of this agreement. In fact, at least the rhetoric of the two countries changed. At the same time, Barack Obama did not rush taking the signed agreement to the Congress for vote and that ‘heritage’ was left for the discretion of the next president. We think that Obama foresaw what fate could have its discussion in the Congress and did not want to undergo that process during his presidency.

Meanwhile, Iran stayed loyal to his commitments and it was the United States’ turn to weaken the sanctions. However, the following developments showed that nevertheless the US is not ready to continue the process of normalization of the relations.

In the result of 8 November 2016 Presidential election, 70-years old businessman billionaire Donald Trump was elected the President of the United States. Even during the election campaign, he was noted with his anti-Iranian statements. He started discussing the exit of the US from the deal. This discussion brought in additional tension between two countries. At the same time in February 2017, the US Congress launched discussions on the necessity of introducing additional sanctions on Iran. Nonetheless, it should be mentioned that Trump is still within the confines of US foreign policy priorities while opting for more hard-line approaches and rhetoric.

Conclusion

- Iran is developing its foreign and domestic policies for upcoming 20 years and changes of presidents do not really affect those policies, thus the foreign policy vectors of Tehran are more predictable because the decision-maker is the Supreme Leader who is in fact ruling for life. But the same cannot be attributed to the United States because the foreign policy is highly influenced by partisan interests and objectives.

- The ruling elites of both states have not forgiven each other for a number of past problems that surely have had negative influence upon bilateral relations. Iran did not forget the continuous interference of the United States into their internal affairs, the military support to both sides during the Iran-Iraq war, the disregard of Iraq’s use of chemical weapons

against Iran, shooting down of Iranian civil airplane in 1988 etc. America does not forgive Iran for parting from its influence, taking over the US embassy in Iran, taking the diplomats as hostages and torturing them, as well as numerous captures of American soldiers.

- There is an apparent issue of mutual ignorance, and both Israeli lobbying and the emigrants from Iran further exacerbate that by presenting every step by Iran from a negative aspect.

- Normalization of relations can be realized only if both sides have clear political will to eliminate the problems. At the same time, we think that it is nearly impossible to pursue that goal as long as the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and generally the senior generation of the current cleric elite of Iran are alive. They have had direct involvement in the Islamic Revolution and the establishment of the republic and do not believe in any initiative by the US. In case of a next Supreme Leader-*rahbar*, especially if a more liberal one is elected, there might be an opportunity to revert to this question.

- Iran has been a key regional player for millennia, and nowadays it cannot come to terms with the activities of a non-Middle Eastern country in the region. In its turn, the United States, as a superpower, cannot stand that any country in the region can hinder its projects and prevent the promotion of its interests.

- Nonetheless, we are sure that in case political will both side can surmount the issues. To achieve that both parties should immediately stop propaganda war and start respecting the interests of each other.

**ՄԻԱՑՅԱԼ ՆԱՀԱՆԳՆԵՐ-ԻԻՀ ՔԱՂԱՔԱԿԱՆՈՒԹՅԱՆ
ԳԻՆԱՄԻԿԱՆ
1993-2016ԹԹ.**

**Գոհար Իսկանդարյան
(Ամփոփում)**

Հոդվածում քննարկվում է Իրան-ԱՄՆ քաղաքական հարաբերությունների դինամիկան 1993-2016թթ., որտեղ հատուկ ուշադրություն է դարձվում միջուկային ոլորտում տեղի ունեցող քննարկումների համատեքստում Իրանի նկատմամբ ԱՄՆ-ի վերաբերմունքի փոփոխություններին, ինչպես նաև կիրառվող պատժամիջոցների մեխանիզմներին: Իրան-ԱՄՆ հարաբերությունները հիմնականում դիտարկվում են ԱՄՆ-ի երկու խոշոր կուսակցությունների՝ հանրապետականների և դեմոկրատների շահերի, նպատակների և որդեգրած մոտեցումների համատեքստում: Մյուս կողմից, վեր են հանվում այն անհաղթահարելի խնդիրները, որ առկա են եղել Իրանի Իսլամական Հանրապետությունում ԱՄՆ-ի հետ անգամ նորմալ հարաբերություններ հաստատելու համար: Ներկայացվում և վերլուծվում են Հ.Ռաֆսանջանիի, Մ.Խալթամիի և Հ.Ռոհանիի ներդրած ջանքերը Արևմուտքի հետ հարաբերությունների կարգավորման գործընթացում: Միևնույն ժամանակ վեր է հանվում Մ.Ահմադինեժադի վարած կոշտ քաղաքականությունը, որը հանգեցրեց Իրանի մեկուսացման խորացմանը: