

**The Art of Making an International Nuclear Deal  
How the Internal and External Variables  
Constrained or Facilitated the International  
Negotiations: Case of Iran's Nuclear Deal 2009-2015**

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## **ABSTRACT**

From the starting point of Iran's nuclear crisis in 2003 through 2005, the negotiations with Iran took place with France, Germany, and the United Kingdom (EU3) and starting from 2006, with the P5+1. The conflict was not resolved as a result of these negotiations. After President Obama took office in 2009, he initiated the strategy of engagement offering Iran the negotiations without preconditions. The result of these negotiations was the "Geneva Agreement". However, the Iranians political and social massive backlash against the agreement prevented its ratification. The second round of negotiations led by Brazil and Turkey in 2010 produced the "Tehran Declaration". However, this was a failure as well because it was rejected by the United States. Thereafter Obama continued imposing tough sanctions against Iran while Iran was continuing its nuclear program. After the election of President Rouhani in 2013, a new round of negotiations started. Eventually, in July 2015 the nuclear agreement between Iran and the P5+1, known as JCPOA put an end to approximately 12 years of tensions between the parties and an international crisis that literally was on the verge of war. This research aims to investigate the internal and external factors that constrained or facilitated the international negotiations regarding Iran's nuclear issue. This study ascertains that domestic politics and public opinion can function as means of constraining or facilitating international agreements. Moreover, the study strives to clarify the impact of the external influential mechanisms, namely sanctions and persuasion, on reaching an international agreement with respect to Iran's nuclear program.

**Keywords:** Iran's nuclear program, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Two-Level game, reverberation, public opinion, sanctions, persuasion

## ÖZ

2003'ten 2005'e kadar olan İran nükleer krizinin başından itibaren Fransa, Almanya ve İngiltere (AB3) ile katılımıyla müzakereler yapıldı ve 2006'dan başlayarak P5 + 1 ile gerçekleşti. Bu müzakerelerin sonucu olarak çatışma çözülmedi. Başkan Obama 2009 yılında göreve başladıktan sonra, İran müzakerelerini ön şartsız bir şekilde angajman stratejisi vurgusuyla başlattı. Bu görüşmelerin sonucu Cenevre Anlaşması meydana geldi. Bununla birlikte, İran'ın anlaşmaya olan yaygın siyasi ve sosyal tepkisi, anlaşmanın onaylanmasını engelledi. 2010'da Brezilya ve Türkiye tarafından yürütülen ikinci müzakere turunda Tahran Deklarasyonu hayat buldu. Ancak, bu aynı zamanda bir başarısızlıktı, çünkü ABD tarafından bu deklarasyon reddedildi. Bundan sonra, İran nükleer programını sürdürürken, Obama İran'a sert yaptırımlar uygulamaya devam etti. Cumhurbaşkanı Rohani'nin 2013 yılında seçilmesinden sonra, yeni bir müzakere turu başladı. Son olarak, Temmuz 2015'te İran ile JCPOA olarak bilinen P5+1 arasındaki nükleer anlaşma, taraflar arasında kelimenin tam anlamıyla savaşın eşiğindeki uluslararası bir kriz 12 yıllık bir gerilime son verdi. Bu çalışmanın amacı, İran'ın nükleer programı konusunda ilgili uluslararası müzakereleri sınırlayan veya kolaylaştıran iç ve dış faktörleri incelemektir. Bu çalışma, iç politika ve kamuoyunun uluslararası anlaşmaları sınırlandırmak veya kolaylaştırmak için bir araç olarak hareket edebileceğini göstermektedir. Ayrıca, bu çalışma, İran'ın nükleer programı ile ilgili uluslararası bir anlaşmaya varılması için yaptırımlar ve ikna etme gibi dış etki mekanizmalarının etkisini açıklığa kavuşturmaya çalışmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İran'ın nükleer programı, Obama, Ortak Kapsamlı Eylem Planı, İki Seviyeli oyun, yankılanma, kamuoyu, yaptırımlar, ikna

## To My Family

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# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

Iran's nuclear issue started to become an international community's concern in 2003 while IAEA reported trace amounts of high-enriched uranium at the Natanz nuclear power plant. From 2003 through 2005, the negotiations with Iran took place with representatives from the EU member states, namely the UK, France and Germany, and starting from 2006, with the P5+1 that would be five permanent members of UN Security Council and Germany. The conflict was not resolved as a result of these negotiations. The international community was persisting that Iran should halt all of its activities with regards to uranium enrichment and have the Additional Protocol of the IAEA enacted prior to any negotiations about a comprehensive deal began. But Iran insisted that the discussion on all the issues must be simultaneous and with no pre-conditions.

Following the failure of Iran's negotiations with the UK, France, and Germany in 2005, and the victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the Iran's presidential elections, the United States had the international community on its side to impose record numbers of multilateral sanctions to discourage Iran's nuclear efforts and to force Iran to comply with the UN Security Council resolutions in full. The underlying motive of the United States sanctions imposed on Iran did not seem to be inhibiting the nuclear program, but rather regime change. Since the Islamic Revolution of Iran, the approach of the United States was formed of sanctions and attempts to isolate the

Islamic Republic diplomatically. In the period between 2006 and 2009, four UNSC Resolutions (1737, 1747 and 1803) were endorsed which were imposing more sanctions majorly aimed at inhibiting Iran's nuclear program.

After President Obama took office in 2009, he initiated the strategy of "engagement" offering Iran negotiations without preconditions. The result of these negotiations was the Geneva Agreement. However, the Iranians political and social massive backlash against the agreement prevented its ratification. The second round of negotiations led by Brazil in Turkey in 2010 resulted the "Tehran Declaration". However, this was a failure as well because it was rejected by the United States. Thereafter Obama continued imposing tough sanctions against Iran while Iran was continuing its nuclear program.

After the election of President Rouhani in 2013, a new round of negotiations started. Eventually, in 2015, Barack Obama and leaders from Germany, France, the UK, Russia, and China reached a historic agreement to lift sanctions on Iran and in exchange, Iran would halt its nuclear program. Many experts agree that this was a huge diplomatic achievement. The opening of nuclear talks between Iran and the P5+1 had stopped expanding and deepening the crippling sanctions that were being held in the name of Iran's nuclear activities. After more than two and a half years of intense multilateral negotiations, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia, China, the European Union and Iran reached an agreement, which is commonly known the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), as the Iran nuclear deal an agreement that has verifiably cut off all of Iran's pathways to a nuclear weapon. Halting the Iranian nuclear crisis, the treaty was widely welcomed at the global level, and Iran and the world powers, after nearly one and a half decades

of conflict, finally reached an agreement on the framework for full-blown cooperation. The great powers were willing to eliminate almost all the nuclear-related sanctions gradually. While leaving office, John Kerry, the U.S. Secretary of States, stated that in reaching and implementing this deal, U.S. took a major security threat off the table without firing a single shot.

## **1.1 Objectives of the Study**

This study attempts to investigate the internal and external factors that constrained or facilitated the international negotiations regarding the Iran's nuclear issue. The study will examine Iran's domestic social environment and the role of Iranians public opinion as an internal factor influencing the ratification of international agreements regarding nuclear issue. The study also considers the role of domestic political environment that had had a significant impact on the outcome of negotiations. Since international decision-makers do not live in isolation and are affected by the external factors, the study takes into account the external mechanisms of influence. As the chosen framework for analysis suggests the influences of sanctions, persuasion, and reverberation on the outcome of negotiations will be examined as well.

In short, this study ascertains that the domestic politics and the public opinion, can function as means of constraining or facilitating international agreements. Moreover, the study strives to clarify the impact of external influential mechanisms, namely sanctions and persuasion, on reaching an international agreement with respect to Iran's nuclear program.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

This project ascertains that the domestic politics and the public opinion can function as means of constraining or facilitating international negotiations. Moreover, the study strives to clarify the impact of external influential mechanisms, namely

sanctions and persuasion, on reaching an international agreement with respect to Iran's nuclear program. In this regard, this study attempts to provide answer to the following questions: A) Which critical factors prevented the Geneva Agreement's ratification in Iran in 2009? B) Why did the "Tehran Declaration" fail? C) What factors contributed to the success of negotiations that eventually led to nuclear agreement JCPOA?

### **1.3 Methodology**

This research is a qualitative study based on all-inclusive literature review regarding the Iran's nuclear issue and the international negotiations that draws comparison between the failed negotiations during 2009-2010 and successful negotiations during 2013-2015. The aim of this study is to investigate the reasons that whether constrained or facilitated reaching an international agreement regarding the Iran's nuclear issue. The data were collected from secondary sources including books, articles, journals, transcript of speeches, and online sources.

### **1.4 Scope and Limitations**

The aim of is study is to focus on the events and negotiations that took place after President Obama came to office in 2009, as the researcher believes that since then a considerable shift took place regarding Iran's nuclear issue. Therefore, the time scope will cover the events between 2009 until 2015 when the parties eventually came to an agreement.

Well-realized that there were many parties involved in the negotiating process, the researcher focuses on the relations between Iran and the United States for two reasons. First and most because the United States had had the toughest stance against the Iran's nuclear program, while the European countries could have come to terms

with Iran, the United States was pursuing the strategy of isolation. Thus, the researcher assumed the United States as the key player of the negotiations whose strategy had the greatest influence on the outcome of the negotiations. The second reason was to simplify the model into two bargaining parties to create space to investigate the concerns of the two key parties in depth.

The study is limited in terms of data and time, due to the fact that the researcher is not able to back to the time and place in which the negotiations had taken place and observe and evaluate the outcomes. The more important reason is that much of negotiations, especially after 2013 had taken place secretly, therefore there had been lack of media coverage. However, the researcher attempted to access the details as much as possible by referring to two specific books, which provide extensive information about the events. The author of these books, Trita Parsi, is an Iranian professor of International Relations at John Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies, who heads the National Iranian American Council. The significance of his role is that he had been advising the Obama Administration on the talks while at the same had great access to the Iranian officials and had an opportunity to constantly interview them and interact with them in the midst of the negotiations. Eventually, he have had documented all the related data in two books, “A Single Roll of Dice” 2012 and “Losing an Enemy: Obama, Iran, and the Triumph of Diplomacy” in 2017, published by Yale University. Due to the inability of the researcher to access the related data on the issue personally, the needed data about the secret negotiations is borrowed from these books.

## **1.5 Theoretical Framework**

The analytic approach employed in this study begins with concept of two-level games introduced by Putnam in 1988. Then, in order to broaden the theoretical foundations of the two-level games approach for understanding Iran's nuclear deal negotiations; I will apply the concept of the public opinion as a domestic constraint in international negotiations elaborated by Trumbore (1998). Finally, in order to elaborate on the external effects, I will refer to mechanisms of influence on international negotiations developed by Drezner (2003).

### **1.5.1 International Negotiations as a Two-Level Game**

The two-level game metaphor -developed by Robert Putnam in an article titled "Diplomacy and domestic politics: the logic of two-level games" in 1988- describes the policy of many international negotiations as a two-level game. At the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressing the government to implement their favorable policies and politicians strive to gain power through establishing coalitions among constituents. At the international level, negotiating parties strive to maximize their ability to respond to domestic pressures and minimize the unpleasant consequences of foreign developments. In other words, by formulating and implementing any move in foreign policy, political leaders simultaneously play two games: an international game (responding to the imperatives and pressures of the global system) and a domestic game (response to the nature of the state and the political, economic, cultural and strategic requirements of the state). Therefore, the key decision-makers cannot ignore any of these two games. According to Putnam, analytically, the process can be divided into two stages: At first stage, the negotiators bargain with one another striving to reach a tentative agreement. This stage, as Putnam calls, is Level I. At second stage the domestic constituents debate

over the Level I agreement and decide to whether approve it or not. This stage is referred to as Level II. These two stages will be called the negotiation phase and the ratification phase, respectively. The prerequisite for any Level I agreement to be approved at Level II provide an important theoretical link between the two levels. In other words, the approval of the agreement reached at the international stage by the domestic actors of the two sides is the mechanism of linking the two levels of internal and external. Through the approval process, the commitments that the parties accept at the Level I can be implemented at the domestic level. The approval process refers to any domestic decision-making process that is required to ratify or implement the Level I agreement, either formally or informally. The only formal limitation in the approval process is that, since the same agreement is expected to be approved by both parties, the agreement reached at Level I cannot be amended without re-negotiation at the same level. In other words, since the final domestic approval will only be in the form of a yes or no, any change in the Level I agreement would be a rejection of the agreement unless it is agreed upon by all international parties to the agreement.

Putnam uses the phrase “win-set” to refer to “a set of all potential Level I agreements that will receive the required score among constituents at Level II”. When there is overlap among the win-sets of negotiating parties, it means that they can reach an agreement that will be ratified by each party’s domestic constituents as well. Thus, the cooperation will be possible. Therefore, the size of the win-set is crucially important for bargaining parties. The bigger the negotiating parties win-sets are, the greater the chance of reaching an agreement. In contrast, the smaller the size of win-sets is, the higher the probability of negotiations to fail or collapse.

### **1.5.2 Public Opinion as a Domestic Constraint in International Negotiations**

Trumbore argues that the theoretical boundaries of Putnam's framework should be expanded in order to provide an explanation of the public opinion impacts on international negotiations. According to his argument when the public's preferences and the preferences of decision-makers do not coincide public opinion can function as a constraint and prevent the ratification. The degree to which public opinion would affect the ratification is directly related to the intensity of the issue under negotiations. High intensity issues are issues in which wide range of political actors are involved as well the general public. The link that connects the public opinion to international negotiations is due to logic that public can praise or punish decision-makers indirectly with their votes. As the result, the effect of any nuclear deal on public opinion is an important issue for ratifiers as well as foreign policy decision-makers.

### **1.5.3 The External Influential Mechanisms**

Although Putnam refers to a two-level game and two negotiating tables that are simultaneously in progress, the main focus of attention is on the domestic level and less about the impact of international players on domestic politics. In this regard, Drezner proposes three types of influence mechanism through which international actors would influence domestic constituents. These interaction strategies are contracting, coercion, and persuasion.

Contracting is a kind of interaction in which actors make decisions solely based on their own self-interest, without any concerns of subsequent punishment if they fail to cooperate. Through contracting the status quo can be improved for all negotiating parties while no party will be worse off. This is similar to market transactions in which either both parties benefit from the deal or no deal carries out, thus, none is

worse off than before. Therefore, contracting is a win-win game in which players influence one another to cooperate by providing incentives and not by threatening or imposing sanctions. This model is commonly used by international political economy scholars to demonstrate the interactions through international organizations.

Coercion resembles contracting in a sense that it assumes that players have clearly defined self-interest, and make decisions accordingly. However, coercion is different from contracting in a sense that other players are able to have an impact on decision-making (Hurd, 1999: 386). In other words, while in contracting self-interest is the only restraining factor for decision-making, in coercion the constraining factor is given exogenously. This influential mechanism poses the possibility that at least one actor will experience a worse condition than the present one. Therefore, players may impose sanctions against the player who would fail to cooperate.

In contrast to contracting or enforcement, persuasion offers the possibility of changing the actors' internal preferences by means of new modes of inter-subjective understanding. This mechanism reorganizes the internal values of the actors. Of course, the result of co-operation in this way may be similar to contracting or coercion, but the causative mechanism is different. In contracting or coercion approaches the actors ensure cooperation by manipulating material incentives and disincentives. In contrast, in persuasion actors are faced with new concepts and analogies that may change their perception of the world and the subject on the agenda. Like the man in the Plato's cave, players lacking information are prone to misconceptions. By receiving new information or methods for information processing, they can extend their mental instruments, changing their views and preferences over problems involved. For instance, in the early 1970s, Soviets

believed defensive weapons were a necessity in the era of nuclear deterrence. Therefore, they resisted signing the antiballistic missile (ABM) treaty. The Soviets did not change their minds until after the United States changed its nuclear doctrine and through negotiations, eventually, they were convinced that an ABM defense would increase the temptation of launching an offensive strike (Nye 1987). Thus, it can be said that persuasion is a combination of both social interaction and elements of strategic interaction that can create adequate level of intersubjective understanding in order to encourage the actor targeted for persuasion alter its preferences.

Drezner divides actors into two groups. In the first group are the actors that possess power to set agendas, these actors he calls policy initiators. These actors have the opportunity to propose a shift in the status quo by taking the first move. In the second group are the policy ratifiers who are not endowed with the first-mover advantage but they are capable of vetoing policy initiators' proposals. Hence, when proposing policy modifications, the initiators must hold consideration of the interests and preferences of the ratifiers.

## **1.6 Structure of the Study**

This research is divided into five chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction to the issue under study, the objective of the study, the questions that are intended to be answered in the project, methodology and theoretical framework and the scope and limitations of the study. The second chapter delivers a literature review related to the topic. The third chapter aims to provide an extensive background about the topic under study. This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part will focus on geopolitical issues of the Middle East and particularly the position of Iran after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The second part focuses on the chronological history of

Iran's nuclear program development to offer the reader a timeline of the events regarding Iran's nuclear issue as well as the related talks and sanctions. Finally, the third section will provide the details on issues that have shaped Iranians public opinion towards the West. The fourth chapter focuses on the period of the Obama Administration and is divided into two episodes. The first episode is devoted to analyzing the failure of the "Geneva Agreement", and the second part explains the factors that led to successful negotiations and eventually the signing of the nuclear deal between Iran and the P5+1 known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The fifth chapter concludes the study and gives prospects about the future of international negotiations regarding Iran and the United States political relations.

## **Chapter 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The 1979-Revolution and the collapse of Pahlavi ended the era of the close alliance between Iranian regime and the United States. Following the hostage crisis and the failure of Operation Eagle Claw, US policies changed remarkably. Washington portrayed Iran as a threat to international order and global peace. By January 1984 Iran had been put on the list of nations sponsoring international terrorism and subjected to various and numerous sanctions. In this regard, Murray (2010) provides a comprehensive chronological account of the United States foreign policies towards Iran during the period of 1979 to 2009. His book offers a better understanding of the rationale, efficacy and the impacts of American foreign policy towards Iran.

Clinton categorized Iran as a rogue state and adopted the so-called “rogue state doctrine” accordingly (Miles, 2014). The rogue doctrine was essentially erected as a response to the military cutbacks following the end of Cold War. The new *raison d’être* for the military establishment was an institutionalized method, a “New Demonology”, targeting, mostly, emerging Third World countries that had anti-western attitudes. These “outlaw” states with their aspirations of nuclear weapons acquisition and illicit proliferation activities were perceived as a threat to US national interests as well as its allies (Klare, 1995: pp. 10-26).

Hoyt (2000) conducted a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the content of all the documents publicly released by Clinton Administration during 1993 to 1998, in which the term “rogue” was mentioned. He carefully examined transcript of speeches and press conferences done by President and the high-ranking officials of Department of State, Department of Defense and CIA. His analysis demonstrates the discrepancies between the attributed behavior to rogues and the countries appeared on the list. He proposed that while there are links between states behavior and the use of the rogue label, the connection is neither objective nor thorough. The rogue is an “image” base on idiosyncratic view and perceptual judgments utilized by American decision-makers, which empowers them to employ their desired policies, whether it is economic/political sanctions or undermining political stability, against target sates.

O’Reilly (2007) conducted the same analysis over an extended timeframe from 1993 to 2004, covering two Clinton Administrations and the first Bush Administration. The results confirmed the prevalence of holding a relatively rigid image of rogue states among American foreign policy-makers during Clinton and Bush. Iraq, Iran, North Korea, and Libya were referred to as rogue states in 94 percent of instances and were represented as the greatest threat to international peace and security due to attempts to acquire and develop WMD or nuclear weapons and sponsoring terrorism. However, the emphasis on policy prescriptions was different. While Clinton put more emphasis on expanding the nonproliferation regime, Bush advocated the development of a national missile shield. The contrast was seen among the Secretaries of State and Secretaries of Defense in both administrations, as well. Christopher, Albright, and Powell were more in favor of pursuing the nonproliferation. In contrast, Cohen and Rumsfeld referred defensive measures and development of a national missile shield as means of dealing with rogue states.

Applying the image theory, he concluded that the rogue image is different from the enemy image in US policy-makers' perception, regarding both the characteristics and policy prescriptions.

In their study Caprioli and Trumbore (2005) empirically tested the conventional assumption of military aggressiveness attributed to rogue states. Their project was divided into two parts. First they identified those states branded rogues by examining not only the speeches and public statements of foreign policy-maker authorities but also New York Times and Washington Post articles as well as popular foreign policy journals during the period from 1980 to 2001, in which the term "rogue" was attributed to a state, regime or government. Secondly, they put the behavior of rhetorical rogues into test to determine the probability of their involvement in militarized interstate conflicts. According to their analysis, they suggested that there was no evidence to support the assumptions prevailed among US policy-makers, that rogues (except Iraq) were prone to initiate or embroil in militarized disputes more than non-rogue states.

Litwak (2001) discussed the pitfalls of the rogue state policy. He claimed that the term rogue state had been used selectively and inconsistently by policy-makers in order to satisfy their own purposes. He pointed out, while Syria met the criteria of possessing WMD capabilities, it was excluded from the list, due to its key role in the Middle East. In contrast, Cuba did not meet the criteria but was often referred to as a rogue state due to the Cuban émigré community's political pressure. In addition, imposing extraterritorial sanctions on foreign-owned non-US companies prohibiting doing business with rogue states has not been free of political cost and has brought about extensive resentment among allies. Finally, the rogue state approach restricts

the strategic flexibility. He pointed out the irresponsiveness of the Clinton Administration to Iran's political changes during the reformist President Khatami, because they simply couldn't shift their policy from containment and isolation due to the designated rogue image of Iran. He suggested that instead of a one-size-fit-all generic categorization, diversified policies should be developed which would address the intricacy conditions in every target country, which prerequisites an adequate understanding of the history, political culture and particularities of each case.

Duek's (2006) study focuses on evaluating the main strategic alternatives available for US foreign policy decision-makers to cope with rogue states. Reviewing policies of appeasement, engagement, containment, rollback, and non-entanglement and applying them to rogue cases, he identified rollback and appeasement as the riskiest alternatives. He suggests that a main strategy of containment combined with levels of diplomacy appropriate to the existing circumstances could be the most successful strategy towards Iran.

Bonham and Heradstveit (2005) focused on the metaphor "Axis of Evil" used by President Bush in his State of the Union Address to Congress on January 29, 2002. They also conducted interviews with members of Iranian opposition and reformists to study the impacts of this metaphor on Iranian political discourse. According to the study, in US and Europe, some considered the term to be only an empty rhetoric, intended to attract domestic audiences in the United States, to cover the failure of finding Bin Laden and to satisfy the urgent need of "doing something" to bring justice after 9/11 attacks. The use of an incoherent hostile metaphor bringing Iran, Iraq and North Korea without any meaningful connection, neither to each other nor to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, under the same umbrella, disappointed Iranians who

thought that their collaboration with West in Afghanistan would bring positive consequences. According to respondents, the metaphor, in fact, not only strengthened the conservatives but also alienated the reformist and mobilized the entire country into a greater national unity. The threat and insult implied by the term confirmed that the anti democratic conservatives' enemy perception of US was right and that essentially killed all the chances of an opening to diplomacy, while Iranian President Khatami was pushing towards with the concept of the "dialogue of civilizations". In short, the implications of the metonymic concepts implied by the term "axis of evil", was dramatic change in thoughts, attitudes, and actions.

As mentioned above tackling Iran, as a rogue state has been a key objective of US foreign policy. Adopting the policy of containment and isolation sanctions have been the most popular means of coercion and to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. United States has limited Iran's economic development by curbing oil exports and cutting its access to foreign investments for four decades (Clawson, 1998; Falasiri, 2010).

Economic sanctions have historically been imposed since the Megarian decree of Athens in 435 B.C. (Hufbauer et al, 1990:4). After the creation of the League of Nations, economic sanctions have been implemented expansively. Hufbauer et al. (1990), have provided a comprehensive record of 116 cases of sanctions, which were employed between 1914 and 1990. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rising costs of militarized action over the past 20 years, the United States have progressively taken up sanctions as a preferential option in responding to the request for "do something" on nuclear proliferation, infringement of human rights, narcotics or terrorism (Elliot & Hufbauer, 1999; Lacy & Niou, 2004). According to Kaempfer

and Lowenberg (1999), just from 1993 to 1996, the United States implemented sanctions against 35 countries. Henceforth, economic sanctions became the “liberal alternative to war”, as Pape (1997) puts it.

Evaluating the cases mentioned in their book, Hufbauer et al. (1990) stated that rate of sanctions effectiveness achieving foreign policy objectives was 34 per cent in total (Hufbauer et al., 1990:93). However, Pape (1997) challenged their determining factors of sanctions success or failure and reassessed the data. He claimed that although sanctions slightly bring GDP loss to target states, it couldn't be interpreted as sanctions success. Under his newly defined strict standard of sanctions effectiveness, he concluded that the success rate was only 5 per cent. In this regard, Morgan (1997) reported similar results implying that sanctions are not effective tools of foreign policy. Nevertheless, under specific circumstances properly designed sanction may efficiently help shifting the behaviors of target states, due to its enhancing impact on other policies. However, this is not free of cost for sanction senders.

Majidpour (2013) argues that in evaluating sanctions effectiveness Iranian context and the global energy concerns should be taken into consideration. He focuses on Iran's oil and gas industry and provides evidence claiming that Iranians have turned sanctions into opportunities for industrial growth by employing self-reliance concept. He concludes that the unilateral sanctions imposed by the US did not endanger Iranian industries, because they had already turned to non-US companies in aspects of industry and technology.

In another evaluation of sanctions' effectiveness, Macdonald and Reitano (2016) examined the effect of economic sanctions on the defense sector, as the third sector of a nation's economy, in addition to private and government sectors, contributing to its GDP. Their argument was that while the sanctions may originally be designed to exert pressure and shrink the economy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, it might eventually result in an increase in its GDP because of the subsequent militarization effect. Providing empirical analysis of data from 1959 to 2007, they concluded that defense expenditure provides a positive effect greater than a negative shift in economic growth cost by imposed sanctions, which confirms that US sanctions imposed on Iran have been largely failed.

Since sanctions have been employed by Super powers to push for democratization of authoritarian regimes, some scholars have studied sanctions to evaluate sanctions effectiveness in achieving this goal. In a study, Grauvogel and Soest (2013) examined the global dataset on sanctions from 1990 to 2011, which were imposed against authoritarian regimes such as Iran, Cuba and North Korea. They claimed that while sanctions are imposed to undermine authoritarian rulers and instigate democracy, they have actually contributed to their persistence. The reason behind this is that the authoritarian regimes have narrated the situation as an unjust external intervention to the domestic population and exploited it to revive claims to legitimacy, which in turn has activated the so-called rally-around-flag effect. This study and previous related researches (Galtung 1967; Lindsay 1986) suggest that sanction senders should not focus solely on the effects of sanctions but rather on the messages for which sanctions are designed to convey.

Despite the vast literature that focuses on United States' foreign policy during the Clinton and Bush Administrations and rogue policy analysis and evaluating the effectiveness of sanctions as means of US foreign policy, there is few research on Obama's period, in which there has been a shift in American foreign policy towards diplomacy. However, there are two books written by Trita Parsi, who heads the National Iranian American Council, which is a non-profit organization that he founded to facilitate participation by Iranian-Americans in American civic life. He is one of the strongest advocates of dialogue and engagement between the United States and Iran. In his book, a single roll of the dice, he examined US-Iran relations during the initial years of the Obama Administration. He showed how diplomatic opportunities had been systematically missed or even rejected pushing the situation towards war (Parsi, 2012).

In a triumph of diplomacy, explaining how the nuclear deal was negotiated, he provided a detailed history of a major diplomatic breakthrough that has altered the situation in the Middle East. He had exceptional access to many of those involved in the talks and was consulted and briefed by US officials throughout the process and he also maintained frequent contact with Iran's Foreign Minister. Being able to observe the two sides up close gave him the opportunity to understand their fears, calculations, motives and how they were hoping that their strategy would be able to work out. He showed what could be achieved when smart policy prevailed over the desire to appear tough. His book offers lessons in why diplomacy succeeded this time at least stalling the development of Iranian nuclear weapons and how it might serve as a model in resolving future international conflicts (Parsi, 2017).

## **Chapter 3**

### **BACKGROUND**

This chapter aims to provide an extensive background about the topic under study. This chapter is divided into three parts. First part will focus on geopolitical issues of the Middle East and particularly the position of Iran after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The reason is that this issue is critical in order to understand Iran's nuclear policies since then. The second part focuses on the chronological history of Iran's nuclear program development to offer the reader a timeline of the events regarding Iran's nuclear issue as well as the related talks and sanctions. Finally, the third section will provide the details on issues that have shaped Iranians public opinion towards the West. The necessity of this part is due to the fact the Iranians public opinion played a crucially constrained the ratification of the Geneva Agreement in 2009. That issue will be analyzed in details in the next chapter.

#### **3.1 Geopolitical Considerations**

After the Soviet Union had collapsed and Iraq had been defeated in the Persian Gulf War by the United States and a UN coalition, a new geopolitical situation was created both regionally and globally. In a global level, the United States was the sole superpower of the world. On a regional level, the previous balance of power had changed, but it was not yet clear exactly what it would be replaced with. With Iraq defeated, Israel and Iran emerged as two of the most powerful states in the region. Four to three previous decades despite official enmity, behind the scenes they had been collaborating and enjoyed a secret security relationship. This was driven by the

fact that they were facing common security imperatives, a threat from Iraq and a threat from the Soviet Union. However, with these two threats gone a new constellation emerged in the region, one in which Israel and Iran emerged as two powerful states and then began viewing each other as potential threats and rivals. It was not because of Iran's ideology because they had already enjoyed the relationship during the 80s in spite of Iran's ideology. It was because of the change in the geopolitical configuration of the region.

The Israelis cleverly moved very fast and argued that in order for Israel to be able to make peace and take the risk of peace-making with the Palestinians, the United States needed to contain and isolate Iran. Because Iran was, then, the new threat to the region in the Israeli view. The Clinton Administration obliged and adopted a policy that was called the “dual containment” policy, the idea that Iraq and Iran needed to be jointly contained and isolated. Essentially a new order was established in the region based on the centrality of Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia and based on the prolonged isolation of Iran and Iraq. For the Iranian audience, this was a major blow. They had collaborated with the United States quietly against Iraq during the Persian Gulf War and they were hoping that they would be rewarded by coming out of the cold and being able to enjoy an important position in the region again, but, instead, the United States doubled down on isolation. Iranian response was to spread extremism and target what they viewed as the weakest link in the American strategy, which was the peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians. If that process was sabotaged, essentially the rest of the US strategy will fall apart. As long as the US was seeking an order in the region based on Iran's isolation, Iran was going to make it as costly as possible for the United States to pursue that policy hoping that it

would cause its collapse. However, despite everything the Iranians did, it were not the Iranians that succeeded in collapsing that order, it was the United States itself by George W. Bush invading Iraq and hoping to be able to change that country and other countries in the region to its own liking and establishing an order only based on new and pro-American regimes in the region. Bush strategy failed miserably and the invasion of Iraq did not build a new order. It only managed to destroy the previous one. More importantly, the United States weakened itself to the point in which it no longer had the capacity to impose on the region a new equilibrium, a new balance of power. Ever since we have seen an essentially orderless Middle East.

Much of the fighting and the wars that have been taking place is driven by the fact that there are so many vacuums in the region and the larger nations are vying for influence fighting each other, perhaps not so much offensively as much as defensively, because they do not want to see the new balance of power being tilted against them whatever balance that would emerge afterward. For Israel and Saudi Arabia, this is significantly important. For them, the collapse of Pax-Americana was a disaster. They were the main beneficiaries of the previous order and enjoyed maximum maneuverability under the protection of the United States in the region. For Iran this was a blessing in disguise, the United States had defeated Saddam and removed the Taliban in Afghanistan, two of Iran's main rivals at the time. Moreover, in the process it had weakened itself to the point that it was increasingly difficult for it to uphold a policy of isolating Iran, instead what we saw was that Iran was unleashed. But as long as the United States continued to refuse negotiations and refused to recognize Iran, the Iranians could not lock in this new favorable geopolitical circumstance.

What the Iranians needed was a crisis, something that would force the United States to the table and that would enable negotiation that by definition would cause the United States to end its policy of regime change and come to terms with the Iranians. The Iranians wanted this recognition for the very same reasons the Israelis did not want to see Iran get this recognition because that recognition in and of itself would put an end to decades of the American policy of isolating Iran.

Ironically, the Iranians and the Israelis actually used the same instrument to be able to achieve their objective, which was the Iranian nuclear program. From the Israeli perspective, this menacing program was used to make unrealistic demands, such as the idea that enrichment in Iran had to be completely and entirely ended, in order to make sure that no compromise could be reached at all. The Israelis' calculation was that what had been defined as an existential threat would eventually lead the United States towards taking military action against Iran and the balance of power that would follow the United States attacking Iran would be one that would be favorable to Israel. The Iranians had a different calculation but with the same instrument. Advancing the nuclear program certainly could lead to war but precisely because the United States had failed in Iraq which had become so costly and the American population was so tired of warfare it could also lead to the United States coming to the table and trying to find some sort of common ground with the Iranians. The crux for the United States essentially was how to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapons capability without taking military action and without allowing the Israelis to take military action and without enabling Iran to be in a position to define the new balance of power. The Bush Administration's strategy was to refuse negotiations, insist on "zero-enrichment, pursue sanctions, and issue threats of war. It was an

utter failure. The Iranians had zero-enriched uranium when bush came into power and they had roughly 150 centrifuges. At the time Bush left office, the Iranians had 8,000 centrifuge and 1,500 or more kilos of low enriched uranium, enough to be able to build one nuclear weapon. Clearly, a different approach was needed. Then, Senator Barack Obama campaigned on an idea of reinstating diplomacy as a central piece of American statecraft, rejecting the bush doctrine of not negotiating with countries the United States disagree with. Hence, negotiating with Iran very much became the centerpiece of his platform but once Senator Obama became President Obama he discovered rather quickly how difficult diplomacy could be which would be discussed in details in chapter 4.

## **3.2 A Brief History of Iran’s Nuclear Program**

This section focuses on the chronological history of Iran’s nuclear program development to offer the reader a timeline of the events regarding Iran’s nuclear issue as well as the related talks and sanctions.

### **3.2.1 The Foundations of Iran’s Nuclear Program**

Iran and the United States signed a cooperation agreement on a civil nuclear program, on 5 March 1957. The program that the administration of Eisenhower had was called “Atoms for Peace”. Iran was looking to expand on the energy requirements for its modernization. On the other hand, the United States was looking to invest in Iran as a buffer state that could face the threats of the USSR. In the following year, Iran officially became a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Iran largely was against the weapons of mass destruction, both in political and military realms. That led to Iran signing of the Partial Nuclear Ban Treaty, which was in line with its policies, in 1963 (Rowberry, 2013).

The first nuclear facility of Iran was the Tehran Research Reactor, which the Americans had set up in the year 1967. Highly enriched uranium was the fuel to run the reactor that could produce 5 megawatts of energy. Iran was one of the first nations to sign the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT). After the initial signing of the treaty, the Iranian parliament, in February 1970, approved the treaty as well (Rowberry, 2013). In order to start the training of Iranian nuclear program personnel and make way for working together with other countries, in 1973, The Atomic Energy Organization of Iran was established.

The year 1974 was the start of Iran's safeguards agreement with the IAEA. Beginning in the mid-70s, many European countries, as well as the United States, were interested in having a share in nuclearizing the country. Siemens Company, from then West Germany, settled to build two 1200-megawatt light water reactors, in the southern Iranian province of Bushehr that would provide nuclear energy (Nikou, n.d.). The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) agreed to train nuclear engineers from Iran. Also, the Iranians and the French started a joint venture, for fuel production for the nuclear program (Inskeep, 2015).

Gerald Ford, the President of the United States, supported the Shah's nuclear aspirations, so he issued the National Security Memorandum 324, which would recognize uranium enrichment, as well as the reprocessing. The memo was meant to guarantee that when it came to any future reprocessing plans and prior to any crucial decision-making. Shortly after the document was issued, Iran decided to let go of the multinational sourcing of the nuclear fuel and decided to initiate an Iranian nuclear program that was national and all-inclusive. A result of negotiations between Iran and the Carter Administration, Iran permitted safeguard measures beyond those of

the IAEA's. In return, Iran would be granted a status of Most Favored Nation Status when it came to processing of the fuel that its origin was in the US (Shajari, 2014).

### **3.2.2 The Iranian Revolution and the Western Broken Promises**

Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran headed towards decreasing the sizes or cancelling altogether of the nuclear and military plans of the Shah that were extremely ambitious, as the leaders of the new Iran would perceive those projects as results of the American plans for extending its hegemony in Iran and the region. The United States along with the Western governments decided they will all remove themselves from any nuclear agreement with Iran, and instead of cooperating under the new Iranian policies, they would push Iran towards isolation, by means of sanctions, economic pressures or other means of compulsion.

Immediately following the Islamic Revolution of Iran, the decision-making bodies of the new Iranian government were no longer willing to continue the process of uranium enrichment in the country. Iranians had an agreement with an association of French companies, European Gaseous Diffusion Uranium Enrichment Consortium (Eurodif), for providing the fuel for Tehran Research Reactor and the Bushehr two power reactors. This would abolish the necessity of enriching uranium domestically. But as a result of the American compulsion, France withdrew from the agreement between Iran and Eurodif, despite the fulfillment of a \$1.2 billion payment to France by Iran. Germans followed the French by abandoning the power plant project in Bushehr, again, despite Iran had paid 8 billion Deutschmarks, almost the complete cost of the project (Slavin, 2009).

During the period between the mid-80s and mid-90s, Iran unsuccessfully made the effort to persuade the French and the Germans to respect their obligations under the

agreements dating back to before the revolution (Mousavian, 2012). That led Iran to seek self-sufficiency in pursuit of concluding the incomplete nuclear projects that had cost the nation billions of dollars, to be able to supply the Tehran Research Reactor with required fuel rods, so it can functionally provide medical isotopes for cancer patients.

In 1980, Iraq, under the dictator, Saddam Hussein began the destructive Iran-Iraq war that would go on for eight years. The United States, as well as the western governments, backed Iraq, by supplying Saddam's military with logistics that would be used for chemical weapons as well as ballistic missiles (Harris and Aid, 2013). Although over 100,000 Iranian civilians, lost their lives to Iraqi chemical weapons, which were already banned internationally (Bajoghli, 2013), Iran, not only never retaliated using similar weapons, but also still remained committed to the NPT. Yet, regarding the war and the unexpected support for the aggression of Saddam's Iraq, the new security calculations directed Iran to the development of self-defense measures and capacities to repel and discourage any aggressive action from the Arabs or the West. Iran was convinced to rely on herself for defense as well as in security measures, as a result of silence of the international community, in response to Iran being attacked by ballistic missiles and WMDs including chemical weapons were used against the civilians.

In 1995 Iran and the Ministry of Atomic Energy of Russia, signed a contract, valued 800 million US dollars, to complete the Bushehr nuclear power plant, under supervision of safeguards of IAEA. At the same time, the United States managed to pressure France and Germany as well as China, Spain, Argentina, and India to cease their cooperation with Iran, in developing any peaceful nuclear technology. This

would be clearly a breach of the NPT (Ningthoujam, 2016). The Iran–Libya Sanctions Act was signed by the American President Clinton with concerns for Iran’s atomic energy projects in 1996. Additionally, the Iran Non-proliferation Act was signed by Clinton in 2000 that would result in sanctions against anyone helping Iran in its nuclear efforts, including organizations or individuals. These attempts by the US to prevent Iran from developing nuclear technology, one that Iran would see as its legitimate right with regards to the NPT, Iran followed its native strategy of self-sufficiency. Iran still was working within the frameworks of the NPT, but the United States had the activities on its radar. By the year 2002, Iran had gained the capability of enriching uranium for the production of nuclear fuel. This came as a shock to the US and the international community (Farhi, 2005).

### **3.2.3 The Iranian Nuclear Crisis**

The IAEA issued a report in July 2003 that declared that although Iran had the capability for enrichment on uranium, seemed to be complying with the NPT. But almost 60 days later, IAEA reported that it had traced evidence of high-enriched uranium in the location of Natanz nuclear plant. As a result, the Board of Governors of the IAEA then motioned a resolution that would require Iran to put all of its activities that would be in relation to uranium enrichment under indefinite suspension. As well, the resolution demanded Iran to implement to the agreement, an Additional Protocol that would need the utmost measures of transparency IAEA had demanded from any entity up until that time.

Ayatollah Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic republic, repeated his fatwa that would prohibit the production and use of nuclear weapons just like any other WMDs (Crowley, 2015). This opposition to nuclear weapons was consistent with Iran’s previous positions. Going back to the time before the revolution, the Shah had

declared his support for initiating a nuclear-weapon-free zone (NWFZ). Ayatollah Khomeini had also expressed his opposition to development of nuclear weapons.

Following the United States invasion of Afghanistan, after the 2001 terrorist attacks and the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the EU3 became more engaged with Iran in a diplomatic manner, in order to end the nuclear crisis and avoid another outburst of wars and conflicts (Mazzucelli, 2007).

Iran and the EU signed the Tehran Declaration, on October 21, 2003. Iran had agreed voluntarily to cut the introduction of gas to its centrifuges in half as well as to implement the Additional Protocol, both of which were temporary measures and neither were legal obligations (BBC News, 2003). In return, the EU3 would recognize Iran's right to have nuclear technologies that would be used solely for peaceful purposes. Also, they would remove the Iranian nuclear file from the IAEA's board agenda, while they would broaden their relations with Iran, economically and politically.

These negotiations kept on going through 2005, and Hassan Rouhani, the chief negotiator of the Islamic Republic submitted multiple proposals on behalf of Iran (Davenport, 2015). In March 2005, Iran offered a deal to the EU3. Iran declared to be ready to: (1) Keep the uranium enrichment, maximum at the level of 5 per cent; (2) export all low-enriched uranium that it would not need for use in Iran or make fuel rods out of it; (3) commit to the Additional Protocol and Subsidiary Arrangement Code 3.1 of its safeguards agreement; (4) give permission to the IAEA agents for unrestricted inspections of any nuclear facility in Iran without prior announcement; and (5) not reprocess plutonium from the heavy water reactor in Arak (Porter, 2012).

The primary goal of submitting the proposal was to prevent Iran from changing the course of its uranium enrichment towards the path of building nuclear weapons, and Iran could continue to enrich uranium while complying with NPT. In return, IAEA would normalize the Iran file and Iran would cooperate more extensively with the European Union in economic, political and security matters. The EU3 were in favor of the offer while the George W. Bush Administration refused to accept the offer, rather they demanded no enrichment of uranium inside Iran (Parsi, 2013). In Addition, President Bush announced that he would continue considering military action against the Islamic Republic (Herald, 2005).

#### **3.2.4 The Failed Nuclear Talks and the 2005 Iranian Presidential Election**

The failure of the negotiations that had taken place between 2003 and 2005, while President Mohammad Khatami was in office helped Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to be elected as the president in June 2005. Soon after Ahmadinejad was in office, Iran resumed the operation of converting uranium in the Isfahan facilities. On the 24th of September 2005, the IAEA announced that they believed Iran was not complying with the safeguards agreement it had made. Iran restarted the enrichment process at the Natanz plant. The IAEA voted to pass the matter of Iran to the United Nations Security Council on February 3rd. The following UN Security Council Resolutions demanded Iran to cooperate with IAEA. Iran refused to comply with those resolutions. The refusal subsequently led more resolutions that would place sanctions, from 2006 onwards. From 2006 to 2009, the UN Security Council passed resolutions 1696, 1737, 1803, and 1835, which would put Iran under more sanctions, also requiring Iran to fully suspend all its uranium enrichment as well as heavy water production inside the country.

From the starting point of Iran's nuclear crisis in 2003 through 2005, the negotiations with Iran took place with France, Germany, and the United Kingdom (EU3) and starting from 2006, with the P5+1 that would be five permanent UN Security Council members and Germany. The conflict was not resolved as a result of these negotiations. The international community was persisting that Iran should halt all of its activities with regards to uranium enrichment and have the Additional Protocol of the IAEA enacted prior to any negotiations about a comprehensive deal began, but Iran insisted that the discussion on all the issues must be simultaneous and with no pre-conditions.

Following the failure of Iran's negotiations with the EU3 in 2005, and the victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the presidential elections, the United States had the international community on its side to impose record numbers of multilateral sanctions to discourage Iran's nuclear efforts and force Iran to comply with the UN Security Council resolutions in full. The underlying motive of the United States sanctions imposed on Iran did not seem to be inhibiting the nuclear program, but rather regime change. Since the Islamic Revolution of Iran, the approach of the United States was formed of sanctions and attempts to isolate the Islamic Republic diplomatically. In the period between 2006 and 2009, four UNSC Resolutions (1737, 1747 and 1803) were endorsed which were imposing more sanctions majorly aimed at inhibiting Iran's nuclear program.

### **3.2.5 Obama's First Term in Office and a New Season of Negotiations**

In January 2009, when Barak Obama entered the White House, as the Democrat President of the United States, the negotiations with Iran were proceeding. In order to break the deadlock, he offered Iran negotiations without any preconditions, as a strategy of "engagement". As a result of those negotiations, in October 2009, the

“Geneva Agreement” was reached. In compliance with the terms of that agreement, Iran had to give up 1200 kilograms of low-enriched uranium and would instead receive fuel rods for the Tehran Research Reactor. The deal was supporting future negotiations as well, as a measure of confidence building. However, Iran demanded that all of the promised fuel rods be sent to Iran at the same time as the low-enriched uranium was sent out of Iran, and the P5 + 1 refused to accept the alteration.

Iran was then convinced by Turkey and Brazil, to consider accepting a new version of the agreement. This new version would be called the “Tehran Declaration” and in May 2010, the announcement that Iran had agreed to it was made. In compliance with this agreement, Iran would move 1200 KG of its low-enriched uranium to Turkey. Instead, Iran would be given 20% enriched uranium that would be fuelling the Tehran Research Reactor. Just like the Geneva Agreement, at first, European officials and the officials of the United States did not accept the deal and proceeded to push the United Nations to pass the new Security Council Resolution 1929. The Resolution 1929 would authorize more financial and economic sanctions to be imposed on Iran, to include investment of foreign entities in the Iranian energy sector, restrictions on trade credit with Iran, banning arms sales to Iran all together as well as blocking any financial transactions with Iranian banks (Samore, 2015, 7). As a significant number of major multinational and international financial institutions and companies put a halt on their businesses with Iran, the impact on Iran’s economy was affected to a great extent.

Through summer 2010, the infamous Stuxnet cyber attack was launched against the Iranian nuclear facilities’ centrifuges, multiple prominent nuclear scientists were assassinated. The mainstream media reported that the cyber attacks were joint

American-Israeli sabotage. It was also reported that the assassinations were led by Israel (Sanger, 2012). As a result of the failure in the swap talks, Iran went ahead with 20% enrichment locally to supply the Tehran Research Reactor with the required fuel rods. This was publicly announced by Salehi, Iran's Atomic Energy Agency's chief in February 2010 (CBS News, 2010).

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad visited New York for the United Nations Assembly in September 2011. He announces the success of Iranians in 20 per cent uranium enrichment, and the expanding of stored uranium, enriched to the level of 20 per cent. He also recommended the halt of the 20 per cent enrichment, if in return the western governments were willing to provide fuel rods for Tehran Research Reactor (Vaez and Ferguson, 2011). As well as a goodwill gesture towards the Americans, the Iranian president announced that Iran was releasing two Americans who were arrested in Iran because they were suspicious of spying (BBC News, 2011). Despite all that, The United States declined Iran's proposed plan. An oil sales embargo was imposed on Iran and the Iranian Central Bank was sanctioned in fall 2011 by the European Union and the United States. Also, two UN resolutions were put forward that would condemn Iran in its human rights records and involvement with terrorism (Landler, 2011). Yukiya Amano, IAEA Director General, stated openly that he was doubtful about the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear activities (Peterson, 2010).

During the time when Ahmadinejad was in office, several series of talks between the P5+1 and Iran resulted in failure. The Iranians' efforts to bring forward a deal that was acceptable to all parties were not successful, as the United States insisted that Iran should not have centrifuges operational within its borders. The fact that the United States would not tolerate even Iranian uranium enrichment, even though it

was claimed to be solely to provide the Tehran Research Reactor with fuel rods, was seen by officials in Tehran as the total lack of interest on the side of the Americans to solving the Iranian nuclear problem.

Jack Straw, who was at the time the Foreign Minister of the United Kingdom, claimed that the American disagreement had blocked the deal. Iranians then decided that they had no option other than deterring from reaching an agreement and try to move faster with the enrichment program and achieving self-sufficiency in the enrichment program. But the international community eventually reached the conclusion that the Iranians' haste towards expanding and establishing nuclear capacity and potential, is a matter of great concern and should not be tolerated, as a result, Iran faced tougher sanctions imposed by the western powers.

Ahmadinejad substantially did not consider the IAEA and UN resolutions, sanctions, or Iran's relationship with western powers. Rather he favored a strategy of "tit for tat" to respond to sanctions imposed on Iran. As a response to Resolution 1737, the Iranian president denied entry to 38 IAEA inspector personnel and declared the will to install 3000 centrifuges at the nuclear site in Natanz. Ahmadinejad's response to the Security Council Resolution 1803 would be to declare the installation 6000 additional centrifuges. The reaction to Resolution 1835 was his order to construct 100 new uranium enrichment sites with 20 per cent enrichment capability. And ultimately after Resolution 1929, the Iranian president put a halt to the on-going talks with the P5+1. He also set some preconditions for getting back to the talks. As well as many other Iranian officials, Ahmadinejad maintained that the sanctions had no major or minor affairs on the country and the nation, undermining any value to the United Nations resolutions, diming them as worthless pieces of paper, while Iran's

economy was actually nearly desolated as a result of the sanctions. (Graham-Harrison and Master, 2010).

The toughest sanctions against the Islamic Republic began in 2011-2012. The United States and the European Union, imposed sanctions on Iranian oil, the Iranian central bank, and access to SWIFT (the international system for transferring funds). These sanctions decreased the Iranian oil export by 50 per cent. Iran was producing 2.5 million barrels of oil per day in 2011, but in 2013 the production had reduced to 1.1 million barrels per day. Iranian Rial experienced the most serious devaluation in the history of the country. Also, the ability of Iran to obtain hard currency from the export of the oil was drastically limited as a result of those sanctions (Newton-Small, 2012). When the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was over, the Iranian economy was shrinking at a rate of 5 per cent of the GDP annually and the inflation rate was over 42 per cent. The unemployment rate also was as high as 18 per cent. Along with the nation partly being fed up with anti-western rhetoric and policies of the Ahmadinejad Administration, and among other social reasons, the economic issues in Iran were contributing factors to the election of Hassan Rouhani, to the Iranian presidency in June 2013.

### **3.2.6 Iran's 2013 Presidential Election and the Impact of Moderate Policies**

Eight years of failure in nuclear talks and economic problems under Ahmadinejad facilitated the election of Rouhani in 2013 presidential elections. The new administration grabbed all the chances and within the first hundred days, Hassan Rouhani managed to reach a temporary nuclear deal with the P5+1, a Joint Plan of Action. Seemingly Rouhani being elected as moderate president was a considerable factor contributing to the settling of the parties to an agreement.

In the United States, on the other hand, the Obama Administration had already started its second term. Players such as Secretary of State John Kerry, Secretary of Energy Ernest Moniz, as well as Special Assistant to the President and White House Coordinator for the Middle East Robert Malley, seemed like a matching alignment to Rouhani, Javad Zarif, his Foreign Minister, and Ali Akbar Salehi his Vice President. Yet the most important factor was that Obama altered the United States traditionally established policy of zero enrichment with the more comprisable policy no nuclear bomb in Iran” (Parsi, 2017).

Unlike Ahmadinejad, Rouhani kept demonstrating pragmatic approaches in his foreign policy in general, most importantly in his administration’s activities concerning the nuclear issue. Earlier as he was Iran’s chief negotiator between the years 2003 and 2005, he had suggested practically applicable packages to the EU3 negotiators. Only the zero enrichment policy of the United States was the preventing factor from Iran being able to achieve a deal. One famous Hassan Rouhani statement in his 2013 campaign is as follows: “It is good for the centrifuges to spin, but the wheels of Iranian factories should also spin and the livelihood of our people should improve”. He appointed Javad Zarif to establish a new more eager negotiating team. Zarif was also a member of Islamic Republic’s negotiation team during 2003–2005. The new team had also Araghchi and Majid Ravanchi who were more skilled and experienced diplomats (Mostaghim, Sandels, and McDonnel, 2013). Rouhani, Zarif, and Salehi had been colleagues during the 2003–2005 talks and of course, would follow a similar approach towards resolving the dispute that would be mutual compromise.

Rouhani's presidency showed a remarkable move away from Ahmadinejad's policies and actions regarding the nuclear problem and had altered the image of the Islamic Republic, although his strategy of the nuclear negotiations had not changed at all since 2005. In November 2013 Iranians practically agreed to the same principles, which they already had brought forth in March 2005. However, kept insisting on zero enrichment, the Americans had refused to agree to those principles, otherwise, a deal would have been made in March 2005, which would prevent the Iranians go radical in nuclear and foreign policies, that had escalated the nuclear dispute drastically.

The crippling effects of sanctions on Iran led most of the observers to believe they were the reason Iran was forced to get back to the negotiation table. Definitely, the sanctions had, directly and indirectly, cost the economy of the Islamic Republic heavily. But also they had created a political situation, which made the election of Hassan Rouhani as the President easier in 2013, as he had campaigned on bringing the sanctions as well as those imposed in relation to the nuclear problem to an end, through diplomacy.

If the primary objective of the sanctions placed on Iran by the United States is viewed only to discourage Iran's nuclear program, it would be reasonable to assume that those sanctions, not only had entirely failed to accomplish their objectives, but had drove Iran to attempt to expedite the development of the uranium enrichment program in to higher levels and capacities. Through the stretch of sanctions, the Islamic Republic elevated uranium enrichment levels from 5 per cent to 20 per cent. As well, the storage of enriched uranium had increased from a few hundred kilograms to more than 8000 kilograms. Iran, in that period, not only had increased centrifuges from 3000 to 22,000, at the same time Iran had leveled up its centrifuges.

The centrifuges until then were IR1. But Iran had acquired the IR8 centrifuges. Those IR8 centrifuges were more than 20 times faster. The Iranians also had constructed the new enrichment facility in Fordo (Gordon and Nephew, 2017).

### **3.3 Iranians' Identity**

Iranian identity can be described as a lens from which Iranians see the world. This can be traced in their history, beliefs, and traditions. Iranians are immersed in the feeling of pride that Iran has one of the oldest cultures in the world, dating back to the Achaemenid Empire in the sixth century BC. They believe that they are the most intelligent among their neighbors and enemies. Iranians have a sense of inherent arrogance to the world around them and feel absolute confidence in the superiority of their culture. The shadow of these phenomena can be seen in the revolutionary slogans such as “ Independence, freedom, the Islamic Republic” or “Neither East Nor West, the Islamic Republic”. The latter implied the formulated identity of Iranians that rejects the eastern communism and the western capitalism and introduce a “third way”. Ayatollah Khomeini called it as the “ straight path”.

In addition, in Persian cultural archetypes (theosophical archetype), Satan, representing the spirit of evil and the origins of darkness, was attributed to their enemies. Moreover, West was seen as the symbol of the darkness, wickedness, and perdition. This is one factor behind branding U.S and Great Britain as “Great Satan” and “Little Satan” respectively.

Graham Fuller (1991) believes that the suffering caused by the failures of the foreign countries in the past, European imperialism, the competition between two great empires of Great Britain and the Soviet Union to weaken and eventually disable the

entire structure of the government of Iran, and moreover the obvious intervention of Britain and America, on the eve of the twentieth century, to bring Pahlavi into power are the roots of the formation of negative opinions about the foreigners. But Xenophobia, in latest century, is rooted in the identification of the Pahlavi regime with the West and America, which has led to the formation of anti-West rhetoric in Iran. The coup d'état can be considered as the starting point, which brought the formation of the resistance discourse.

The other fact that needs attention is that Iranians believe that international organizations norms are unjust. The superior and inferior positions within the international procedures and structures have led the Iranians to revolt against the hierarchy of the international system and to reject of the status quo in international politics. Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, believed that international organizations were puppets made by superpowers, especially U.S., to serve their interests. Western cultural institutions and political practices are conducive channels to dominate, oppress and exploit the 'oppressed' in favor of 'oppressors', 'the world devouring superpowers' as he called them.

The Iraqi invasion of Iran, supported by most countries, and the lack of condemnation of Iraq by international organizations had effectively led Iran to disregard the international organizations and international norms. Furthermore, it is important to mention the U.S. role during the warfare. Howard Teicher, who served as a Staff Member to the United States National Security Council from early 1982 to 1987 and was responsible for the Middle East and for Political-Military Affairs, explains how in June 1982 President Reagan decided to change the U.S. neutral policy to Iraqi support by "supplying the Iraqis with billions of dollars of credits, by

providing U.S. military intelligence and advice to the Iraqis, and by closely monitoring third country arms sales to Iraq to make sure that Iraq had the military weaponry required. The United States also provided strategic operational advice to the Iraqis to better use their assets in combat". Ronald Reagan removed Saddam Hussein, who imposed the war on Iran, from the terrorist list, so that they could provide Saddam military aid and support (Battle, 2003).

Further more, toward the end of the war, on July 3, 1988, a U.S. Navy ship called the Vincennes shot down Iran Air Flight 655, a civilian airliner, over the Straits of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf, in Iranian airspace in a clearly identified commercial air route, killing all 290 people on board including 66 children (Fisher, 2013). The commander of a nearby U.S. vessel, David Carlson, wrote in the U.S. Naval Proceedings that he "wondered aloud in disbelief" as the Vincennes announced her intentions" to attack what was clearly a civilian aircraft (Chomsky, 2014). U.S. called it a mistake and two years later, the commander of the Vincennes and the officer in charge of anti-air warfare were given the Legion of Merit award for "exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding service" and for the "calm and professional atmosphere" during the period of the destruction of the Iranian Airbus (Moore, 1990). This was one of the major factors in Iran's accepting a U.N. resolution calling for a cease-fire in the Iran-Iraq War. Khomeini described the truce acceptance as "drinking the cup of poison". The war was imposed on Iran so as the truce.

After the 8-years war, Iran sought to rebuild the relations with international and regional organizations, in order to reconstruct the economy. This new procedure can be seen in Iran's new approach toward the United Nations and the Organization of

Islamic Cooperation. President Khatami decisively attempted to reduce the tensions between Iran and both Arab nations and the European Union. He introduced the idea of “Dialogue Among Civilizations” as a contribution to the international normalization process. He did not oppose the principles of prevailing international order, but rather he criticized the West-centric international system of norms. However, Western countries did not trust Iran’s attempts in confidence-building process. One month after the 911 attacks, in 2002, U.S. President George W. Bush branded Iran as a part of “Axis of Evil”, a threat to world’s peace and security. This metaphor has had a great impact on Iran. For instance, under the UN Charter, Article 2(4) the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State is prohibited, but not the state, which has been labeled as a ‘rogue’ state. As a result, we often hear from the White house or Israel threatening Iran. Iran is subjected to respect the Western cultural international order and laws while its rights are not being respected by the same order.

## Chapter 4

### FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter's focus on the period of Obama Administration and is divided in two episodes. The first part is devoted to analyzing the failure of the "Geneva Agreement" in 2009 and the "Tehran Declaration" in 2010. The second part explains the factors that led to successful negotiations, which started in 2013 eventually led to the nuclear compromise between Iran and the P5+1, which is commonly referred to as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). For a general analysis, Putnam's Two-Level game framework is applied. The role of public opinion is examined applying Trumbore's complementary framework. The role of sanctions and persuasion will be discussed as well with regard to Drezner view of the external influential mechanism on international negotiations.

#### 4.1 First Episode: The Geneva Agreement in 2009

To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history, but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist (President Barack Obama, Inaugural Address, January 20, 2009).

Only 12 and half minutes into Obama's presidency he reached out to the Muslim world at large and into Iran, in specific, offering America's hand of friendship if the Iranians were willing to unclench their fists. This was a bold move born not out of desire but out of necessity. As some would make the argument that the Bush Administration pursued war as an option I would make the argument that Obama had come to the conclusion that peace was a necessity in dealing with Iran. The Bush

Administration pursued an ideological foreign policy one in which one of its key tenants was that if you talk to your enemies you strengthen them and you risk legitimizing them. As a result, for several years there was not any on-going or any sustained diplomacy taking place between the United States and Iran, fearing on the U.S. side that if we did so it would be to the benefits of the Iranians. In fact, diplomacy should only be conducted with the states that deserved America's company and Iran under the Islamic Republic clearly did not. Obama did what no one else had done before him. During the 2008 elections in the primaries, he turns to the Iranian issue and he makes diplomacy with America's foes a central part of his foreign policy platform and diplomacy with Iran became a very central part of that.

However, the political space that the administration had, once Obama got into office, to be able to pursue diplomacy, was limited from the outset. The administration's calculation and expectation was that they had to produce some results with the diplomacy within twelve months otherwise the window for diplomacy would domestically close. After that, the landscape would go back to its normal circumstances, one in which any type of opening to American foes would be viewed as quite negative domestically in the United States. Thus, the opening in the American political landscape that Obama sought to take advantage of was limited. The first four months of that twelve-months was eaten up by positioning everyone into office, reviewing the policies and coming up with a new strategy. By the time they were ready with the review, sometime in April 2009, the question was when could the diplomacy begin. There were arguments of trying to start it right away but there was also a fear because the Iranians were entering their political seasons with upcoming presidential elections in June 2009.

Obama Administration decided to wait till after the elections. There was this fear that starting negotiations before that could end up helping Ahmadinejad in the elections and that was probably the last thing that Obama wanted to do. The decision was made to wait till June 13th due to their expectations that by June 13th there would be some level of clarity in Iran; by that time, eventually, someone would have won the elections and thereafter they could proceed with diplomacy as quickly as possible. What the administration did not expect was the fraudulent disputed election with massive human rights abuses that followed after the Iran's elections. The impact on the Obama Administration was quite decisive. A lot of time was being lost because Iran's political elite was at war with itself and there was no clarity of who could make decisions if decisions could be made. In fact, there was a political paralysis and under those circumstances, the Iranians simply were not capable of conducting foreign policy.

Nevertheless, something happened just 10 days before the elections that had given the administration a lot of hope that perhaps there was an opening that could be pursued successfully. On June 2nd, 2009 the Iranians sent a letter to the head of the IAEA in Vienna saying that they wanted to buy fuel for their Tehran Research Reactor (TRR). The Tehran research reactor was built by Americans in 1967 and thereafter was used by Iranians to produce medical isotopes for approximately 850,000 to 900,000 patients in Iran. They were running out of fuel for that reactor and they wanted to buy those fuel pads. The normal protocol would say that the head of the IAEA would have to inform all potential sellers and they would then respond to the Iranians. However, ElBaradei did not follow the protocol. Realizing the opportunity he only informed the Russians and the United States about this.

Meanwhile, the Obama Administration had been spending several months thinking about how could they reduce the stockpile of low-enriched uranium (LEU) and get the LEU out of Iran and, by that, buy time and political space to pursue further negotiations, in Iran an opportunity window opened. Without having to convince the Iranians, an opening was there because the Iranians themselves wanted to buy fuel pads. The stockpile of LEU was something that had become one of the indicators of how much time remains before Iran would get to the nuclear weapon or potentially could get one. Theoretically, 1200 kilos of LEU is sufficient to be able to build a nuclear bomb. If Iranians would have that amount, it would be viewed as if the Iranians, then, have a credible breakout scenario.

After the administration realized this unprecedented opening the question was when could the talks actually begin. They waited and towards September it became clear that there was no clarity as to when the Iranians really would be ready. There was essentially no clarity of any particular indication that would say now the political infighting in Iran is over. Since the clock was ticking and the administration felt that it probably did not have more than to December to try to do something, the decision was to take a risk and pursue negotiations even though there was a lot of hesitation and a lot of fears that the Iranians simply were not ready to negotiate because of the political paralysis at home.

The first session between the P+1 and the Iranians was unprecedented in which for the first time the United States was an active participant in the talks. In the previous talks, the United States was not present. In one instance, the U.S. was there, under Secretary Burns present in the room with the instructions that he had no permission to speak. During the first sessions, Iranians accepted the fuel-swap proposal in

principle as well as the idea that they would permit inspections in another site called Fordou. They also agreed to meet again at a technical level within the next two to three weeks. Three weeks later on October 19 they met in Vienna at the technical level with the Vienna group, which was not the full P5+1, but including France, Russia, the United States, and the IAEA. The greater details of the proposal were presented to Iranians. The nuclear fuel-swap proposal in detail was that 1200 kilos of Iran's LEU would be taken to Russia, which would re-enriched it to 19.75 per cent. Russia would then send it to France and the French would produce fuel pads and fuel pads would be transferred to Iran within approximately nine to twelve months.

First of all, Iranians contested France's involvement. The French had a very negative relationship with Iran on the nuclear issues, which had made Tehran distrustful. The legal dispute was over Eurodif enrichment plant of which Iran held 10 per cent shares. However French had refused to deliver Iran's share of enriched uranium and also held on fifty tons of yellow cake, which belonged to Iran. Iranians argued that France should either return it to Iran or transfer the proportion amount of it to Russia in order to produce fuel. However, French rejected both suggestions. Iranians ambassador, Soltaniyeh, argued that while France refuses to transport the yellow cake to Iran or Russia, how Iran could be sure that they would transfer Iran's LEU after turning it into fuel pads. As a result, the first day of the negotiation was actually spent with the Iranians trying to cut the French out of the deal. That did not succeed but the compromise was that instead of the French being a signatory to the deal the French would be a subsidiary to the Russians. Therefore, the French would be Russia's headache, not Iran's.

Nevertheless, the major problem was that the Iranians argued that this is putting too much of the risk on their shoulders. Iranians argued that if they give up their strategic asset of the LEU, which the West clearly wanted, and they would not get fuel pads until a year later, a lot can happen during that year, therefore, there were no guarantees that the West would not renege on the deal. If that would have happened Iranians would essentially be left empty handed. Mindful of the fact that trust between these two sides was at its minimum, as the Iranians mistrust the West as much as the West mistrust Iran, the Iranians were suggesting mechanisms to guarantee that the fuel pads could be delivered because otherwise the agreement could not be approved domestically. Those mechanisms were primarily the idea that the LEU would be given up not in one shipment of 1200 kilos but in three shipments of 400 kilos and every time they give a shipment they would get some fuel pods back. Iranians argued that an instantaneous transaction would split the risk more evenly and would make it easier for them to accept it.

The United States, however, could not accept that for political reasons. The United States wanted to get the Iranian LEU count below 1200 kilos. Iran had at that time approximately 1600 kilos of LEU stockpiles. After shipping 400 kilos, Iranians would still have close to 1,200 kilos. As a result, the political space and time that the United States was trying to win through this deal could not be achieved. Therefore, it was not meeting the red line of the United States and the deal did not have any chance to be ratified domestically.

At the end of the three-day talks it was quite clear that they were heading for a failure but instead of EIBaradei going out and declaring that, he suggested to the parties that they would have a gentlemen's agreement to go out and say that the talks had been

constructed and they were quite cordial throughout this period but that they would take the proposal back to their respective capitals and there would be a response within few days.

The French, the Russians, and the United States took it back to their capitals. They instantaneously accepted it. For them, domestic approval was quite easy, as it was their own proposal but the Iranians never came back with a formal response, neither yes nor no. Instead, they were asking for additional technical meetings in order to resolve what they call the trust deficit and the mechanisms to guarantee that. Eventually, the Geneva Agreement was nothing but a failure, essentially because of the Iranians' domestic issues and political paralysis.

By early November it was quite clear that the Obama Administrations were stuck and so far 11 out of the 12 months that Obama had had passed and he had nothing to show for his diplomacy. The quick victory that he was looking for simply was not there. By the end of that month, Obama decided to activate, as it was called, the pressure track. The idea that, as a result of the Iranian failure to accept the deal Iran would be sanctioned and punished in order to soften them up and perhaps down the road pursue a new round of talks in which the Iran, theoretically, would be more amenable to a deal. This way, Obama would be able to show that he pursued diplomacy genuinely and since it did not lead to any agreement, he managed to get more sanctions than the Bush Administration had managed to do before.

In practice, it did not work out easily because the Russians and the Chinese put up stiff resistance against sanctions for various reasons. As a result, time was passing and there was no sanctions resolution by April. Meanwhile, the Congress was adding

pressure on the administration arguing that Congress had no problem imposing its own sanctions on the Iranians. The problem with UN sanctions was that most of those sanctions would actually not hit Iran as much as they would hit other countries, which were trading with Iran and some of those countries were in the Security Council. Therefore, the administration was making the argument that the United States should not go for any unilateral sanctions, but rather they should try to get the Security Council sanctions first.

Meanwhile, Turkey and Brazil two non-permanent members of the Security Council at the time decided to embark on a diplomatic mission to try to get the Iranians to agree to the original deal with some changes in order to save the diplomatic track and give it a push so that further negotiations can take place. Both of them had their own reasons for doing this. Turkey, of course, as a neighboring country was very afraid that sanctions eventually would lead to war and that was the last thing the Turks wanted to have in their neighborhood. Brazil had its own incentives as well. However, the bottom line was that they were in the Security Council and they wanted to prove that could have an impact on international affairs in a positive way.

On May 16th president Lula of Brazil arrived in Tehran. A day later Erdoğan of Turkey went there and they were having 18-hour marathon negotiations with the Iranians trying to get them to say yes to a deal that was built on the same benchmarks of the previous deal only six months earlier. Eventually, they got the Iranians to agree to give up 1200 kilos that would be shipped instantaneously and there would not be any fuel pads given to them until approximately a year later. The difference was that the LEU of the Iranians would not be sent to Russia, instead, it would be sent to Turkey and it would be held in an escrow in Turkey. The Russians would use

their own LEU to produce the fuel pads and if during this one year period was any cheating on the western side the Iranians could get their LEU back from Turkey from that escrow. This was actually a proposal that Obama himself had endorsed in a meeting on April 13 with Lula and Erdoğan in Washington DC during the nuclear-zero summit.

The Turks and Brazilians were ecstatic they had managed to achieve a diplomatic breakthrough that others were tried for years had failed. They had proven themselves and they were quite excited to report back to Washington that they got the deal. However, while the Brazilian Foreign Minister, Amorim, called the Secretary of State, Clinton, to inform her about the new agreement, she told that the deal has essentially expired and was completely unacceptable. The Turks and Brazilians were stunned as the administration presented their argument stating that the facts on the ground had changed and Iran at that time had, not 1600 kilos, but actually 2400 kilos of LEU. Even after cutting 1200 kilos out of that, they still would have 1200 left. Therefore, the deal had expired because the numbers needed to be revised. Moreover, the Iranians had begun doing 20 per cent enrichment on their own, which the West viewed as a provocation and as a result that needed to be addressed as well, however, it was not addressed in the Turkish Brazilian deal. What the Turks and the Brazilians did not know was that a few days earlier, China and Russia, eventually, had given their final approval for a UN Security Council resolution.

A lot of tensions emerged between Turkey and Brazil and the United States. After personal attacks against president Lula in the U.S. media, saying that he was doing this because of his own megalomania, someone in Lula's office became so irritated that leaked a letter from President Obama to Lula on April 20th only three weeks

before Lula had gone to Tehran. In that letter, President Obama asked Turkey and Brazil to take 1200 kilos of LEU out of Iran, for that would be a significant confidence-building measure and would be of tremendous importance. There was no mention of the 20 per cent enrichment. This became quite embarrassing for the Obama Administration because the argument that the deal was no longer valid, reasoning the facts on the ground had changed, was not in any form reflected in that letter signed by the President of the United States himself, which was sent to the Turks and Brazilians only a week after they met on April 13th in Washington DC discussions.

Eventually, between sanctions and diplomacy, the Obama Administration chose the sanctions rather than a diplomatic opening. The bottom line was that the administration was quite concerned that if they had gone for the diplomatic opening, Congress would have acted on its own and would have imposed sanctions on the Iranians. However, most importantly was that the Obama Administration simply had run out of political space. Congress was coming at them like a steamroller and taking that political risky fight only five months before congressional elections was not something that the administration felt that they could do. As a result, the Tehran Declaration became a failure due to the United States domestic political environment.

After the mid-2010 negotiation collapsed, no agreement was reached in further talks between 2010 and 2012. Thereafter, Iran continued its nuclear program and Obama and its allies applied more sanctions. Although the sanctions did not halt the nuclear progress of Iran, they extremely affected Iran's economy. Economic problems and Social discontent, eventually, contributed to the overwhelming victory of Hassan

Rouhani in Iranian presidential elections in June 2013. During his presidential campaign, Rouhani, the pragmatist cleric, made promises on a new season of reforms and reopening to the world. This new season of negotiations will be discussed in details in the second episode.

#### **4.1.1 The Role of Public Opinion**

In order to determine the role of Iranian public opinion in the failure of the Geneva Agreement, the intensity level of the negotiating issue should be considered and examined. According to Trumbore As the issue becomes more intense, public opinion is more likely to restrict decision-makers.

Few points should be considered while examining Iran's nuclear program intensity. First, the bitter history of external interventions, especially American and British involvement in bringing Pahlavi into power and overthrown of Iranian popular nationalist Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh in 1953 through a coup d'état, has contributed to an extreme negative sensitivity towards external interference. Therefore, Iranians have always been obsessively suspicious about the west's objectives and incentives and particularly that of the United States. (Brown, Hinnebusch & Ehteshami, 2002, p.285). According to one survey conducted in September 2009, 77 per cent of Iranians held unfavorable opinions of the United States government. Although the survey showed a higher degree of trust in Obama, compared to his predecessor, still 71 per cent of Iranians had no or little faith in him (World Public Opinion, 2009).

Secondly, It has been believed that Western cultural institutions and their political practices are conducive channels to dominate, oppress and exploit them in favor of

superpowers. Iran is subjected to respect the Western cultural international order and laws while its rights are not being respected by the same order.

Thirdly, Iranians have strong sentiments about the nuclear program. One survey in December 2009 suggested that the support for civilian aspects of nuclear energy is widespread among Iranians, 87 per cent. In addition, according to this survey, 98 per cent of Iranians consider the nuclear program as a “national right” (Elson & Nader, 2009: 11). One could assume that due to the high economic and political costs of developing nuclear weapons, Iranians would have opposed the development and possession of nuclear weapons. However, the survey demonstrated that more than half of the respondents supported that development (Ibid, 12). These results confirmed the previous research conducted by Terror Free Tomorrow in 2007, which claimed that majority of Iranians, 52 per cent, were in favor of developing nuclear weapons, due to their beliefs of a more safer Iran (Tomorrow, 2007, p.4).

Finally, to make the nuclear issue more intensified the supreme leader has often referred to it as a symbol of Iranians progress, prestige and pride, representing Iranians’ success in resisting American bullying through the years. The Iranians believe that the nuclear issue has been an excuse for the United States to justify the public opinion and a pretext for gaining support from other countries to achieve its own objectives. These observations suggest that for most Iranians a peaceful nuclear program was a non-negotiable right. The issue intensity was evident in a famous slogan “the nuclear energy is our indisputable right” (Vick, 2006). Thus, the western and especially American efforts to stop Iran from improving nuclear energy were seen as unlawful interference in Iran's domestic affairs. Hence, it was somehow expectable that signing of any international agreement that curbs this “indisputable

right” would result in great domestic backlash. As Hassan Rouhani, the former secretary of the Iranian Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) stated at Supreme Cultural Revolution Council in 2005:

This [nuclear] issue has become larger than it should in the public opinion. We must cool down and lower the intensity of our propaganda... the public is very sensitive about this issue. Whatever we do, we must have the support of the public. If the country’s political decisions conflict with the public opinion, we definitely would have problems (Beyond the challenges, 2005, p.35).

This is essentially what happened after the announcement of the Geneva Agreement; shipping a substantial proportion of Iran’s low-enriched uranium out of their country without reliable assurance was considered by many Iranians as the abandon of a major bargaining chip. Moreover, the fact that Ahmadinejad had made the deal and was attempting to depict it as a historical “diplomatic victory” fostered the popular opposition. Given the extensive public hatred for him and the regime after the fraudulent 2009 presidential elections, regardless of the content of the agreement, the fact that the deal was “his” diplomatic triumph was enough for Iranians to consider it as delegitimized and protest against it.

To reiterate Trumbore’s original argument, public attitudes can shape the result of international negotiations. Moreover, the public can constraint the ratification of international agreements indirectly. This is due to the fact that the public can praise or punish decision-makers indirectly with their votes. In this regard, it needs to be added that in order to comprehend the role of public opinion in withdrawal of Iran from the Geneva agreement it is important to acknowledge that although Iran is an authoritarian state, it is one with democratic elements, political parties and a degree of genuinely political rivalry (Brown & Buchta, 2000). Furthermore, the regime is more interested in maintaining popular legitimacy rather than merely repressive

measures, due to the fact that it is a less costly and more effective way of preserving authority. The effect of any nuclear deal on public opinion was, thus, an important issue for Iranian politicians. As discussed above, Iranian negative public opinion towards the deal was a significant variable, which effectively constrained its ratification.

#### **4.1.2 The Role of Level II Institutions**

Iranian constitution after the revolution defines the Supreme Leader as the ultimate authority. There has been a trend among western and non-western politicians to believe that the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is the ultimate decision-maker on the issues related to national security and he has the final say over Iran's foreign policy. An immediate impression is that Khamenei imposes his will to make every policy he likes, and no other political figure in Iran can challenge his will. However, contrary to this conventional wisdom, previous administrations have sought different foreign policies. If Khamenei's opinion is the only effective one in determining foreign policy, then, how different foreign policy approaches, from Rafsanjani's rapprochement, Khatami's reconciliation attempts and Ahmadinejad's aggressive confrontation, can be interpreted and justified?

In the 1990s, having no trust in the United States and considering all efforts to be futile Supreme Leader's was insisting on "West minus the U.S." strategy. However, Rafsanjani took some big steps in order to reduce U.S. hostility against Iran. When the United States called on Iran to help release the Western and American hostages in Lebanon, Rafsanjani pledged all his credentials to the system for this mediation, although Khamenei strongly opposed his approach. Years later, during the Clinton era, Rafsanjani deliberately gave a \$ 1 billion oil deal to the American Conoco,

although the Europeans had won the bid. This was the largest oil contract in Iran's history. Clinton, not only blocked the Conoco-Iran oil deal but also put into operation the most severe oil embargo, which even today is one of the biggest sanctions on Iran, by issuing two Executive Orders (Murray, 2010: 99).

During the Khatami era, reconciliatory policies were pursued. Stopping uranium enrichment between 2003 and 2005, while Ayatollah Khamenei strongly opposed that policy, Khatami, offered an unofficial proposal through the Swiss ambassador, Tim Guldemann, to the United States to resolve the existing disagreements and cooperation with the United States to abolish the Taliban and the formation of a new government in Afghanistan. However, those attempts were rejected by the Bush Administration. Ayatollah Khamenei criticized those approaches, as a result of which the tensions were exacerbated by hostility on the part of the Bush Administration and the inclusion of Iran in the "axis of evils." These examples show that although Khamenei speaks the last word in foreign policy, in practice he is not an absolute dictator. This approach, which considers Khamenei as the only actor in foreign policy is far simplistic because firstly it ignores the fact that every political leader, like other human beings, is affected by his environment, and secondly, it ignores the complexity of political polarization in Iran. In reality, rather than merely dictating, the Supreme Leader, therefore, performs a balancing function among different factions, trying to promote his desired strategies without alienating any important political factions or national constituencies meanwhile preventing factional conflicts from threatening the integrity and legitimacy of the regime.

In general, according to Iran's Constitution, the following institutions are present in the process of foreign policy decision-making: 1) The Supreme Leader, 2) The

executive branch, including the President, the cabinet of Ministers, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other relevant ministries, 3) The legislative bodies including the Parliament -Islamic Consultative Assembly- and Guardian Council, 4) The Expediency Council, 5) The Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), 6) Armed forces, especially the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and 7) The Judiciary branch. It is, of course, natural that regarding various occasions, the role of some institutions becomes more intense and the role of others diminishes. For instance, in the context of the nuclear issue, the role of institutions such as the leadership, the presidency and the Foreign Ministry, the Supreme National Security Council and the Islamic Consultative Assembly and, to a lesser extent, the Guardian Council have been more prominent.

Nevertheless, these complex institutional arrangements have contributed to low levels of coordination and cooperation. These multiple and overlapping centers of power often pursue competing and contradictory agendas. The factional disagreements among three main factions, namely the radicals, the traditionalist conservatives and the reformers and factional alliances based on ideological sympathies, patronage, and family ties have resulted in “suspended equilibrium” within Iran’s political system (Kamrava & Hassan-Yari, 2004). In this situation, the regime is unable to adopt the appropriate action or to respond efficiently to proposals from the international bargaining parties. This is due to the fact that domestic factions not only have different positions on issues but also they change their alliances according to the nature and circumstances regarding the issues at stake (Kamrava, 2007). Thus, unable to generate consensus the outcome is a political stalemate. This is what essentially happened after the fraudulent 2009 presidential election. Iran had the greatest political crisis since the Islamic revolution.

After the terms of the Geneva Agreement were published, the internal political fights intensified. The terms of this agreement were described as ' illegal ' by Hassan Rouhani who was the former lead nuclear negotiator. The Green leader Mir Hosein Mousavi, popular presidential candidate, who was defeated in 2009 election, criticized the deal and Ahmadinejad's diplomacy. He said:

Today it seems like we have to surrender a major portion of the product of our country's nuclear program, which has caused so much uproar and has brought upon our people so many sanctions, to another country in hopes that they may out of kindness provide us with this [TRR fuel] basic need sometime in the future ... Is this a victory? Or a lie portraying surrender as victory? Not only have the officials been unable to solve global problems, but also they are not even safeguarding the undeniable rights of our people and have generously given these rights up. This shows that the officials are extremists even when it comes to surrendering and bowing down [to foreigners] (Parsi, 2012).

Ali Larijani, speaker of the Iranian parliament and former head nuclear negotiator, was skeptical of shipping Iran's LEU out of the country he stated, "My guess is that the Americans have made a secret deal with certain countries to take enriched uranium away from us under the pretext of providing nuclear fuel". Further questioning the basic principle of the fuel-swap proposal, he added, "I see no links between providing the fuel for the Tehran reactor and sending Iran's LEU abroad" (Crail, 2009). Nevertheless, it was obvious that none of the political factions whether conservatives or reformists wanted to see that Ahmadinejad's government score a victory by making a deal and consolidate their position within the Iranian political spectrum. Since the first days of office in 2005, Ahmadinejad kept an unbending position towards any compromise with the IAEA or the EU negotiators. However, his decision to accept the Geneva Agreement, apparently, was based on the calculation that he could depict the agreement as a significant diplomatic victory and thus strengthens his political stance. Ironically, the outcome was exactly the contrary.

