

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL  
STUDIES**



**MASTER'S THESIS**

**IRAN AND THE UNITED STATES'  
RELATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF  
THE NUCLEAR DEAL**

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Subject: **IEPS**  
Academic Year: **2016**  
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Date Submitted: **July 2016**

# Master Thesis Proposal

Institute of Political Studies  
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## Iran and the United States' relations in the context of the Nuclear Deal

**Registered in SIS: Yes**      **Date of registration: June 2015**

### **Topic Characteristics:**

My topic will focus on the evolution of the international relations between Iran and the United States in the context of the Nuclear Deal Framework. As Iran and the US have no diplomatic relations nowadays, I will attempt to demonstrate that the Nuclear Deal, if signed, could possibly warm up the relations between the two countries, as well as benefit the Middle East with a newfound stability – even if it could announce a regional proliferation. However, the geopolitical ambitions of both countries in the Persian Gulf is similar; expanding and maintaining their influence. Therefore, they have to overcome their mutual distrust in order to cooperate and reach an agreement that would benefit both nations.

This thesis will discuss the security dilemma the US has with Iran's nuclear weapons program and how the US deals with it using a realist perspective. This thesis will argue that liberalism should be used to replace deep-rooted realist policies that have been applied by both countries throughout the years. The Nuclear Deal will be used as an argument that should embrace political liberalism as it emphasizes on cooperation rather than conflict.

From an IR standpoint, this topic is of international importance since the possible evolution of the two countries' relations would shape the international development of an entire region of the world; the Middle East. If the Nuclear Deal stays in place and is followed thoroughly by both nations, it could possibly increase stability and peace in the region. Understanding why both countries behaved the way they did using political realism will help us understand why the conflict is still actual, decades later.

### **Working hypotheses:**

- The US's new geopolitical strategy towards Iran is from realist to liberalist actions
- Iran and the US should cooperate because they share strategic interests
- The Nuclear Deal will make Iran a great economic and geopolitical power in the Middle East

The research question is: can the Nuclear Deal help improve relations between Iran and the US and if so, is it in either country's best interest to be allies?

### **Methodology:**

The international domain of interest will be international security with an emphasis on realism, and liberalism theories of International Relations as well as the concept of strategic culture. Those concepts will be used to explain the core differences between Iran and the US as well as evaluate potential relational outcomes. The thesis will show that political realist theoretical ideas and concepts shape both countries' relations as of today.

Classical realism as well as Neorealism will be used to understand the relations between the US and Iran since 1945. Indeed, classical realism's balance of power can clearly be seen between the two nations. Power and security both push the countries away from each other and towards a conflicting state of affairs (Hans Morgenthau). The fact that both nations stayed in such perpetual state of conflict will be explain with neorealist theory as their structural environment helped foster this conflictual atmosphere (Kenneth Waltz).

The Democratic Peace Theory (liberalism) will be used to explain that with the Nuclear Deal, Iran could move towards being a more democratic state and hence, the tensions between the US and Iran will appease because both democracies would unlikely fight one another (John M. Owen). However, this will be refuted as Iran and the US relations have been shaped by realism since the Nuclear Deal implementation.

The strategic culture field of study, is also crucial in fully understanding the complexity of those two countries' relations. This new lens especially help understand how the relations after the Iranian revolution shifted from realism to a blinded ideology on both sides since strategic culture uses the historical past to explain how contemporary policies are influenced. Mead's schools of thought (2002) regarding American strategic culture will specifically be used to analyze the US foreign approach towards WMD. The concept of strategic culture (in the interpretation by Johnson, 1995) allows for more depth in foreign policy explanation. This is why all three approaches will be used as methodology.

### **Draft Outline:**

1. Introduction
2. Literature Review
3. The U.S.'s strategic culture towards WMD
4. Iran's Nuclear ambitions and strategic culture
5. The Evolution of Iran-US Relations
6. US foreign policy towards Iran
7. Conclusions
8. Bibliography

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## Abstract

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This study analyses the evolution of relations between Iran and the United States by applying the theories of realism, liberalism and the theoretical concept of strategic culture on their contest for power, control and sovereignty. From strategic partners to strategic enemies and back to pragmatic tolerance, both countries have maintained a troublesome relationship which entered a new era of cooperation with the implementation of the Nuclear Deal in January 2016. This deal is a geopolitical breakthrough that should improve the relations between the two countries as it is in both their strategic interests to collaborate.

With sanctions removal and by choosing the diplomatic route, Iran can get access to a larger trade and investors' market which could help its economy tremendously and could be seen as an important international actor. Moreover, since the deal allows for the supervision and investigation of Iran's uranium facilities, this allows for greater transparency, profitable for the US and the international community. After the Nuclear Deal implementation, American and Iranian actions on the Islamic Republic's nuclear weapons program shifted from blind ideologies on both sides (i.e. overcoming both the Iranian religious fundamentalism and the American interventionism) and became imbedded within realist principles, bounded by the concepts of power and security. The main finding of this thesis is that the Nuclear Deal will create a tradeoff that will be unilaterally beneficial for Iran as it will make the country a great economic and geopolitical power in the Middle East.

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I, Alexane Saïd, declare on July 15, 2016, that this thesis is my own work, based on the sources and literature listed in the appended bibliography. The thesis as submitted is 187 997 keystrokes long (including spaces), i.e. 78 manuscript pages.

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## I. Introduction

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During the early period of the Cold War, Iran was a powerful ally of the United States. It received military assistance and economic resources from Washington in order to undermine the Soviet Union's influence in the region. However, this naturally balanced friendship didn't last since the US used its position in Iraq to manipulate Iranian politics, elevating the Shah Reza Pahlavi to power in 1953 where the dependence of Iran on the US became dominant. The Western support of the very unpopular and repressive regime of the shah led to the Iranian Revolution, establishing the Islamic Republic, and led to the storming of the American Embassy in Tehran on November 4, 1979 where fifty-two Americans were held hostage for over a year. The overthrowing of the Shah the same year marked an end to the two countries strong relationship that has been deteriorating ever since. Nowadays, there are no formal diplomatic relations between them. They don't have respective ambassadors – the US has an interests section at the Swiss embassy in Tehran while the Islamic Republic has an interests section at the Pakistani Embassy in Washington D.C. Moreover, since 1995, the US has had a trade embargo with Iran and keeps imposing scientific, military, financial and other economic sanctions against the country. The relations that have been frozen since the 1979 revolution even worsened with George W. Bush's speech describing Iran (alongside North Korea and Iraq) as an "Axis of Evil" building terrorist long-range missiles endangering the future of nuclear non-proliferation.

After Obama's inauguration in 2009, talks with the Islamic Republic resumed. Nowadays, the implementation of the Iran Nuclear Deal could warm the relations between the two countries. This reconciliation could fundamentally change the entire geopolitical strategy of the Middle East as it could potentially benefit the region with a new-found stability. However, the geopolitical ambitions of both countries in the Persian Gulf are similar; expanding and maintaining their influence. The main issue holding them back remains their mutual distrust cemented by a troublesome history. Therefore, they have to overcome their suspicion towards one another in order to cooperate and reach an agreement that would benefit both nations. If the two countries are able to put their

differences aside, the Nuclear Deal could mark the way for recovering the long-lost friendship.

This thesis will focus on the evolution of the international relations between Iran and the US in the context of the Nuclear Deal Framework. The following research question will be addressed: *can the Nuclear Deal help improve relations between Iran and the US and if so, is it in either country's best interest to be allies?* Three hypotheses will be discussed to answer the research question. First, the US's new geopolitical strategy towards Iran is shifting from realist to liberal actions with the Nuclear Deal. Second, Tehran and Washington should cooperate because they share strategic interests. Third, the Nuclear Deal will create a tradeoff that will be unilaterally beneficial for Iran. These hypotheses subsume one important question: if it is feasible that the realism in politics can overcome its competing stumbling block – the religious fundamentalism.

From an international relations standpoint, this topic is of importance since the possible evolution of the two countries' relations could shape the international development of an entire region of the world; the Middle East. If the Nuclear Deal stays in place and is followed thoroughly by both nations, it could possibly increase stability and peace in the region as well as make Iran an undeniable international geopolitical new player.

For the purpose of the thesis, qualitative research regarding the theoretical concept of strategic culture (Johnson, 1995), the realist and liberal theories of international relations and regarding Walter Mead's four schools of thought (2002) will be defined to explain how the relations between Iran and the US are shaped. The thesis will show that political realist theoretical ideas and concepts keep shaping both countries' relations and strategic culture as of today even though Iran and the US seem to be favoring stability and cooperation if the Nuclear Deal stays in place.

With this background, the next six chapters of this thesis will determine the validity of the hypotheses as well as answer the research question. The first of those chapters, which is Chapter II, is the literature review. A literature review is an evaluative examination of the current knowledge available for a particular field or subject and that has been done by accredited scholars. This thesis' literature review will seek to explain why strategic culture is important in regards to policy making. Realism, neorealism and



liberalism will be defined, compared and used as paradigms to describe how the relations between Iran and the US are constructed. The second of those chapters (Chapter III), will explain the US's strategic culture towards Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Then, Chapter IV will describe Iran's nuclear ambitions and strategic culture and Chapter V, will explain how the long-strained relations between the United States and the Islamic Republic evolved since WWII. Indeed, the settlement of US-Iran conflict could mark a break-through in the US troubled strategic politics in the whole Near and Middle East (if not in the whole Asia). The US's foreign policy towards Iran as well as Iran's economy evolution before and after the Nuclear Deal implementation will be discussed in the penultimate chapter. The last section will provide concluding thoughts, forecasting the future of the two countries' relations, assessing the veracity or refutation of the hypotheses and extending the scope of the discussion to future developments.

## II. Literature Review

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To understand the relations between Iran and the United States, it is important to become familiar with the two set of theories of international relations that are classical realism and neorealism. Indeed, it is a conventional scholarly wisdom that classical realism's balance of power can be seen between the two nations. Power and security both push the US and Iran away from each other and towards a conflicting state of affairs considering the analytical approach of Morgenthau (1948). The fact that the two countries have stayed in such a perpetual state of conflict after 1979 can also partially be explained with neorealism (Waltz, 1979) as their structural environment helped foster this conflictual atmosphere. A liberal theory, following the framework of the Democratic Peace (Owen, 1994), will be used to explain that with the Nuclear Deal, Iran could potentially move towards being a more democratic state and hence, the tensions between Washington and Tehran could appease since both countries would not likely fight one another. Realistically, this scenario seems highly unlikely in the near future. However, as the moderate Reformist party earned an important amount of the seats during the recent 2016 legislative elections in Iran (Naji, 2016), an imaginably more democratic Islamic Republic could potentially rise.

All of these theories are certainly important and will be used to describe Iran-US relations. However, a new framework, which is the strategic culture field of study, is also crucial in fully understanding the complexity of those two countries' relations. This new lens especially helps understand how the relations after the Iranian revolution shifted from realism to a blinded ideology on both sides since strategic culture uses the historical past to explain how contemporary policies are influenced. Mead's schools of thought (2002) regarding American strategic culture will specifically be used to analyze the US foreign approach towards WMD. Realist and liberal theories help stay grounded within theoretical paradigms while the concept of strategic culture (in the interpretation by Johnson, 1995) allows for more depth in foreign policy explanation. This is why all three approaches will be used as methodology. The literature about the subject is obviously more expansive than depicted here. However, the following is a helpful and rigorous point of departure.

## ***Morgenthau's Classical Realism vs Waltz's Structural Realism***

Realism refers to a family of theories of international relations that believes in a rather negative image of human nature: individuals are self-centered and compete to maximize their own utility rather than being driven by idealistic visions or doctrines. According to realist theorists, international politics is competitive and conflictual, closely related to economic and power gains. Realist thought is built upon four fundamental assumptions. First of all, in the international system, nation-states are the main and most significant actors which tend to pursue their own national interests. Second, the international system is infested by anarchy and uncertainty. There is no supranational authority capable of regulating the states and enforcing rules. Third, all states are rational in the way that they are self-interested. The anarchic system is comprised of countries that act as they please. However, these countries are rational and do what they do in order to survive, or achieve security. Lastly, all states' major interests are national security and survival. In order to protect those interests, governments attempt to gain as much power as possible, compared to others (Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979). The more powerful a country, the more control it has over its own well-being and all countries pay careful attention to how much power they have relative to each other.

Thus, for realists, international politics is the struggle between states for maximizing their power within the system, hence, power is the currency of international politics. To achieve security, states build up military capability, as well as natural resources and economic wealth in order to survive. This arms race leads to a security dilemma where a country that increases its own security, mechanically decreases the security of others.

One of the founding father of realism, Hans Morgenthau (1948) promulgated six principles of political realism. Those played a major role in the foreign policy of the US during the Cold War period. First, politics is governed by observable laws that are rooted in human nature. This means that humans are naturally inclined to acquire power that is locked within a state and great powers are led by people who are powerfully dominating their rivals. Second, power is the main unit of analysis of national interest. This means that countries act to protect their political interests or power, independently from ethical or religious interests. Third, the method and articulation of power is not fixed and since it has been changing throughout history, it will continue to do so. The conditions under

which foreign policy is exercised may evolve but not the purpose of it, which is acquiring power. Fourth, morality is not absent from realism. Policy makers are aware of the contradiction that exists between morals and political action. However, they tend to lean more towards pragmatism in fulfilling required political action. Their morals are often subjected to constructivism and open to ideology. Fifth, *“political realism refuses to identify the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the moral laws that govern the universe”* (Morgenthau, 1948, p. 11). If a state defends its policy interest while respecting those of other states, it leads to more fairness for all. These are the positive externalities of dominant states. Sixth, realism believes in the autonomy of the political sphere although recognizing the importance of other spheres and relevance of other ways of thinking. Realism is based on a pluralistic vision of human nature, but it believes that, in order to understand the political dimension of the latter, it must be approached out of an analysis of power.

We can thus conclude that behind Morgenthau’s theory lays the idea that *“international politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power”* (Morgenthau, 1948, p. 25). This main tenant was later used by John H. Herz (1950, p. 157) to describe what became to be known as a security dilemma:

“Groups [...] are, concerned about their security from being attacked, subjected, dominated, or annihilated by others [...]. They are driven to acquire more and more power in order to escape the impact of the power of others. This, in turn, renders the others more insecure and compels them to prepare for the worst. Since none can ever feel entirely secure in such a world of competing units, power competition ensues, and the vicious circle of security and power accumulation is on. Whether man is by nature peaceful and cooperative or domineering and aggressive, is not the question. The condition that concerns us here is not a biological or anthropological but a social one.”

Following Herz’s footsteps, Kenneth Waltz (1979) revolutionized realism by introducing neorealism, also known as structural realism. Neorealism derives from classical realism except that instead of using the pre-set “human nature” to explain why there is conflict, it focuses on the international system in a dynamic “top-down” approach to explaining international behavior of concrete agents. According to neorealists, the anarchic structure creates incentives for states to acquire power for the sake of their own security (survival) within the given evolved international setup composed of institutions,

and economic and power balances. Since there is no world government and no guarantee that one will not attack another, this external security challenge makes each state want to have enough power to protect itself if attacked. This creates what Waltz (1979, p. 126) calls a balance of power: *“the international structure provides states with little incentive to seek additional increments of power. Instead, it pushes them to maintain the existing balance of power. Preserving power, rather than increasing it, is the main goal of states.”* Neorealism thus presents a pessimistic view of the global system which, by being anarchic and inherently conflictual, creates rational states that are more motivated by power rather than ideas and values. The neorealist model is often used for explaining Iran’s behavior due to the Islamic Regime’s emphasis on WMD as a deterrent mechanism to increase its defense capabilities (see Chapter IV).

Waltz (1981) lists seven several security paradigms explaining the spread of nuclear weapons (see Table 1). For the purpose on this thesis, only six will be explained since Waltz (1981 p. 9) himself discarded one of them that is: *“countries may want nuclear weapons for offensive purposes. This, however, is an unlikely motivation”*. According to Waltz, the propagation of WMD does not increase the risk of war but make states less reckless and cautious because the principle of mutually assured destruction creates a more secure environment. Nuclear proliferation can therefore be seen as *“a strategic chain reaction”* (Sagan, 1996, p. 58). Assessing Iran’s geopolitical neighborhood (with nuclear-armed states, including Russia, Pakistan, India, Israel), and its hostile relationship with the US, this realist perspective has often been applied to analyze the Iranian nuclear program. This will later be explained in more depth in Chapter IV.

<b>Table 1. Why Nations Want Nuclear Weapons According to Kenneth Waltz</b>		
<b>Paradigm</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>Countries</b>
<b>I</b>	The international system forces nations to create a balance of power where great powers counterbalance the weapons of other great powers.	US, Russia
<b>II</b>	States that fear their nuclear allies will not help if they are attacked by other nuclear nations will try to arm themselves.	Great Britain
<b>III</b>	There is a “domino effect” where a country without nuclear allies wants nuclear weapons if its enemies have them.	China, India, Pakistan
<b>IV</b>	Isolated and vulnerable states seek WMD to protect themselves and to deter stronger enemies.	Israel
<b>V</b>	Nuclear weapons may be a better alternative to a militarily dangerous and expensive conventional arms race.	/
<b>VI</b>	WMD can bring prestige and enhance a country’s international standing and power.	France

**Source:** Waltz (1981).

### ***Liberalism and Owen’s Democratic Peace Theory***

Let us look now at the theoretical alternative vision to realism. Liberals (idealists) also recognize individuals as being self-interested and competitive. However, contrary to realists, they assert that people can cooperate because they share many interests such as protecting themselves. Liberalism offers a rather positive view on human nature. A branch of liberalism, neoliberalism, developed in response to the neorealist dilemma on how to explain patterns of cooperation in an anarchic world. According to neoliberals, it is possible to overcome realist challenges such as the security dilemma thanks to international institutions. Those establish an order in the international system by creating a certain structure and rules that enforce state behavior. As the representative of individuals, the state should, on the political field, make alliances and support many international institutions that will provide benefits for its citizens. Robert Keohane (1982), one of the most influential theorists of international institutions, defines institutions as “*sets of implicit and explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which an actor’s expectations converge in a given area of international relations*”. Regarding the arms race and nuclear security dilemma, one important international treaty is worth mentioning: the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The NPT is an international treaty aimed at reducing the risk of the WMD proliferation in

the world. It is operating under the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)<sup>1</sup>. With the NPT, states are prohibited to acquire nuclear weapons, therefore, the realist uncertainty around nuclear proliferation is reduced. This does not guarantee that some countries won't pursue WMD but it makes it harder for them to actually arm themselves because of the sanctions at risk.

A large amount of liberal literature is focusing on the relationship between nuclear proliferation and domestic political institutions. The most well-known theory in this regards is called the Democratic Peace Theory that is based on the claim that liberal democracies are more law-abiding and peaceful than autocracies, therefore democracies do not go to war with one another and are less likely to seek nuclear weapons. Several scholars have written about Democratic Peace. John M. Owen (1994) is arguably the most compelling in his explanation of how the Democratic Peace works. Owen explains that it is the liberal values and ideas, creating democratic governments that prevent war between two democracies. If two countries are democracies and recognize each other as such, they will remain at peace because both produce foreign policies that are friendly towards each other. However, if one sees the other as being illiberal, both states could go to war. Just like Owen (1994, p. 96) explains: *"for the liberal mechanism to prevent a liberal democracy from going to war against a foreign state, liberals must consider the foreign state a liberal democracy"*. This theory challenges neorealism's rationality. Using the words of political scientists Bruce Bueno de Mesquita (2006, p. 838):

"Democracies rarely, if ever, fight wars with each other while democracies and autocracies fight with one another [...]. [This] highlights the realization that domestic characteristics of regimes lead to sharply different patterns of foreign policy behavior, a fact that cannot be true if states are rational unitary actors whose patterns of behavior are determined by factors outside the domestic politics of the state as argued by [neorealists]."

Liberals believe that democracies and totalitarian regimes conduct strictly different foreign policies. Because of this, conflict is widespread in the international system. When autocracies become more liberal, democratic and adjust their foreign

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<sup>1</sup> The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is an international organization, operating under the aegis of the United Nations that seeks to promote the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

policies accordingly, peace is more likely to happen (Markwell, 2006; Owen, 1994). Therefore, the Democratic Peace Theory is used as a justification for democratic promotion abroad. With the spread of democracy and the commitment of democracies to join non-nuclear proliferation treaties such as the NPT, the threat of WMD proliferation reduces. Therefore, democratic countries are able to hinder the realist security nuclear dilemma (Chafetz, 1993; Miller and Sagan, 2007; Sagan, 1996). The theory has come to be more widely accepted in the United States and used as a rationale for promoting democracy abroad through war. Former President George W. Bush, for example, made the Democratic Peace Theory the linchpin of his democracy promotion policies. In a 2004 press conference, he said: *“democracies don't go to war with each other. [...] I've got great faith in democracies to promote peace. And that's why I'm such a strong believer that the way forward in the Middle East, the broader Middle East, is to promote democracy”* (The White House, 2004).

Realist critics argue that it is actually economic ties and interdependence over democracy and not liberal values that act as a motivation not to enter war with another nation. Nonetheless, the theory suggests that countries sharing the same values will not likely disagree in terms of international politics in a way that could lead to violence.

### ***Defining strategic culture***

It is widely accepted among scholars that realist theories can best explain US and Iran's relations since most foreign ministers throughout the world follow realist principles (Bueno de Mesquita, 2006). However, the “strategic culture” approach can also be used as a complement in understanding those foreign relations as it *“offers the promise of providing insight into motivations and intentions that are not already explained by other frameworks, and that may help make sense of forces we might otherwise overlook, misunderstand, or misinterpret”* (Kartchner, 2006 p. 6). Strategic culture focuses on each state as a particular entity with its own distinct values, beliefs and history. This model is important in explaining how the policy decisions of different states were made, influenced by their own cultural background. As American lecturer Jeannie L. Johnson and American director of the Research Division at the NATO Defense, Jeffrey A. Larsen (2006, p. 5) explain: *“strategic culture aims to supplement, rather than displace major theoretical constructs such as realism.”*



The concept of strategic culture has always been hard to define in a way that all scholars of the discipline can agree upon. However, what is important to notice is that culture is ingrained in every single individual and affects people's behaviors which in turn affect countries' domestic and foreign policies. For example, it can be argued that war is a cultural phenomenon. War, British military historian John Keegan (1994, p. 12) writes, *"is always an expression of culture, often a determinant of cultural forms, in some societies the culture itself."* Countries fight differently compared to one another and their different cultures play an important role in these different ways of fighting. The idea of strategic culture concerns the use of force for political purpose and security in the context of a country's cultural background. Despite the existence of various definitions of culture, all share several common elements. Culture is a polyvalent term that includes geographical features, norms, values, shared ideas, ethnic heritage and history as well as patterns of thinking (Johnston, 1995).

The same goes for strategic culture, that holds several definitions. However, a widely recognized strategic culture definition was attributed to American professor Jack Snyder who himself originally coined the term. According to him (1977, p. 8): *"strategic culture can be defined as the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other with regard to nuclear strategy."* Therefore, states have different strategic preferences that are influenced by their cultural background. This notion of strategic culture has been used as a framework to explain change or continuity in domestic and foreign policies. Attitudes and beliefs guide and bound individuals through the use of armed forces. Culture, thus, dictates everyone what to do. The way people describe themselves or understand their enemy is done through their cultural glasses. Therefore, on a national scale, each country has its own way of analyzing, interpreting and reacting to others' actions which represents its strategic culture. This opens the arena to cultural stereotypes, prejudices and cultural conflicts, instead of cultural convergence and political harmony.

According to Alastair Iain Johnston (1995), there have been three generations of strategic culture proponents. Two of the most influential first generation scholars were Jack Snyder and British-American strategic thinker Colin Gray that both worked on Soviet

nuclear strategy and on American deterrence policy during the Cold War. The first generation agreed that strategic culture was semi-permanent. Therefore, the nuclear strategy of different actors could be predicted. Moreover, first generation scholars thought that there was only one American and one Soviet strategic culture. This was problematic as Johnston (1995, p. 38) notes that if the first generation holds to its definition of strategic culture, *“it would be more logical to conclude that the diversity of a particular society’s geographical, political, cultural, and strategic experience will produce multiple strategic cultures, but this [...] is excluded by the narrow determinism of the first-generation literature.”*

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, with the rise of the second generation of scholars such as Kerry Longhurst (2004), the scope of security issues examined went behind the initial nuclear field of study such as the relationship between behavior and strategic culture. However, the second generation literature also carried a major flaw as it didn’t explain if the strategic culture influences a state’s behavior or not. Emerging in the 1990s and inspired by the rise of constructivism, the eclectic third generation focused on particular strategic decisions as dependent variables (Lantis, 2006). Johnston (1995) is often cited as the most representative third generation scholar. According to him, strategic culture is an integrated system of symbols (language, metaphors, analogies, historical narratives) that acts to establish long-lasting, semi-permanent strategic preferences structure and a way of thinking. Once a strategic culture is established, it guides, or even binds, policy making through any situation.

Countering the first generation’s ideas that strategic culture was simple and uniform, one of the US’s prominent foreign policy thinkers, Walter Russell Mead (2002) explained that the American strategic culture was multiple. Also overcoming the second generation issue regarding strategic culture influence on state behavior, Mead argued that strategic culture does have a major influence over both domestic and foreign policy in the US His ideas will be covered more in depth in the next subchapter.

### ***Mead's Schools of Thought***

Various models of US's foreign policy have broadly been put into the two set of theories viewed above, namely realist and liberal. However, both fail to grasp the full multiplicity of the American strategic culture. Recent work in this field has been done by Mead (2002) to remedy to that simple interpretation. He characterizes four historical basic approaches to American foreign policy defined as Hamiltonian, Wilsonian, Jeffersonian and Jacksonian named after past major American leaders. Each of these approaches has distinct characteristics all of which represent aspects of the American strategic culture. Those are especially important in defining American strategic culture towards WMD (see Chapter III).

Hamiltonians are economic nationalists and focus on international trade, capitalism, economic growth by having a 'pro-business' approach. They are against the use of force and against war unless it is used to protect economic interests of the country. They are supporters of a strong central government aimed at favoring business-oriented policies. Wilsonians, like Hamiltonians, support a strong central government. However, they want to establish and keep international peace through international organizations, laws and public opinion. They are liberals that are influenced by the Democratic Peace Theory in the way that they want to spread peaceful and democratic American values worldwide. However, according to them, force should be used as a last resort to promote democracy and the rule of law abroad. Jeffersonians, on the other hand, have a more libertarian view regarding the government. According to them, the government, being a "necessary evil," has to be small and decentralized. They believe that democracy is more important than capitalism and that not everything has to be done in order to support economic policies, especially if those endanger democracy. They also are isolationists and oppose wars since they are reluctant to the use of force, thinking it should be purely defensive. Jacksonians also favor a weak government and are supporters of democracy. According to them, the government should provide security to the entire American nation and all of its citizens. However, they are extremely patriotic and prone to realism since they support a muscular foreign policy, and are prone to the use of a strong military force. Even if it should be use rarely, when it is, it should aim at entirely crushing the enemy when a real threat appears. There is a preference for unconditional surrender because there is no interest in compromising.

The US strategic culture is complex and has been a mix between those four, sometimes contradicting, approaches throughout the years. Understanding why Iran and the US behaved the way they did using the strategic culture paradigm and realism on Iran's side and both realism and Mead's schools of thought on the American one, will help understand why the conflict is still actual, decades later. Introducing liberalism could explain how they might behave after the Nuclear Deal is implemented. However, even if theoretically, liberal ideas could help foster relations between the two countries, policy making is far from being predictable and is obviously detached from theories. What could potentially happen is purely hypothetical as no one can know but only predict the course of action. The Nuclear Deal, by being a liberal action on the surface could also disguise an American realist agenda.

### III. The US's Strategic Culture towards WMD

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Given the increasing concerns regarding international security and WMD proliferation, the idea of strategic culture has become important especially to understand the motivations behind actors' different foreign policies and the balance of trust or mistrust. Strategic culture influences countries' decisions regarding WMD (following international non-proliferation norms vs trying to acquire them). For example, the reason Iran tries to get WMD and why the US tries to dissuade this proliferation can be explained through the strategic cultures of both countries. Kerry Kartchner<sup>2</sup> (2006, p. 3) estimates that: *"the concept of 'strategic culture' is undergoing a revival because it has become essential to better understand the reasons [...] for acquiring, proliferating, employing WMD by diverse actors under circumstances that differ [...] from [...] previous analytical constructs."* Strategic culture is therefore crucial in the understanding of how the US's national security and foreign policy work, especially with regards to WMD decision-making. Limiting the proliferation of WMD is among the US's most important priorities, the Nuclear Deal reached with Iran late 2015 being a case in point.

#### ***Strategic Culture shifts: from Bush to Obama***

The American strategic culture has always been defined by exceptionalism and idealism. The country is also inclined at exporting its liberal democratic ideals abroad. As American professor Thomas G. Mahnken (2006, p. 5) points out: *"North America's insular position and weak neighbors to the north and south combined to provide the United States free security. Shielded by the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and the Royal Navy, the United States grew to maturity in a benign environment. [...] American insularity and the existence of free security bred the view that war is a deviation from the norm of peace."* The "American way of war," i.e. the American strategic military culture, is unique. It favors direct and overwhelming power aimed at the annihilation of the enemy (Weigley, 1977). Since the end of Cold War, technological advances also became of importance. The technological drive in the US's thinking tries to overcome the idea that war needs to be a bloody exercise

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<sup>2</sup> Kartchner is the former director of the American Advanced Systems and Concepts Office of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) which goal is to reduce the threat of weapons of mass destruction to the US.

conducted by masses of frontally attacking armies. Americans are reluctant to expose their military to casualties, so technology should be used to have a “painless” dominance while protecting national interests. Realist principles also play an important role in shaping American foreign policy. Bueno de Mesquita (2006, p. 831) explains that: *“the idea that a balance of power promotes peace and an imbalance war [...] is a belief that continues to permeate the thinking of secretaries of state or defense in the United States and of foreign ministers and defense ministers throughout the world.”*

As seen in Chapter II, Mead’s schools of thought have shaped the US’s strategic culture throughout the years. After the end of the Cold War and with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US incontestably became the world’s most important power. At the time, American foreign policy was mainly influenced by Hamiltonian and Wilsonian globalist agendas. However, by the end of Bill Clinton’s mandate in 2000, Jacksonians, who were disappointed by his administration, endorsed George W. Bush who had radically different takes on domestic and foreign policies. Mead (2002, p. 269) explains:

“As the Cold War ended, [...] both the first Bush and the Clinton presidencies were staunchly globalists. The globalist coalition weakened through the 1990s, however, and the elections of 2000 saw the second Bush court Jacksonian and even Jeffersonian support for a modified Hamiltonian international agenda that stepped back from the ambitious Wilsonian goals of the post-Cold War decade.”

Bush’s foreign policy strategy took a brand new dimension after 9/11. The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center didn’t only affect the country, they were also attacks on the ideology of liberal capitalism and world democracy. The country’s honor was at stake and Bush had to strike back to satisfy Jacksonians desire to protect America’s national interests, reputation and dignity by exercising the US power and world hegemony. Bush’s invasion of Iraq had full Jacksonian support since his primary goal at the beginning of the war was to overthrow alleged Al Qaeda supporter, Saddam Hussein, to prevent him from building WMD. As the war continued and those previous claims remained unsupported by evidence, Bush started to lose support from the Jacksonians as they didn’t see any American interests in remaining at war. As a result, Bush changed its strategy towards a more Wilsonian one; the Democratic Peace Theory was used to justify the promotion of democracy throughout the Middle East region by war. Mead (2010) argues that: *“Bush’s presidency was defined by an effort to bring Jacksonians and Wilsonians into a coalition; the*

*political failure of Bush's ambitious approach created the context that made the Obama presidency possible."*

Contrary to Bush, Barack Obama is strongly following the Jeffersonian tradition. However, like Bush, he seems to be torn between two schools of thought, namely the Jeffersonian and the Wilsonian (Mead, 2010). Like Jeffersonians, Obama think that America's foreign policy should be aimed at limiting and reducing the country's commitment abroad. What is important is to secure democracy at home in order to provide a good example of it. On the other hand, Obama also has Wilsonian tendencies. He wants to promote democracy and human rights and doesn't want to isolate his country, giving up on supporting societies that need help abroad. One of Obama's main Jeffersonian promises during his mandate was the withdrawal of the military presence in Afghanistan. However, in 2015, the US chose to maintain troops indefinitely due to the fragile security situation of the country. This can definitely be seen as a Wilsonian policy. Mead (2010) warns that these conflicting views could damage the US's involvement abroad like during Jimmy Carter's presidency. He calls it the "Carter syndrome" and explains that *"the contradiction between the sober and limited realism of the Jeffersonian worldview and the expansive, transformative Wilsonian agenda is likely to haunt [Obama's] administration as it haunted Carter's, most fatefully when he rejected calls to let the shah of Iran launch a brutal crackdown to remain in power."*

### ***American Responses to WMD proliferation***

Since the end of the Cold War, WMD have become an important security issue. The way the US has dealt with WMD proliferation has evolved throughout the years, especially after 9/11. During and after the Cold War, the main view regarding WMD has been that they are weapons of deterrence. Deterrence can be defined as a measure taken by a state aimed at preventing or influencing actions of other states by making them believe that these actions will be answered by retaliation. In the case of WMD, this would be mutually assured destruction. Nuclear deterrence prevented a third world war by creating a balance of power since neither the Soviet Union nor the US were willing to risk a nuclear war. From a neorealist perspective, the possession of nuclear weapons could strengthen the security of a state by reinforcing its deterrence capability. As Kenneth Waltz (1981) explains: *"the likelihood of war decreases as deterrent and defensive capabilities increase."*

*Whatever the number of nuclear states, a nuclear world is tolerable if those states are able to send convincing deterrent messages: It is useless to attempt to conquer because you will be severely punished."*

Regarding proliferation, the US focuses on prevention by trying to prohibit states (which are not US's allies, unlike France, the UK and Israel) legally and within an international framework, from acquiring WMD. This Wilsonian idea is called "nonproliferation". Paul I. Bernstein<sup>3</sup> (2006, p. 21), explains that: *"nonproliferation enterprise has been a political, legal, and diplomatic framework aimed at establishing a norm against WMD acquisition, reducing incentives to proliferate, and restricting access to critical technologies."* For example, nonproliferation includes international treaties such as the NPT, or international institutions such as the IAEA, aimed at promoting the peaceful use of nuclear energy. Therefore, except for the nations already owning WMD (called the P5 nations, namely China, France, Russia, the UK and the US), any other state trying to get nuclear weapons would be illegal in front of the international law. If there is any violation of the treaty made by a signatory, the international community (in the NPT case, the UN), would take necessary measures such as economic sanctions towards the state at fault. Nonproliferation has been quite successful since only five countries have acquired WMD after the NPT entered into force in 1970 – Israel, India, Pakistan, North Korea and South Africa. Regarding Israel, India and Pakistan, they actually never signed the NPT. North Korea withdrew from it and South Africa actually gave up its nuclear weapon to join the treaty. Moreover, the international community, supporting nonproliferation with as its head the P5 nations, has successfully made several states relinquish their nuclear weapons (Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine) and other states stop their nuclear enrichment as they were suspected from trying to get WMD (namely Argentina, Brazil, South Korea, Taiwan and most recently Iran). The problem with nonproliferation treaties is that they can be violated and don't actually guarantee nonproliferation. Countries could withdraw from the treaty (North Korea), lie or hide their uranium enrichment (Record, 2004). The later happened in the 2000s with the revelation of Iran's clandestine uranium enrichment (ElBaradei, 2006).

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<sup>3</sup> American Senior Research Fellow at the National Defense University Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction in Washington D.C.



After the First Gulf War, the discovery of an advanced Iraqi nuclear weapon program, and because of the NPT flaws, the US turned to what is called counterproliferation. As a Jacksonian idea, counterproliferation can be described as the use of force (not the use of WMD) to prevent the acquisition of WMD, or neutralize its use by states and rogue states that could possibly launch an attack on the United States. Jeffrey Record (2004, pp. 7-8) asserts that *“counterproliferation [...] encompasses deterrence, sanctions, defensive measures (such as anti-ballistic missile defenses and vaccines against biological weapons attacks), and the capacity for [...] destroying enemy WMD assets in time of conflict, if necessary through counterforce attacks.”* After 9/11, the Bush administration declared a war on terrorism targeting an “axis of evil,” namely Iran, North Korea and Iraq, that, while disregarding international law, were determined to build long-range missiles and nuclear weapons. Using the words of Bernstein (2006, p. 5): *“detering rogue states seeking or possessing WMD may be problematic for a variety of reasons: lack of mutual understanding that increases the likelihood of miscalculation; a high propensity for risk taking; an asymmetry of stakes in regional conflict that may work against restraint; and the vulnerabilities of US and coalition forces and societies.”*

Because of this problematic situation, the US couldn't afford to wait for rogue states to strike first. Counterproliferation was justified by a rather realist claim: the US had to prevent those states from getting WMD aimed at destroying its own interests. Deterrence alone wasn't an option anymore. US security policy makers began using a more extreme form of counterproliferation called “preventive war” that became an instrument of higher order for deterrence. This led to the invasion of Iraq that was justified, as seen before, by the fact that Saddam Hussein was trying to acquire WMD and could potentially give it to Al Qaeda. Moreover, his potential involvement with the 9/11 attacks further helped with the justification. Even if there were no evidence to those previous claims, the US *“remain[ed] committed to a policy of coercive counterproliferation in circumstances where alternative courses of action [were] not available”* (Record, 2004, p. 2).

However, preventive war, assuming that conflict was inevitable, was considered a policy failure by many scholars. American professor Stephen M. Walt (2015) claims that: *“Bush [...] mistakenly believed preventive war was justified because Saddam was undeterrable. But Saddam was not suicidal, and if he had ever obtained WMD, he could not have used them or given them to others without facing devastating retaliation. It was always*

*an unnecessary war.*” So far, neither rogue states nor terrorists organizations have employed WMD against the US, the risk of retaliation being too high. Moreover, the fact that some rogue states try to acquire WMD doesn’t necessarily mean that they will use it to attack Washington. Actually, rogue states may want nuclear weapons to protect themselves, building deterrence and self-reliance, the same way the US is doing. In the case of Iran (see Chapter IV), it has often been said that the pursuit of nuclear weapons was a way to counter Israel’s nuclear capabilities, as well as deter outside powers from intervening (such as the US) in the country’s domestic affairs. *“Rogue state possession of nuclear weapons is thus seen as a threat not so much to the US itself but rather to the US freedom of military action necessary to sustain US global military primacy”* (Record, 2004, p. 23).

The features of the American strategic culture have influenced how the United States has approached WMD proliferation. The geopolitical circumstances of the changing world and the emerging rogue states also affected the way American policies evolved towards WMD. Since it is impossible to know if the policy of preventive wars works, it seems that only deterrence appears to work against WMD proliferation. The international regime pro-NPT played and keeps playing a crucial role in managing the WMD proliferation problem. The best example being the Nuclear Deal reached with Iran. Even if its implementation is still recent, the impact on the region could be positive. Moreover, Iran accepted that all of its nuclear sites be inspected by the AIEA. The enhanced investigation and transparency of Iran’s nuclear facilities would definitely benefit the international community. Therefore, deterrence helped reduce WMD proliferation in Tehran – at least for now.

The American strategic culture slowly evolves but it is still bounded by its underlying structure, i.e. Mead’s four schools of thought. The way foreign policy is designed changes depending on which school of thought is the most influential. This explains how American foreign policy towards WMD evolved throughout the years. Policies that focus on deterring the use of WMD by so-called rogue states tend to be more efficient. The use of force isn’t always the solution. Wilsonian policies, such as nonproliferation diplomatic, political, and economic measures induced by the NPT, are more adapted regarding the prevention of nuclear weapon proliferation. It was

determined that deterrence has been efficient in this regard. However, normal deterrence, which is using the same measures the same way for every country, should be altered. For example, the Nuclear Deal reached with Iran perfectly captures what is called “tailored deterrence” (Lantis, 2009). Indeed, deterrence policies have to be ‘tailored’ in order to reflect the cultural differences of most countries. This is a more Jeffersonian and Wilsonian approach where the strategic culture of the countries that have to be deterred should matter as much as the strategic culture of the countries trying to deter them. For example, if the US wants to dissuade Iran from getting nuclear weapons, the strategic culture of Tehran must be taken into account. Iran’s rich history led to a rich specific strategic culture (see Chapter IV) and a strong cooperation or preventive war from the US seem highly implausible in looking at Iran. Therefore, a tailored deterrence is needed. Professor of political science Jeffrey S. Lantis (2009, p. 470) observes that: *“analysts need to know more about political and cultural dynamics including values and priorities of the adversary, how they are affected by history and strategic culture, their objectives, factors in the decision-making process, and cost–benefit (risk/gain) calculations by potential adversaries.”* For more than ten years, the international community led by the P5+1 (the +1 being Germany) failed to come to an agreement with Iran regarding the country’s nuclear capabilities. With the more tailored approach that is the Nuclear Deal reached with Iran, Obama seemed to have avoided the “Carter syndrome” Mead (2001) warned us about.

## IV. Iran's Strategic Culture and Nuclear Ambitions

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In order to stop nuclear proliferation, it is important to understand why states want to acquire nuclear weapons in the first place. Understanding state motivation can help tailor proposals that are aimed at reducing the spread of nuclear weapons. Every country has different motivations that are linked to their own geopolitical situation and strategic culture. According to realists and as seen in Chapter II, states tend to seek WMD if they are facing a security dilemma and if a nuclear arsenal could increase their own security. This is the case for the Islamic Republic of Iran. To understand Tehran nuclear ambitions, the strategic cultural model will be used because it *“work[s] best for authoritarian states where there is typically a singular historical narrative”* (Lantis, 2009, p. 472). Waltz's (1981) five security paradigms that explain the spread of nuclear weapons will also help explain one facet of Tehran strategic culture that is its sense of vulnerability and feeling of international isolation.

Iranian strategic culture has undergone many changes throughout the centuries because of its rich and complex historical background. Jeffrey S. Lantis (2009, p. 472) estimates that: *“Iranian strategic culture is rooted in a nearly 3000-year history of Persian civilization that lends itself to a fascinating combination of ‘cultural superiority,’ ‘manifest destiny’ and Iran’s ‘deep sense of insecurity.’”* To this day, influences that come from domestic, regional as well as global sources still play an important role in shaping this strategic culture that keeps changing and evolving accordingly. This chapter will identify three fundamental elements of strategic culture that are influential in defining and shaping Iranian decision-making related to nuclear technology. Those are the geopolitical and ethnic features, the Iranian nationalism, and a sense of vulnerability. These major elements constructing Iran's strategic culture also help understand the country's strategic ambitions which are; becoming a regional power, promoting self-reliance and building deterrence.

Expert on nuclear proliferation Gaukhar Mukhatzhanova (2010, p. 59) writes: *“Iranian self-image is a contradictory combination of the legacy of great empires and regional dominance on the one hand and the history of humiliation and abuse by foreign powers on the other.”* Ideology, history, and experiences have formed the Islamic

Republic's unique strategic culture. Geography is also seen as an important element. As policy analysis specialist Willis Stanley (2006, p. 20) points out: *"within the natural boundaries of the Iranian plateau, Iranian nationalism was born and flourished alongside the development of civilization and empire."* This powerful nationalist sentiment contributed to Iran's desire of becoming a great regional power. Since the Islamic Revolution, Iranian nationalism has been conveyed and embodied through religion, i.e. Shi'ism, which has also become an important element of the country's strategic culture. From a geopolitical standpoint, Iran is often said to live in a *"dangerous neighborhood"* (Amirahmadi, 2008, p. 55) surrounded by states owning nuclear arms such as Russia, Pakistan, India and especially Israel. To balance these nuclear capabilities could definitely be one incentive for Iran to develop its own nuclear weapon in order to build deterrence. Moreover, relations with the US have been stained by frictions, provocations and many economic sanctions which led the Islamic Republic to strive for self-reliance. Lantis (2009, p. 472) writes: *"Iran seeks a nuclear capability as a symbol of national pride, as well as a way to deter the United States, gain influence in the Middle East region and achieve status and power internationally."*

### ***Geopolitical and ethnic features***

Tehran's most important geographical feature is its mountainous physiography. As George Friedman (2008) says: *"Iran is defined, above all, by its mountains, which form its frontiers, enfold its cities and describe its historical heartland."* Since Iran is surrounded by mountains on three sides and by the ocean on the fourth, it is extremely difficult to conquer. Over the years, Washington has occupied, or placed substantial forces, to the east and the west of Iran, respectively in Afghanistan and Iraq. Tehran is not concerned so much about these troops invading as it would be militarily possible at prohibitive costs and human losses only. However, manipulating Iranians inside the country is possible. Iran is home to 78.8 million people (World Bank, 2015) who are divided into a large number of ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups (see Table 2 and Map 1). Though Persians constitute the majority of the population, there are potential separatist insurgency among Azeris<sup>4</sup>, Kurds, Balochs, and Khuzestani Arabs.

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<sup>4</sup> Since Azeris make up for about one fourth of Iran's total population, Tehran has long been concerned that they will want to join the independent Azerbaijan. Even if Azeris in Iran are well integrated into Iranian society, senior Azerbaijani officials already expressed their desire to unify Azeris people. The recent problem for Iran is explained by Michael Eisenstadt (2006, p. 128); *"calls by a senior Azerbaijani official for*

**Table 2. Iran Ethnic, Linguistic and Religious Distribution**

<b>Population:</b>	78.8 million (2015, est.)
<b>Ethnic groups:</b>	Persian 51%, Azeri 24%, Gilaki and Mazandarani 8%, Kurd 7%, Arab 3%, Baloch 2%, Lur 2%, Turkmen 2%, other 1% (2008 est.)
<b>Languages:</b>	Persian and Persian dialects 58%, Turkic and Turkic dialects 26%, Kurdish 9%, Luri 2%, Balochi 1%, Arabic 1%, Turkish 1%, other 2% (2008 est.)
<b>Religions:</b>	Muslim (official) 99.4% (Shia 90-95%, Sunni 5-10%), other 0.2%, unspecified 0.4% (2011 est.)

**Sources:** CIA World Factbook about Iran (2011), World Bank (2015).

Any foreign power interested in Iran will therefore be tempted to use these minorities to create allies inside the country in order to undermine the power of the central government. This has been historically proven during World War I, when the British as well as the Soviets were able to manipulate internal political divisions and Iran virtually lost its national sovereignty<sup>5</sup> (Ali Farah, 2011; Friedman, 2008; Kazemzadeh, 1968). During the past few decades, Tehran was concerned about the US using these positions mentioned earlier as platforms to create ethnic dissent in Iran. Since 2003, several claims have been made that the United States has violated Iranian territorial sovereignty with soldiers, drones and with the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PEJAK). Even if PEJAK was listed as a terrorist organization by the US, several important American figures<sup>6</sup> asserted that it was actually supported and coordinated by the US as it is based in Iraq and de facto under American military force control. PEJAK is supposedly equipped and trained by the US and Israel in order to create internal dissent in Iran. Washington has actually tried to do this in several regions, namely in Baluchistan, Khuzestan and within the Kurds minority in northwestern Iran (Friedman, 2008).

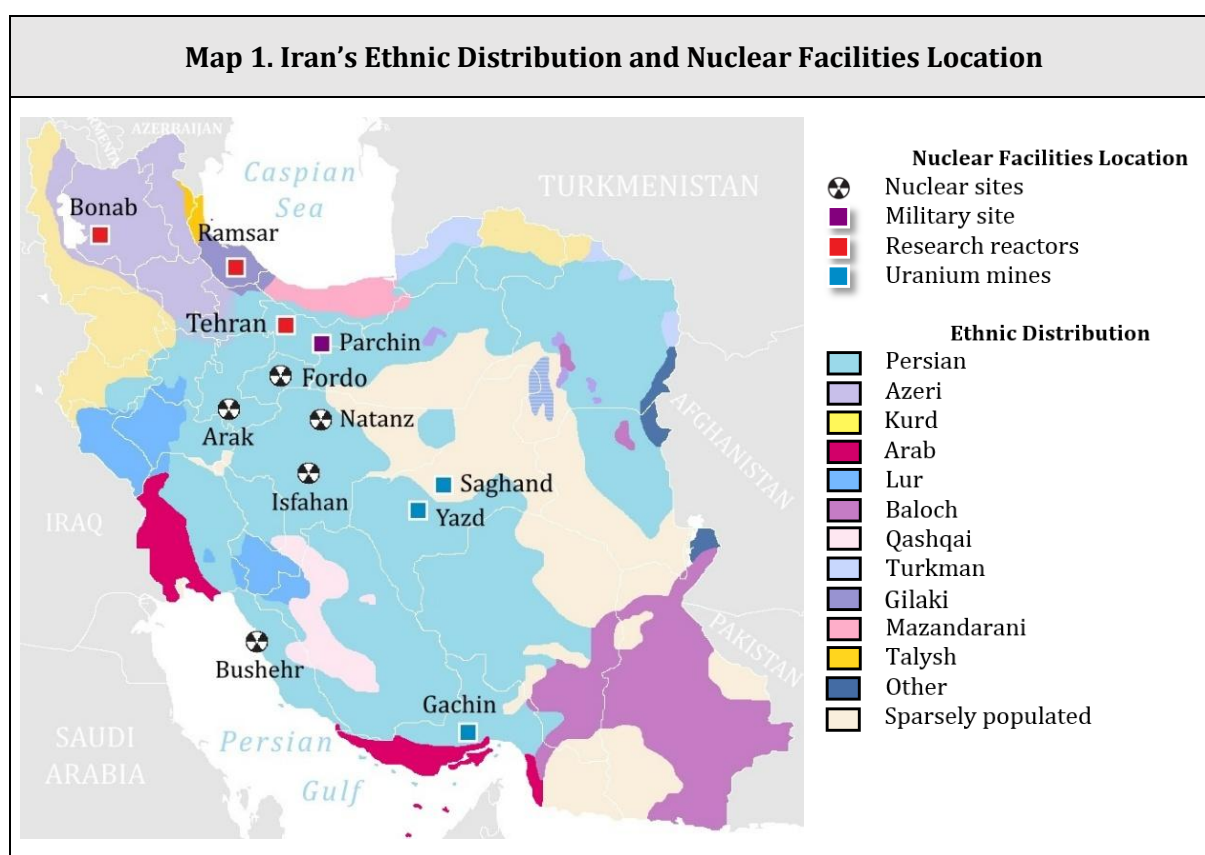
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*NATO or the US to establish a base in Azerbaijan in order to counter the Russian presence in Armenia, have compounded Iranian concerns about encirclement by the United States. Senior Iranian officials fear that Azerbaijan is increasingly aligning itself with American and Israeli interests". This also adds up to the sense of vulnerability felt by Iranian officials that will be explained later on.*

<sup>5</sup> In 1907, the Anglo-Russian Convention defined boundaries that specified control in Persia, creating a Russian sphere in the north and a British one in the South. During and after World War I, British and Russian troops also occupied Iran, infringing its autonomy and impartiality (Kazemzadeh, 1968).

<sup>6</sup> See for example US Congressman Dennis Kucinich's open letter to George Bush (2006) in *United States of America Congressional Record Proceedings and Debates of the 109th Congress Second Session* and journalist Seymour M. Hersh's article in *The New Yorker* (2006); *The Next Act*.

Therefore, maintaining internal peace and security is one of the most important geopolitical goals of Iran. In order to do so, Tehran is maintaining a repressive security and regime, putting down violently any uprising against the central government. Besides, Iran thought of concentrating its major nuclear facilities within the Persian areas (see Map 1) just like the USSR kept its nuclear facilities within Russian and Slavic territories. Iran is also manipulating Shia religious groups in Iraq and Afghanistan in order to undermine Washington's position there. In fact, the US makes Iran responsible for the improvised explosive devices that have caused hundreds of deaths among American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. These devices were used effectively by both the Iraqi resistance and the Taliban. Washington also sees Tehran as a geo-strategic threat since it worked to undermine American efforts to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict (Friedman, 2008; William-Samii, 2006).



**Source:** Author's creation with data from Stratfor (2008) and the IAEA (2006).

## ***Iran's nationalism***

Even if many Iranians have different ethnicities and different political beliefs, they all take pride in their history as they consider Iran to be the cradle of one of the oldest and greatest civilizations on earth that also has a large economy and a powerful military (Stanley, 2006; Taheri, 2006). Ray Takeyh (2006, p. 61), a leading expert on Iran's politics and history explains the following: *“Iran has always perceived itself as a natural hegemon of its neighborhood. Iranians across generations are infused with a unique sense of their history, the splendor of their civilization, and the power of their celebrated empires. [...] Iranians believe that their nation should establish its regional preeminence.”* Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif perfectly embodied Iranians' sense of pride in a 2013 interview regarding Iranian infamous nuclear program when he declared that: *“Iran is a proud nation. We believe we have the technological capability [...] [and] the human resources in order to stand on our own feet”* (Ghoreishi, 2013). The majority of Iranians have a very strong sense of nationalism and are very supportive of the government's nuclear ambitions as they see the nuclear program as an important technological power achievement for the country.

More than a shared history, Iranians' conception of Shia Islam is a bedrock of the national identity. Both are strongly anchored in people's mind. As Willis Stanley (2006, p. 21) analyzes:

*“Iranian nationalism since 1979 has been expressed through the vehicle of Shi'ism. [...] However, there are reminders of Iran's glorious pre-Islamic past. Much of Iran's history remains current for modern Iranians and is communicated through not just through the traditions of Shi'ite Islam but through cultural artifacts that even the current clerical regime does not challenge”.*

Because religion plays a central role in the official ideology of the Islamic Republic, Iran is often seen as an irrational and undeterrable state only driven by religious imperatives. For Michael Eisenstadt (2015, p. 4), this is an anachronistic view of Iran: *“Iranian decision-makers have generally shunned direct confrontation [...] Such behavior is evidence of an ability to engage in rational calculation, to accurately assess power relationships.”*

Beyond geopolitical and ethnic factors, Iran's interest in having a nuclear program also serves Iranian nationalism as it would make Iran an important regional and global



power (Huntley, 2008). Both the Shah and the actual Islamic Republic perceive Iran as the natural hegemon of the region and this is how the government got popular approval for their nuclear program. However, Iranian officials' aspirations are far too ambitious for the actual country's military means. The Islamic Republic's financial problems prevent it from building a large capable military in order to be the leader Tehran aspires to be. In consequence, Iran has devoted much of its available resources to aircraft, missiles and nuclear weapons because it would easily make it a regional military power (Eisenstadt, 2006).

Iran nationalism was also reinforced by the multiple foreign invasions in the country's internal affairs. The Anglo-Russian sphere of influence during and after World War I and past US interventions in Iran coupled with a strong anti-Arab sentiment reinforced Iranian nationalism. The nuclear issue is a nationalist one since the program was initiated under the Shah. Iranians consider that nuclear accession is a national right and that the international community shouldn't interfere with it (Ali Farah, 2011; Huntley, 2008). In conclusion, the population is socially divided but nationalism rises above those divisions as a uniting element.

### ***Ubiquitous sense of vulnerability and realist perspective***

Iran's need for deterrence and self-reliance is intrinsically linked to the country's ubiquitous sense of vulnerability and insecurity that is deeply rooted in its history. Its geopolitical location as a Persian nation surrounded by non-Persian neighbors made it a subject to numerous invasion throughout the centuries. As Eisenstadt (2006, p. 126) contends: "*at various times, revolutionary Iran has faced or at least perceived threats from Iraq, the Soviet Union, the US, Israel and, more recently, Turkey, Afghanistan and Azerbaijan.*" Indeed, Tehran's sense of martyrdom is not surprising considering its direct experience with English and Russian colonialism during World War I, as well as the English, Soviet and American interferences following World War II. Negative experiences with the international community affected the Islamic Republic in a way that it became an isolated pariah that should protect its own interests and defend itself against enemies without any international help. The most striking example being the Iran-Iraq war where the international community remained unresponsive to Iran's complaints about Iraq's use

of chemical weapons<sup>7</sup>. The war left a great sense of national vulnerability and victimization as well as a sense of hostility towards the west. It is a trauma that still affects the country to this day (Stanley, 2006). The acute sense of vulnerability and feeling of international isolation make Iran exaggerate its real military strength to dissuade attacks not only from the outside since its mountains are secure but also from the inside. Tehran has frequently used ambiguity regarding its nuclear program to serve its objectives of deterrence.

The pursuit of nuclear weapons has usually been justified as a way to counter Israel's nuclear capabilities – i.e. create a balance of terror. In a 1992 interview, the then Deputy President Ataollah Mohajerani stated that *“because the enemy [Israel] has nuclear facilities, the Muslim states too should be equipped with the same capacity”* (Eisenstadt, 2006, p. 129). This statement has been revoked since but Iran's nuclear intentions are still questionable. Therefore, without trust in international regimes and with all the threats perceived, Iran could be pursuing nuclear capability for the purposes of deterrence and self-reliance. *“Living as Shia in a sea of Sunnis, and as Iranians in a sea of Arabs, required developing the survival skills of the often weak and powerless”* (Stanley, 2006, p. 20). Because of that, Iran has generally sought to avoid direct involvement in conflicts.

Coupled with the element of strategic culture that is the sense of vulnerability, Waltz's (1981) realist five security elements explaining the spread of WMD (as seen in Chapter II) can be applied to analyze the Iranian nuclear program. Therefore, Iran, as an isolated and vulnerable state, seeks WMD to protect itself (IV) and to counterbalance the weapons of other great powers such as Israel and the US in order to maintain the existing balance of power (I). Moreover, there is a domino effect (III) because Iran's geopolitical neighborhood is surrounded by nuclear-armed states. Besides, as seen earlier, WMD would help deter its enemies (especially Israel) because Tehran's lack of trust in the international community since the Iran-Iraq war led to the fear that no one will help the

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<sup>7</sup> In September 1980, Iraq launched a surprise invasion of Iran, starting a devastating war between the two countries that would last for eight years. As Saddam Hussein was trying to take advantage of the political chaos in the new Islamic Republic to invade oil-rich territories, neither side achieved their goal of overthrowing and conquering the other. However, Iraq employed chemical weapons and between 750,000 and 155,000 Iranians died (depending on the estimates) as a result of the war which left a lasting psychological imprint on Iranians' minds (Kurzman, 2013). Paradoxically, the Iran-Iraq war strengthened the new Iranian regime, and galvanized the population against Iraq and the international community (Stanley, 2006).

country if attacked by another nuclear nation (II). Iran's lack of financial means also led it to devote much of its resources to missiles and nuclear enrichment (V). Finally, WMD can enhance Iran's international standing, making it a great power in the Middle East (VI).

All of these aspects of the Iranian strategic culture help explain why the country keeps the nuclear element on the negotiation table. They also provide an important framework to understand how the history of Iran's nuclear program unfolded throughout the years since WMD decision-making appears to have been influenced by Tehran's strategic culture. Iran seems to view its nuclear program with a sense of entitlement because Israel, Pakistan, and India, countries near in proximity to Iran, already possess nuclear weapons. From an Iranian perspective, these countries acquired nuclear capability with minimal objections from the United States. However, the US, by wanting to prevent Iran from getting WMD, reinforces the Iranian victimization feeling as well as the Iranian nationalism that have been exploited by the Islamic government. Tehran seeks a regional hegemony status while the US opposes this because Washington does not want to lose its strategic interests in the Middle East. However, the recent cleavages between the US and Saudi Arabia, the US and Turkey, and the US and Pakistan calls for a change in geopolitical alignment of Washington in this part of the world. This leads to a security dilemma just as predicted by the realist school of thought. This security dilemma can be seen in the continuing conflict over Iran's nuclear program and Iran has obviously been wanting to create a nuclear force in order to have a bargaining tool for negotiations.

## V. The Evolution of Iran-US Relations under the Nuclear Paradigm

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The relations between Iran and the US started in the best possible terms. In 1783, after the American War of Independence, the US often kept expressing sympathy for the countries of the 'Third World' who resisted colonization – since they did the same against the British. Regarding Iran, relations went even further after World War I. Iran was suspicious of Britain and of the Soviet Union (as seen in Chapter IV). Thus Washington was seen as a more trustworthy Western power due to its anti-colonial policy and was held in high esteem by many Iranians. However, all of this changed in 1953, when the democratically elected prime minister of Iran, Mohammad Mossadeq was overthrown by the MI6 with the help of the CIA because he wanted to nationalize the oil industry. This coup d'état, implemented for geostrategic purposes, restored the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi on the throne and was done to preserve Western interests in the exploitation of Iran's oil fields (Gasiorowski and Byrne, 2004). This realist action on the American part was highlighted by Soushiant Zanganehpour and Wade L. Huntley (2008, p. 40): *"it is important to remember that nations have no friends or enemies but, rather, interests. If democracy would not serve the US in Iran, then the US would surely not help facilitate it."*

The widespread knowledge of American and British involvement and interference in Iranian affairs was seen as an affront to the country's sovereignty and led to major distrust regarding US policy in Iran nowadays. As the Shah regained power, he intensified state repression to eliminate any potential threat against his regime. After denouncing British efforts to control Iran and its resources, the US allied itself to the UK to deprive the country of its right to self-determination. This created a breach in the relations between Iran and the United States. The growing opposition to the regime was accompanied by a growing sense that the monarchy was only kept in power thanks to the support of Washington that was influencing the internal affairs of the country. Iranians accused the Shah of selling Iran's independence and this led to a growing anti-American feeling (Ansari, 2003; Kinzer, 2008). The fact is that the relations between the two countries became defined by the realist precept of mutual interest. Both countries' main goals were

to keep their interests and influence in the Middle East region while achieving relative gains against the Soviet Union. The Shah remained a pro-Western, strong ally against communism before 1973 (even if he was later considered a ruler with friendly relations with Communist countries).

### ***The Shah's nuclear ambitions***

The Shah wanted to make his country a regional superpower. An agreement done with the administration of Richard Nixon, which was called the policy of the “twin pillars”, made Iran and Saudi Arabia the sole responsible for ensuring security in the Persian Gulf. Having achieved this essential goal, the Shah wanted to ensure that neither the Soviet Union nor the US would remain influential in the region. He actually started to consider Washington as a rival and a potential competitor since American foreign policies have always been about power and self-interest, especially regarding Iran (Teicher and Teicher, 1993). Tehran's policies started to be based upon the same realist ideas as those of Washington, focusing on their own national interests. Therefore, power and security pushed both countries away from each other and towards a conflicting state of affairs, following the realist school of thought.

During the Cold War and the escalating nuclear arms race between the US and the USSR, many nations including Iran were eager to utilize nuclear energy but not only for deterring purpose. They recognized that nuclear technology could contribute to enhancing people's well-being. The US, understanding these aspirations, still thought that those should be controlled and supervised. Therefore, President Eisenhower established the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Atoms for Peace Program that allowed for the growth of peaceful nuclear energy but under international surveillance. The Atoms for Peace helped Iran establish its nuclear program in 1957. Iran's nuclear journey officially started the same year, when the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi signed a cooperation agreement with the US, in order to undertake research on the peaceful use of nuclear energy. This agreement also allowed the US to invest in Iran's civilian nuclear industries. Essential nuclear education and technology were provided to Iran and by the mid-1960s, the first major atomic energy facility was built in the country (Bruno, 2010).

Later on, Iran renounced seeking WMD by signing the NPT when it was established in 1968. At that time, Iran's nuclear program remained relatively underdeveloped. However, the US's strict conditions for cooperation coupled with the Shah's fascination with atomic energy expanded the scope of nuclear cooperation to Europe. In the 1970s, the country sought to gradually be less dependent to the US. It also intended to use nuclear energy to produce electricity in anticipation of a scarcity of oil and gas. Therefore, in 1974, the ambitious Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) was launched by the Shah where Iran cooperated with France and the Federal Republic of Germany. This was an exceptionally huge civilian nuclear program promising the construction of nuclear power plants such as two reactors at Bushehr, with a total capacity of 23,000 MW by mid-90s, the equivalent to a quarter of the country's electricity needs (Bruno, 2010; Chipman, 2005; Poitevin, 2007).

Whereas many Western European powers fully supported the Shah's intentions because they sold power reactors to Iran, the US was more suspicious. During the 1970s, the Shah yearned for the right to an independent nuclear energy capability<sup>8</sup> while both Ford and Carter's administrations worried about nuclear weapons prospects. The Shah visited Moscow for further deals with the USSR in 1974, and in 1977 he received the highest Czechoslovak order and accepted an honorary PhD at Charles University. Iran was sending contradictory messages to the international community. In 1974, after Indian 'peaceful nuclear explosion,' the Shah declared in an interview that Iran would pursue nuclear weapon armament "*certainly, and sooner than is believed, but contrary to India we have first thought of our people and then of technology*" (US Embassy Paris cable 15305 to Department of State 1974, p. 2). Even if the Iranian government denied this statement soon after by claiming that the Shah "*actually said Iran was not thinking of acquiring nuclear weapons but may have to revise this policy if other nations develop them*" (US Embassy Paris cable 5192 to Department of State 1974, p. 2), the Shah's motives remained not entirely clear. A pragmatic Shah denounced the following in a later broadcasted French interview (Lorentz, 2001):

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<sup>8</sup> The Shah's independent policy was also linked to his admiration for General Charles de Gaulle's *politique de grandeur* that made France the fourth nuclear power in the world. France, without a nuclear weapon, would have been of little to no importance at the UN table. For him, "*Iran's placement in the Middle East was comparable to that of France in continental Europe*" (Homayounvash, 2012, p. 46).

"Why would it be normal for you [France], for the Federal German Republic and for Great Britain to have atomic or hydrogen weapons while for Iran it is not, even though Iran is not a NATO member nor automatically protected by any other country in the world. Why is that for Iran, the simple principle of self-defense or the defense of national interest a problem while for others it is totally normal?"

The Shah's negligent attitude toward Tehran's non-proliferation obligations under the NPT showed an apparent disinterest in the treaty. Some scholars suspected that Iran was reluctant in signing the treaty but was intimidated by the US in doing so (Homayounvash, 2012). Iran, however, continued to assure the US that it had no intention of getting nuclear weapons but Washington remained skeptical and feared that a nuclear arms race between Iran and India was happening. National security writer, Greg Bruno (2010) explains: *"while Iran's much publicized nuclear power intentions are entirely in the planning stage, the ambitions of the shah could lead Iran to pursue nuclear weapons, especially in the shadow of India's successful nuclear test in May 1974."* The US used India's accession to nuclear capacity as a justification to prevent new countries from accessing too much nuclear energy. But the real reason behind this rationale was the loss of Washington's monopoly on the nuclear enrichment market since a good share of reactors had already escaped the American market in favor of France and Germany. With Europe's entry into the enrichment market, Washington had no interest in the maintenance and growth of the international nuclear industry (Barzin, 2004). Even if US officials warned that the Shah's aspirations were out of control at the time, his ambitions, although problematic, were overshadowed by the more serious threat posed by the Soviets.

As a regional hegemon, Iran could not ignore Israel and India's nuclear status. Even if Iran's program was strictly for a civilian use, the nuclear technology could be manipulated, if necessary, to provide Iran with a nuclear weapon. The nuclear military option was not an end in itself but the survival of the nation was important. The Shah wanted to find ways to defend the country against a potential nuclear threat. Therefore, Iran wanted to be able to have this geostrategic military option. This preoccupied Western governments who withdrew their support from the nuclear program. Because of this, Iran's nuclear ambitions were facing many economic and political difficulties that significantly slowed down the development of the program. In 1979, the deterioration of

the political situation and the revolution marked a real setback to Iran's civilian nuclear expansion (Barzin, 2004).

### ***The Islamic Republic and Iran's nuclear program revival***

The Shah created a society made of contradictions. He decided to modernize a country fiercely attached to its historical and religious traditions using a Western model: women emancipation, religious regulation, introduction of Occidental customs, agricultural reforms etc. However, Iran remained a poor country where the majority of the population was not ready to embrace those changes. Moreover, his system held all the characteristics of a profit-based capitalist economy. As the revenues made from oil were increasing, social inequalities were growing and only those close to the Shah were benefiting from this situation. This led to mass demonstrations, strikes and riots in 1978, where both left-wing university students asking for more freedoms and radical Islamists opposed the Shah's Americanized policies and took the streets demanding that the monarch abandoned power (Ansari, 2003; Djalili, 2005; Kinzer, 2008).

The US also played an indirect role in the Islamic revolution. The American manipulation of the dollar exchange rate reduced the earnings of oil producer countries and thus severely impeded the recovery in crude oil prices. This imposed significant constraints on Iran, who was already committed to new industrial investment programs. Washington also favored nuclear opposition movements worldwide and, with the already existing general dissatisfaction of the Iranian population, the nuclear program was called into question. This led to major popular discontent and hence, led to the regime change, reflected in the 1979 revolution which immediately stalled the nuclear program (Ansari, 2003; Barzin, 2004).

The Islamic Republic was officially proclaimed in Tehran on April 1, 1979 after many months of popular uprising. The Islamic Revolution in Iran transformed the geopolitical situation in this part of the world during an already unstable Cold War environment. The Shah was replaced by the anti-American religious and political leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. This event especially shocked the US as they automatically lost a longtime friend and strategic ally in the Middle East. France, Germany and the US stopped all nuclear partnerships with Iran and the construction of the two almost finished reactors at Bushehr were abandoned (Chipman, 2005; Kinzer, 2008).



For many Americans, the revolution was directed as much against the Shah as against the US and the two countries' relationship started to crumble. Another event led to more tense relations later that same year. When former President Jimmy Carter allowed the Shah to flee to the US territory to be hospitalized, Iranian students attacked the American embassy. They took fifty-two American diplomats and civilians hostage, demanding that Carter returned the Shah to Tehran for his trial, as they feared that the CIA might overthrow a new government. This turned into a four hundred forty-four days hostage crisis that was perceived as a national trauma as well as a humiliation for Washington. A mutual indignation could be felt from both parts and this geopolitical conflict acquired a strong emotional dimension. After this crisis, the US broke diplomatic relations with Iran, and those haven't been restored to this day (Teicher and Teicher, 1993).

After those events, the Iran-US relationship shifted into a cynical and opposite direction; from a model of realist mutual cooperation, to one of strong competition based on blind ideologies on both sides (i.e. the Iranian religious fundamentalism and the American interventionism). The American government, wanting to keep its influence on the Middle East region, started seeing Iran as a threat and imposed sanctions on the country whereas Iran's policies shifted and became based on self-reliance, in which the two countries were isolated by non-alignment. Both countries' policies and actions towards one another started being based on anger and resentment, following their own strategic cultures. This structural environment also helped foster this conflictual atmosphere.

Since Iran was openly opposed to the US after the revolution, the Reagan administration sought to punish the Iranian revolutionaries. When Saddam Hussein invaded Iran in 1980, many Iranians believed that the Iraqi president has attacked the country by order of the United States. Even if former President Jimmy Carter believed that the US should keep military and economic neutrality, the next president, Ronald W. Reagan, decided to establish cordial relations with Saddam Hussein while imposing multiple sanction bills against Iran, during the second half of the conflict, from 1984 to 1988. Washington also supplied the Iraqis with important information regarding Iran and was fully aware that Hussein used chemical weapons. For Tehran, the fact that Washington

supported the Iraqi military was felt as an even stronger betrayal than the coup of 1953 (Ansari, 2003; Kinzer, 2008; Stanley, 2006). It should be noted that in 1986, a political scandal known as the Iran-Contra Affair or Irangate emerged. The scandal unveiled that US senior administration officials were covertly facilitated arms sale to the Iranian government, which was subjected to an arms embargo at the time. Reagan used the funds to aid the anti-communists rebels (or Contras) in Nicaragua. This made both Iran and the US willing to cooperate as their national interests were more important than their ideologies during this scandal (National Security Archive, 2006).

Initially, the revolutionary Islamic regime wanted to cease all nuclear research in order to be independent from any foreign power and because the Ayatollah claimed that the program was incompatible with Shia ideology. However, as Iran was isolated by the international embargo and was facing alone Iraq during the war, the Iranian authorities decided to restart clandestinely the nuclear program. The bitter legacy of the war left deep wounds on the Iranians' minds and since then, Iran has placed a strong emphasis on military self-reliance. As Kartchner (2006, p. 10) explains: *"negative experiences with the international community can also affect a state's confidence in the ability of international norms and regimes to protect its interests, or defend it against violators, thus predisposing it to reject adherence to such regimes or norms."* Therefore, Iran might have been seeing nuclear power as a means of compensation for its military weakness and isolation, thus potentially willing to violate the NPT obligations.