Even many of the conservative hard- liners who used to be Ahmadinejad’s political allies, challenged the agreement based on the argument that Iran, thereby, was obliged to give up too much without reliable assurances and if the West would renege the deal, Iran would be left empty-handed. On the other hand, moderates sharply opposed the deal, not only because of its content but more due to the fact that it was Ahmadinejad’s deal, and they did not want to let him any diplomatic victory.

It can be said that the deal could be potentially good for Iran because, nonetheless, it would protect Iran’s right to enrichment and could have paved the road for further negotiations and compromises. This was essentially what pragmatists and moderates like Rouhani and Mousavi were advocating and did so later during the negotiations in 2013 and afterward. It can be concluded that the rejection was not because of the deal itself but rather because of the dealer. Therefore, as a result of fraudulent elections and extensive hostility towards Ahmadinejad himself, the Geneva Agreement was not only rejected at the level of Iranian society but also, was sharply criticized at the institutional level in Iran.

#### **4.1.3 The Position of Iran’s Lead Negotiators**

The Supreme Leader was initially supportive of Ahmadinejad’s deal. However, after realizing the massive hostility towards the deal, he inclined his stand towards the dominant political forces. Hence, he immediately retreated and withdrew his support for Ahmadinejad and his agreement. Khamenei’s opposition was strengthened under the effects of what Putnam calls “reverberations”. Putman defines reverberations as “statements or actions by level one negotiators in one state that influence the views and preferences of societal or institutional actors in the other”. While Westerners were making claims about the Geneva Agreement, mainly intended to gain support for ratification by their own audience, those claims reverberated negatively for

Iranian constituents. Iranians understood western claims as if the Iranian negotiators were deceived and manipulated to conclude a deal that was contrary to the interests of Iran and would considerably undermine Iran's nuclear capabilities. The negative effect of reverberation brought about enormous domestic opposition in general as well as the Supreme Leader's discontent in particular.

Ultimately, encountering massive backlash against the deal, Ahmadinejad realized that he had miscalculated the consequences of his "diplomatic triumph". The deal had brought about the effects, ironically, opposite to his intentions. Hence, he retreated as well.

#### **4.1.4 The Trust Issue and the Incompatible Win-sets**

The American proposal from day one to day three of the negotiations did not change in any significant manner neither the Iranians counterproposal. The biggest problem in those talks was not that there were completely incompatible interests on the two sides. The biggest problem was the huge deficit of trust, a high level of suspicion and paranoia from all sides. Therefore, the two sides win-sets could not overlap. This failure demonstrates that trust cannot be built overnight; it rather is a lengthy and labor-intensive process, in which, at that time, the U.S. side was no longer interested in investing in it.

#### **4.1.5 The Rationale of Sanctions**

Between sanctions and diplomacy, the Obama Administration chose the sanctions rather than a diplomatic opening. The bottom line was that the administration was quite concerned that if they had gone for the diplomatic opening, Congress would have acted on its own and would have imposed sanctions on the Iranians which were created significant tensions between the P5 states and were created an opening for the Iranians to take further advantage of differences that existed within the P5. Iran

became very much the organizing principle from alliance management in the Security Council. Moreover, these negotiations about the sanctions resolution actually dealt quite little about Iran. In a sense that it was a lot of haggling between the Russians and the Americans of what would be included and would not, what are the concessions the United States would give to Russia in order for Russia to agree. However, the deal was rejected, most importantly because the Obama Administration simply had run out of political space. Congress was coming at them like a steamroller and taking that political risky fight only five months before congressional elections was not something that the administration felt that they could do.

Nevertheless, domestic political considerations, though important, were not the only reason for Obama to reject the Tehran Declaration. He was inclined to pursue tough multilateral sanctions for two reasons. First, he could show the American constituents that the Administration had reasonably taken all the possible options to force Iran to give up enrichment. The second and the more important reason was that Obama thought of sanctions a means of securing agreements in the future. As Drezner pointed out means of coercion can be used to compel parties to cooperation. Obama's calculation was that the tough sanctions would eventually compel Iran to make concessions. Hence, it was meant to secure a potential future deal.

However, support for new by China and Russia was unsure in October 2009. In that context, Obama clearly thought it worth following the Geneva Agreement. However, he had the Chinese-Russian agreement to reinforce his tougher UN sanctions at the time of the Tehran Declaration. In this respect, it appeared unappealing to continue with the Tehran Declaration. He imposed the most striking hard-hitting sanctions that probably any country has been under yet. The United States succeeded in convincing

Europe to cut all oil imports from Iran. Even the Iranian central bank was put under sanctions, which essentially closed Iran's access to the international financial system. The day Congress passed sanctions on Iran's central bank, Iran's currency dropped roughly 30 per cent. Thereafter, riots broke out in Tehran Iran's GDP shrunk 25 per cent.

#### **4.2 Second Episode: Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action 2013**

Whilst the sanctions were clearly hurting, Iran did not break and nor was it without a response. Just as the Iranians responded to Bush's refusal to negotiate by doubling down on their nuclear program, they responded to sanctions by building more centrifuge. Eventually, what ended up coming out of this was that if the American calculation was that sanctions would cause the Iranian cost-benefit calculus to change and make the Iranians realize that it would simply be too costly and painful for them to go forward with their nuclear program, the Iranian calculation was by just expanding the program as much as possible it would make the sanctions policy too costly for the United States. As President Rouhani's chief of staff stated, “Our strategy was to break the mentality of the other side by showing them that pressure does not work...so we escalated our nuclear activities to show what pressure actually would produce” (Carmen, 2019).

The end result was that the United States inched closer to collapse the Iranian economy and the Iranians inched closer to having a nuclear weapons capability. Meanwhile, the Israelis inched closer to taking military action. As these three clocks were ticking, the official P5+1 negotiations were actually leading nowhere. President Obama from the outset believed that ultimately the Iranians would never yield or give any meaningful compromises or concessions to the United States unless it was

in a direct negotiation authorized by the Supreme Leader. President Obama was convinced that he needed to set up a secret channel directly to Iran's Supreme Leader, in order to be able to directly negotiate, far away from the eyes of the media. Moreover, President Obama wanted to assess that how much effect were those sanctions having on the Iranians and whether they were willing to yield.

Going back to 2011, Senator Kerry the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, played an instrumental role in getting three Americans, who had been wrongfully jailed in Iran released, using the help of the Omani government. The Omanis had proven their ability to get the Iranians to deliver and their ability to actually directly access Iran's supreme leader. Therefore, in searching for a secret channel to access Iran in 2012 Oman seemed to be the most reliable and effective channel for Obama. On the other hand, these negotiations had to be kept a very good secret and the reason for this was very simple. The enemies of a deal were not many but they were plenty in opportunities and capacity and most importantly the negotiations were so fragile that even if they were not that many, they could create problems and as a result, these negotiations had to be kept as secret as possible. Therefore, there had been secret negotiations precisely because of the way the issue had been politicized and it was just too difficult to conduct those negotiations in open because there would be too many members of Congress and others who would have a political interest in salvaging it and since not a lot of people go to Oman that was a great place to hold those negotiations.

By July 2012 for the first time, a small delegation of American officials travelled to Muscat in Oman and they met with the Iranians. The gentlemen from the American side were Puneet Talwar and Jake Sullivan who at the time were mid-level. The

Iranians sent three individuals; one of them was a deputy foreign minister. Once they realized that the Americans did not have someone at their rank, the deputy foreign minister never entered the room but instead sat in a different room and observed and conducted negotiations without directly interacting with the Americans. By all accounts, it ended up being a really bad meeting. The U.S. side was there to be able to assess had the Omani succeeded and actually getting an authoritative channel to Iran's supreme leader in order to be able to see how close were the Iranians to capitulating. The Iranians were there not to capitulate but to see how close the United States was to capitulate on the issue of enrichment. For the full day, the Iranians were peppering the Americans with various formulations of how the U.S. could come to terms and accept enrichment on Iran but the U.S. side had absolutely no authority to discuss that issue. To sum up, the first meeting in Oman was a failure.

By January 2013 a new sense of urgency was taking hold of the White House. In January 2012 the Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta had stated publicly that Iran's breakout time was 12 months; meaning that from the moment the Iranians would make a decision that they wanted to build a bomb to actually having a bomb would take roughly 12 months. By January 2013, a year later, the breakout time had shrunk to eight to twelve weeks as a result of the Iranians quickly advancing the nuclear program and building more centrifuges and amassing more LEU. Clearly, the Iranian nuclear clock was ticking faster than the sanctions clock or the Israeli clock. If nothing would have changed the United States would have soon been in a situation in which either had to accept acquiesce to an Iranian nuclear weapons capability or go to war. The least likely scenario was that the Iranians would capitulate because time simply was on their side. Therefore, Obama made the decision to go back to Oman.

#### **4.2.1 Transformational Nature of Secret Negotiations in Oman**

In March 2013 a much larger and a much more senior delegation was sent headed by Bill Burns who was then Deputy Secretary of State, the equivalent of the gentlemen that the Iranians had sent during the first meeting.

The most important thing that happened was that this time the U.S. negotiators were armed with something that they had never been armed with before, the opportunity to play the enrichment card. With very careful terms they presented the Iranians the idea that the United States could accept enrichment on Iranian soil, given that the Iranians would accept significant restrictions to their program and transparency. This was exactly what the Iranians had waited for more than 10 years. However, there was a problem. For the tremendous mistrust between Iran and the United States, the Iranians could not go back to Tehran just being able to say that orally. They had been promised that the United States would be willing to accept enrichment, however, they needed it in writing. The U.S. side had absolutely no authority to be able to put this in writing because the fear was that if they put this in writing the Iranians would be able to pocket this concession. They would be able to leak it, which in turn would cause a significant disunity within the P5+1. Once again the mistrust between the United States and Iran was creating a problem, even when on the substance they were actually getting much closer to each other. Something was needed in order to be able to bridge the trust gap between the two sides and that was where Oman stepped in once again. An idea emerged that instead of the United States sending a letter to the Iranians explaining that under what circumstances they could accept enrichment a letter would be sent to the Sultan of Oman, a person that both the President of the United States and the Supreme Leader of Iran respected. He would then travel to Iran and meet directly with the Iranian Supreme Leader. The Sultan would not show the

letter but would convey to the Iranian Supreme Leader the content of the letter. Therefore, if the Iranians would have rejected, it was no longer than rejecting because they did not trust the United States, but rather they would have been insulting the Sultan of Oman. This solution caused the breakthrough to happen, precisely because both sides, the Iranians and the United States had essentially confidence in Sultan.

After this was settled both sides got really lucky because all of this was happening while Ahmadinejad was still president in Iran. Three months later Rouhani won the elections in Iran. The pragmatic cleric had been a lead negotiator in the past, brought in a completely different team of negotiators, who actually had lived extensive periods of time in the United States and had tremendous familiarity with many of the Americans in the Obama Administration. Thus, a completely different atmosphere was created. Even though Rouhani had no idea that the enrichment issue already, more or less, had been resolved, they immediately go to work throughout August in Oman, September in New York and by November 2013 an interim deal was finally struck. This interim deal was so critical for the United States because it reversed the time dynamics, in which time was on Iran side. By the Iranians agreeing to completely stop adding new centrifuges and the United States not adding new sanctions but keeping the previous sanctions, that dynamic in which time was on Iran's side more or less was either neutralized or reverse, which was a huge victory for the United States. Then, after another approximately 18 months of excruciating negotiations, by July 2015 they finally had a deal. That was a deal that showed that diplomacy had prevailed, war with Iran was prevented as well as a nuclear weapon in Iran.

#### **4.2.2 Obama Initiated the Strategy of Persuasion**

Obama launched significant changes in US foreign policies and re-invigorated America's worldwide image's favorable characteristics, which effectively altered public perceptions of America and United States leadership and considerably amplified pro-US attitudes. The emphasis he put upon realistic rather than idealist factors was reflected in his foreign policies while he emphasized that the U.S. no longer has the means of policing the world nor correcting what is incorrect in every part of the globe.

Regarding Iran, Obama realized that after 30 years of mutual demonization and institutionalized enmity between the United States and Iran it would be very difficult to successfully pursue diplomacy unless first something was done about the atmospherics. The Iranians have been calling the United States the “Great Satan” for 30 years every Friday prayer and the United States had put Iran in the “axis of evil”. Those atmospherics were not particularly conducive to the success of diplomacy.

Therefore, the administration very quickly started to change the language that had been used in the past, particularly by the Bush Administration, in order to signal to the Iranians that Obama was determined to pursue diplomacy and have a better relationship with that country. An early step was to alter the vocabulary of the United States regarding Iran. The United States government had to use a language that mirrored that intention to generate a diplomatic environment.

For instance, during the campaign Obama had on numerous occasions said that he would pursue diplomacy with Iranians using carrots and sticks. Once he got into power it became quite clear to the administration that this is a metaphor that in

English sounds pretty good. It is very commonly used and does not have a negative connotation. However, it translates really badly into Persian both linguistically and culturally. Essentially it means that Iran is a donkey and the United States is going to either trick it with a carrot or punish it with a stick. Within two weeks, this terminology was eliminated from the State Department's talking points. In fact not seen a single state department or White House official made the reference to carrots and sticks ever again.

Nevertheless, the most significant example of how the administration tried to change the atmosphere was the unprecedented Norouz message that was given to the Iranian people and Iranian government on the eve of the Iranian New Year on 23rd march in 2009. In that message, Obama congratulated the Iranians and expressed his hope that the two countries might have a brighter future. “I would like to speak directly to the people and leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” he said, as he expressed his admiration for the Iranian’s contributions to art, music, and literature over the centuries. He continued as follows:

My administration is now committed to diplomacy that addresses the full range of issues before us, and to pursuing constructive ties among the United States, Iran, and the international community. This process will not be advanced by threats. We seek instead engagement that is honest and grounded in mutual respect... You, too, have a choice. The United States wants the Islamic Republic of Iran to take its rightful place in the community of nations. You have that right—but it comes with real responsibilities, and that place cannot be reached through terror or arms, but rather through peaceful actions that demonstrate the true greatness of the Iranian people and civilization. And the measure of that greatness is not the capacity to destroy, it is your demonstrated ability to build and create.

Obama addressed both the Iranian government and the people and talked about the need of finding a better relationship, saying that at the end of the day the many problems that exist between the United States and Iran cannot be overcome through

threats. He talked about the need of bringing Iran into the community of nations and hoped that a better relationship between the two sides could be found. This was a clear departure from the approach of the Bush Administration.

Cleverly acknowledged the admired stance of poets in Iranian culture, Obama quoted one line from Iran's thirteenth-century poet Sa'di as the epilogue. "There are those who insist that we are defined by our differences," he said. "But let us remember the words that were written by the poet Sa'di, so many years ago: 'The children of Adam are limbs to each other, having been created of one essence.'"

This line and the whole poem is one of the most well known in all Persian poetry. Sa'di's works have been taught at schools as a primer in the Farsi language and due to humanism and wisdom lessons embedded in his stories. Thus, every Iranian knows that specific quoted poem by heart. No other choice could have expressed the newly elected president's intentions of transforming the essence of US-Iran relations better than appealing to the common humanity between Iran and the United States. Sa'di's quotation was sensibly designed to enunciate a desired human interaction and to create a salvo to re-establish relations between the United States and Iran.

Not only the idea of communicating directly with Iranian people and the government was remarkable, but also everything about the message itself was outstanding. A thoughtful content with a respectful positive tone was posted by White House on YouTube, not forgetting to add the Farsi subtitles, which made it possible to go viral instantly in Iran. Notably, by using the formal title of Iran — the Islamic Republic of Iran — Obama distinguished his intentions from his predecessors' conventional rhetoric.

This was aimed at creating a better atmosphere and signaling the Iranians that Obama was serious. The response of the leader of the Islamic Republic Ayatollah Khamenei the supreme leader was very swift, within a day he gave a speech approximately 40 minutes going over all of the faults and all of the crimes and sins that the United States had committed against Iran from the Iranian perspective. Towards the end, however, he gave a tiny but nevertheless significant opening, saying that the Iranians do not have any experience with this new administration, “if you change we will change”. He implied that a change of tone was not sufficient and there needed to be a strategic shift in order for that to be viewed as serious by the Iranians. He also expressed a lot of skepticism about whether Obama is capable of pulling this off, said that “we do not know who actually makes the decisions in the United States, is it Obama, is it the Congress or other forces behind the shadows.

Nevertheless, Obama repeated his signals with great emphasis. Not only in his inaugural address in January 2009, but also in his addresses to Prague in April 2009 and another to Cairo in June 2009 as well as in November 3rd 2009 on the anniversary of the day that the American Embassy in Tehran was seized and the hostage crisis began, Obama stated that he and his administration would seek engagement with Iran “without preconditions” based on “mutual interests” and “mutual respect”. For years, the Iranians had insisted that they would not negotiate with the United States unless the United States treats Iran on the basis of mutual respect and mutual interest. Obama’s attempts to create a better political and social climate were not fruitless. It was evident in the reaction of public opinion after the terms of the JCPOA was announced. Unlike 2009, the Iranian public welcomed the deal.

### **4.2.3 The Role of Level-Two Institutions**

The significant changes at the institutional level in Iran were critical to ensuring the ratification of the deal domestically. After the 2009 fraudulent elections, many conservatives were alienated and hard-liners were divided into new conservative parties squabbling factions. On the other hand, The Khamenei-Ahmadinejad relationship collapsed as well, as the president tried to strengthen his own power to the detriment of the Supreme Leader, to the extent that by 2011 the two were openly confronting one another. As a result, Iran witnessed many hard-liner presidential candidates in 2013. This climate, in fact, contributed the election of Rouhani. Following the 2013 presidential elections and Rouhani's presidency, the factional balance of power considerably shifted. Hard-line conservatives, who had been in power during the Ahmadinejad's era, were removed from the key institutions.

Rouhani famously stated, during his 2013 presidential campaign, "It is good for the centrifuges to spin, but the wheels of Iranian factories should also spin" and "Nuclear energy is our absolute right, but so is life without sanctions" ("Hassan Rouhani announced his candidacy", 2013). His views brought extensive public support to win the elections and thereafter he was enjoying "a broader base of support than any president in Iran's post-revolutionary history". His position was further reinforced by the fact that his political opponents were not unified. This fact played a beneficiary role at the time when the agreement was announced. Although many conservatives opposed the deal, others backed Rouhani or they simply refrained from attacking it.

### **4.2.4 The Position of Leaders**

The Supreme Leader, as the ultimate authority, endorsed the agreement. There was no question that the right to enrichment and the consequences of sanctions influenced his choice as well. However, it would be simplistic to conclude that the sanctions

alone compelled him to agree to the deal. For a long time, he had been promoting sanctions as strong incentives for Iranians' independence and self-reliance. On the other hand, the terms of the deal did not meet his optimal expectations. Therefore, in order to comprehend that why Khamenei backed a deal with undesirable outcomes that he had previously resisted, one should consider the domestic political climate and the prospective political implications of the refusal of the deal.

The backlash against the outcome of the fraudulent 2009 presidential elections significantly undermined the popular legitimacy of the regime. At first, Iranians protested against the election results, claiming that the re-election of President Ahmadinejad was rigged and therefore, they were demanding a new election be held. However, after the regime's brutal repression, the nature of the demonstrations changed significantly, whilst Iranians started to challenge the legitimacy of the regime itself. This unprecedented challenge to the Iranian government exposed the huge gap that existed between the state and its population. Nonetheless, the uprisings were eventually repressed and normal conditions were re-established. However, the regime could not significantly recover from the legitimacy crisis. The most obvious form of protest was evident in 2012 parliamentary elections, while reformist refused to participate. The regime's on-going fear for its survival was proved by the continuation of restriction of the media and the Internet.

In addition, rather than appealing to legitimacy, to secure the maintenance of the Islamic Republic, Khamenei had primarily relied on repression. This had resulted in greater reliance on the institutions, which exercise power through repressive instruments, notably the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. The revolutionary guards had become increasingly powerful under Ahmadinejad. During 2009-2010

riots they played a significant role in suppressing the protests, which in turn strengthened their position and increased their overall impact to the extent that many commentators thought that the existing dominance of Khamenei and clerical class were genuinely threatened.

Hence, supporting the popular President Rouhani and endorsing the nuclear agreement could have been a strong remedy to recover the legitimacy crisis. Furthermore, by reviving the regime's legitimacy Khamenei would be able to rely less on the role of the Revolutionary Guards and thereby diminish their general impact within Iran. The Supreme Leader of Iran, therefore, endorsed the JCPOA agreement, mainly motivated by calculating the necessity of accepting the agreement to reinforce the legitimacy of the Iranian government and his own leadership. Thus, it can be concluded that the domestic political factors were the most influential variables for Khamenei to endorse the JCPOA compromises.

Obama's choice to embrace Iranian enrichment was mainly an endeavor to avoid a significantly worse result. If Obama had not compromised on enrichment, no deal would have been reached, Iran's nuclear program would have continued. Hence there would have been constantly increasing pressure to take military action as the only option still untested. There was also the fear that Israelis would launch a surprise attack against Iran. Nevertheless, either case would have led to highly unpredictable and potentially catastrophic consequences. Therefore, it can be concluded that Obama accepted the JCPOA compromise mainly because he acknowledged the deal as the only way to avoid a far worse outcome.

#### **4.2.5 The Positive Effects of Reverberation**

Throughout negotiations, the biggest declared enemy was, of course, the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. He did quite a lot to harm the talks. Netanyahu did so with the calculation that he would force the United States to take action and, of course, his hope was that it would be military action. Instead, to his surprise, Obama managed to figure out how the United States could take diplomatic action but had Netanyahu not eliminated the status quo option, chances were the United States and Obama would actually not have taken diplomatic action but instead would choose to just contain the issue, kick the can down the road, and let it be the headache of the next administration. However, by eliminating that option, Netanyahu forced Obama to choose between war and peace and Obama chose peace. What is perhaps even more ironic is that if he had thought about this a little bit harder, he might have figured out that there was something really simple he could have done to kill the nuclear deal. He went to Congress and blasted the deal saying that was the worst deal ever which would pave Iran's way to a nuclear weapon. However, all he needed to do to kill this deal was to go to the microphones and say this is a fantastic deal that is so good for Israel and this is Iran's ultimate defeat and capitulation. Had Netanyahu hug the deal it would have killed the opportunity for the Iranians to continue the negotiations. The Iranians had no difficulty dealing with Netanyahu saying that this is such a defeat for the West. It actually helped shut up the hardliners in Iran. But had he gone out and said that this is fantastic he would have created massive difficulties for the Iranian negotiators. With all the things he did and all the plans he had, he seemed to not have been able to figure this one out.

## **Chapter 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

To conclude, an international agreement can achieve, reiterating the initial reasoning of Putnam, only if it satisfies the objectives of both the concerned states and of their domestic constituencies. The first attempt in 2009 ended up failing mainly because of domestic problems on the Iranian side. The political fights and the negative public opinion towards the deal, as Putnam called the Level 1 negotiators in Iran, constrained the ratification of the Geneva Agreement in 2009. Iranian negative public opinion towards the deal was a significant variable, which effectively constrained its ratification. Moreover, none of the political factions whether conservatives or reformists wanted to see that Ahmadinejad's government score a victory by making a deal and consolidate their position within the Iranian political spectrum. Therefore, as a result of fraudulent elections and extensive hostility towards Ahmadinejad himself, the Geneva Agreement was not only rejected at the level of Iranian society but also, was sharply criticized at the institutional level in Iran. After realizing the massive hostility towards the deal, the Supreme Leader inclined his stand towards the dominant political forces and withdrew his support for Ahmadinejad and his agreement. Finally, The negative effect of reverberation brought about enormous domestic opposition in general as well as the Supreme Leader's discontent in particular.

By all accounts, the Geneva Agreement could not satisfy the domestic constituents concerns and brought about massive criticisms and resentment. The deal was not ratified and the first round of negotiations was nothing but a failure.

The second attempt, the Tehran declaration in 2010, was acceptable for the Iranian constituents. However, President Obama rejected the deal due to the domestic political considerations. Obama quickly ended up in a situation in which he was stuck with the very same instruments that President Bush had at his disposal namely pressure through sanctions, sabotage, and cyber warfare. Precisely because he had tried diplomacy though and precisely because he enjoyed international legitimacy in a way that Bush did not, Obama succeeded where Bush could not. He imposed the most striking hard-hitting sanctions that probably any country has been under yet. More importantly, Obama thought of sanctions as a means of securing agreements in the future. As Drezner pointed out means of coercion can be used to compel parties to cooperation. Obama's calculation was that the tough sanctions would eventually compel Iran to make concessions. Hence, it was meant to secure a potential future deal.

Obama's calculation proved to be correct. In the new round of negotiations, two parties eventually made concessions and came to an agreement. Obama accepted Iranian enrichment largely because of his acknowledgment that Iran would not yield its "right" to enrich and if Obama had not compromised on enrichment, no deal would have been reached. Obama's choice to embrace Iranian enrichment was mainly an endeavor to avoid a significantly worse result.

In Iran, the right to enrichment and the harsh consequences of sanctions had great impacts on the Supreme Leader's decision. On the other hand, Khamenei's acceptance of the agreement was mainly driven by calculating the necessity of accepting the agreement to reinforce the legitimacy of the Iranian government and his own leadership. Supporting the popular President Rouhani and endorsing the nuclear agreement could have been a strong remedy to recover the legitimacy crisis. Unlike the previous negotiations, the domestic politics did not function as an obstacle but it rather facilitated the ratification.

Regarding Obama's strategy of persuasion, his attempts to create a better political and social climate and building a level of trust between two nations became fruitful. It was evident in the reaction of public opinion after the terms of the JCPOA was announced. Unlike 2009, the Iranian public welcomed the deal and facilitated the ratification.

Moreover, unlike 2009, this time the reverberation effect actually played a positive role. Had Netanyahu endorse the deal it would have killed the opportunity for the Iranians to continue the negotiations. However, he went to Congress and blasted the deal saying that was the worst deal ever which would pave Iran's way to nuclear weapon. The Iranians had no difficulty dealing with Netanyahu saying that this is such a defeat for the West. It actually helped shut up the hardliners in Iran and, ironically, became a facilitating factor for ratification.

By all accounts, the treaty was widely welcomed at the global level and many experts agreed that this was a huge diplomatic achievement. However, President Trump believes it is the worst deal ever. Clearly, there must have been better deals. I think

there was a better deal that could be held but not in 2015. The better deal that could be held if the West had had a more realistic position 10 to 15 years ago. In 2003 the Iranians send a negotiating offer to the Bush Administration, while they had roughly hundred fifteen centrifuges. Iranians offered to open the nuclear program for full inspections and transparency. They offered to come to terms with the United States and a whole set of other issues such as collaborating against Al-Qaeda. The proposal had been delivered to the United States by the Swiss ambassador from Iran and the U.S. side at Bush Administration's response was to say nothing to the Iranians and reprimand the Swiss ambassador for having delivered it in the first place.

In 2005 there was another opportunity. In March of that year, the last Iranian offer was sent to the Europeans before elections were held and Ahmadinejad became president. In that proposal, the Iranians offered to cut their enrichment at 3000 centrifuges. However, Europeans did not even bother to send it to the U.S. side because they knew Bush would reject anything that was above zero enrichment. Therefore, the two parties win-sets never overlapped and they could not make any deal. For decades diplomacy and negotiations were constantly missed or neglected driving the situation between the United States and Iran in particular towards a military confrontation.

However, the recent successful negotiations proved that if policy-makers understand what went right and that what has gone wrong could be reversed in the future, and then reaching agreements will become more likely. When smart policy prevails over the desire to appear tough, international actors actually do get different results. If anything we should learn from this negotiation is that in order to get a behavioral change or policy change on the other side it requires a policy change on our side as

well. International actors have to find the right equilibrium to make sure that as they change the other parties would change as well. Because otherwise, we would live in a world in which we can just wish for others to change their behavior but we ourselves are completely flawless.

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