In the early 1990s, the new Ayatollah, Ali Khamenei, who was more favorable towards nuclear energy than his predecessor, decided to rebuild the Iranian nuclear program. Therefore, Tehran decided to resume the work that was interrupted after the revolution at the Bushehr nuclear power plant. The country faced the non-cooperation of Europe and of the US, which suspected Iran of wanting to get the atomic bomb. Tehran, however, managed to get assistance from China, which ignored American pressure and helped Iran diversify its energy portfolio. It also received assistance from Pakistan, taking advantage of the technology that this country had acquired, and lastly from Russia. In 1995, Iran signed a contract with Russia to restart the construction of the Bushehr nuclear power plant to the displeasure of the United States. The plant was officially inaugurated in 2011 (Bozorgmehr, 2011; Homayounvash, 2011; Poitevin, 2007).

In 1995, President Bill Clinton issued two executive orders, prohibiting the contract with Conoco, a US company specialized in the extraction, transportation and processing of oil, as well as all trade with Iran, accused them of supporting terrorism<sup>9</sup>. Relations between the two countries further deteriorated when the following year, the American Congress passed the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act against countries that would invest in Iran's energy sector (Ansari, 2003; Kinzer, 2008). In the late 1990s, however, a new enrichment facility was built at Natanz. Visits by the suspicious IAEA didn't find any evidence of violation of Iran's NPT obligations. Those suspicions became even stronger in 2002, when Iranian dissidents exposed the undercover construction of two nuclear plants at Natanz and Arak. The same year, relations with the US worsened even more when President George W. Bush described Iran (with North Korea and Iraq) as an "Axis of Evil", accused of supporting terrorism and the proliferation of WMD. Yet, the Islamic Republic made an unprecedented gesture of reconciliation the next year with the "Grand Bargain" proposal. It offered transparency on its nuclear program, cooperation in Iraq, disarmament of the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah and indirectly recognition of Israel in exchange of a lifting of the international sanctions, a full access to peaceful nuclear technology and a recognition of its military interests in the region. The Bush administration refused, having no interest of improving relations with the country since it thought that the Iranian government was politically weak and was promising a lot more than it could deliver. This was considered by many within both countries as a missed opportunity to alleviate the tensions (Kinzer, 2008; Kristof, 2007).

Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech made Iran feel threatened and caused a lot of diplomatic prejudice. Since the US invaded one of the 'Axis of Evil' countries, the other two have felt the need to go nuclear. In 2003, inspections conducted by the IAEA shed a light on the true nature of Tehran's nuclear program and uncovered that Iran was almost mastering the technology required to produce enriched uranium. Despite Western powers' fears, Iran wanted to pursue uranium enrichment to ensure the independence of its nuclear program. This became even more true with the election of the controversial Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the Iranian presidency in 2005 as his fervent support for Iran's nuclear program was coupled with an acute hostility towards some countries, most

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<sup>9</sup> For the United States, the radical Shia Islamist organization Hezbollah was the main instigator behind several terrorist attacks murdering hundreds of American people in Beirut in 1983. Iran's proven financial and military support of the organization which based its political and religious ideology on Iran, further enhanced the animosity between the two countries (Rudner, 2010).

notably Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the US. However, this uranium enrichment could allow the country to be able to build nuclear weapons if the civil nuclear program was sufficiently advanced because it was one of the necessary components used to fuel a nuclear weapon.

Tehran never stopped its enrichment and after a few years of failed negotiations led by the EU-3 (France, Germany and the UK), a 2006 report to the UN Security Council from the IAEA, disclosed that Iran hid some of its uranium enrichment activities for more than twenty years and has withdrawn from its obligations under the NPT. The Security Council asked Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment but the country resumed its nuclear program as they rejected those allegations. This led the UN Security council to impose economic sanctions on Iran (ElBaradei, 2006; Jafarzadeh, 2002; Poitevin, 2007).

### ***Recent change and Iran's Nuclear Deal***

The international community's lack of trust in Tehran led to the creation of a Nuclear Deal Framework in order to monitor the country's activities and to assure that Iran would not develop atomic weapons. It was not until the election of the self-proclaimed moderate and pragmatic Hassan Rouhani in 2013, that the international community and Iran came to an agreement regarding Iran's nuclear program. The Iranian president said that his government was ready to resume talks with the US after more than thirty years. The same year, Rouhani and Obama spoke by phone which was the two countries' highest political exchange since the Islamic Revolution (Wilson and Lynch, 2013). However, the call led to protests in Iran, proving that the relationship between the two countries is still controversial. A year later, Obama sent a secret letter to Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, wanting to improve the relations and cooperation between the two countries, as the Islamic State and other actors of the radical Islamist movement represented the greatest threat not only to the regional stability but also to Iranian and American interests in the region (Rosen, 2014).

One major issue remains Iran's nuclear ambition. According to Iranian officials, civil nuclear power is essential given the demographic growth and rapid industrialization of the country. Indeed, while its population has more than doubled in twenty years, the country must regularly import gas (from Turkmenistan) and electricity to meet its energy needs. Unofficially, the establishment of a civil nuclear industry, which would be a first in

the Middle East, is seen as an important step towards modernizing the country and also would consolidate Iran's status as a regional power. As such, the nuclear issue has become, over the current crisis, a matter of national pride for a large part of the Iranian population. Many Western officials feel that this program is disproportionate to the actual needs of Iran which has very large reserves of gas and oil. They are wondering about the real objectives of the government, i.e. creating WMD. However, Iran has stressed repeatedly that its nuclear program is only civilian and peaceful (Poitevin, 2007).

Due to the instability of Iranian politics, and Tehran's tense relations with Washington, a nuclear Iran would have a destabilizing impact in the Middle East. Iran's acquisition of a nuclear weapon would definitely transform the regional balance of power. Tehran already has major influence in four Arab capitals, namely Beirut, Damascus, Baghdad, and most recently, Sana'a, the Yemeni capital that the Houthis, a Shia movement, took over control. The nuclear program is part of this hegemonic strategy (Brunet, 2015; Poitevin, 2007). Among Iran's strategic ambitions, becoming a regional and influential power, building deterrence and promoting self-reliance are the most important ones. The fact is, a nuclear weapon could fulfill those instantly. However, since the relief of the economic sanctions is also an important part of Iran's plan, and since the Islamic Republic seeks to avoid conflict, the diplomatic route is seen as a more attractive solution. Participating in nuclear negotiations is for Iran an insurance policy, making the country safe from external attacks as long as diplomacy prevails. That is why, on July 14, 2015 a landmark comprehensive nuclear agreement was reached where Iran agreed to limit its uranium enrichment for at least ten years in exchange for a lift of the economic sanctions. As a result, UN sanctions on Iran were lifted on January 16, 2016 (see Chapter VI) and Iran-US relations were back on following realist precepts because it was in both interests to cooperate. Thus, the US ability to project power over Iran in order to provide security to its citizens and Iran's search of nuclear power for deterrence purposes both fit into Herz's (1950) security dilemma and more so into Waltz's (1979) balance of power as seen in Chapter II. It is important to note that the notions of power and security are the bedrock of strategic interaction between the two countries. Nonetheless, Tehran's tactic is to remain ambiguous regarding its nuclear intentions for deterrent purposes. *"Iranian officials have repeatedly declared that Iran is a 'nuclear power', using this term in a way that plays on its multiple meanings"* (Eisenstadt, 2005, p. 11).

## **VI. US Foreign Policy towards Iran: from the Embargo to the Nuclear Deal**

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The American interest in Iran's nuclear program can be understood as an interest in the Middle East region. Indeed, the United States' will to preserve its domination and sphere of influence over the Persian Gulf countries is strategic because these countries possess about two-thirds of the world oil and gas reserves. The US's realist drive for power makes it concerned that if a country like Iran succeeds in getting WMD, the power balance would change in the Iranian favor and the American influence would be in jeopardy. Another US interest in the region is the security of its major ally Israel, which is the historical and regional nemesis of Iran. Since the Iranian regime consistently tries to undermine US interests in the region, Washington has relied on sanctions and containment towards Tehran as a means to promote its foreign policy objectives in order to prevent a nuclear Iran and to force the Islamic country to change its hostile behavior. Besides, national security has increasingly become important for American citizens since 9/11 and preventing any new attack either by terrorist, military or nuclear means justifies US policy action. Conflicts thus tend to characterize American policy toward Iran.

The US has sought to contain Iran by refusing its access to anything that could enhance its military strength and added economic and financial sanctions to isolate the country economically. Historically and despite their implementation complexity, Washington has relied on sanctions and embargoes because they seem to be more attractive and less costly than preventive wars in achieving the objective of isolating and eventually politically disintegrating the target-country. However, those sanctions have been matters of controversy and criticized by many scholars due to their limited effectiveness (Hufbauer, Schott and Elliott, 1990; Pape, 1997; Torbat, 2005). Even if undergoing harsh criticism, economic sanctions still intensified under five presidents, remaining an important feature of the American policy towards Iran.

### ***Sanctions, frozen assets, isolation of the “Axis of Evil” state***

US sanctions have been an important part of American policy towards Iran since the inception of the Islamic Republic in 1979 and as soon as Iran started to challenge the US domination of the Persian Gulf region. Those sanctions, aimed at changing Iran hostile behavior towards the west, only managed to exacerbate the tensions and Iran’s sentiment of being a social pariah within the international community. Moreover, as seen in Chapter IV, Iran has been perceived as an irrational Islamic fundamentalist country. This perception tainted Washington’s foreign policy towards Tehran. However, Iran is a rational state, and the US’s policy failure was partially due to the American leaders’ failure to comprehend the Islamic Republic’s strategic culture as a rationally acting state trying to reconcile faith with economic, military and diplomatic goals.

The construction of the sanction regime towards Iran is complex. The US’s sanction list shows that different US bodies – Congress, President, Department of Treasury – enacted different types of sanctions. This diversity can be translated as the result of the American hostile behavior and animosity towards Iran. The economic sanctions on Iran were originally implemented in 1979 by President Jimmy Carter and have been more or less in effect until today (Katzman, 2016) even if some American nuclear-related sanctions were lifted after the Nuclear Deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), implementation (see Appendix).

A historical, and especially political, background has shaped the sanctions regime against Iran throughout the years. The political nature of the sanctions evolved depending on several changing rationales. When the hostage crisis took place in 1979, the very first sanctions freezing Iran’s assets were used to carry a public message against Iran. In the 1980s and 1990s, American sanctions were aimed at limiting Iran’s influence in the Middle East and at compelling the country to cease supporting acts of terrorism. In the mid-2000s, those goals, which were still of concern, were overshadowed by Washington’s worry regarding the prospect of an Iranian nuclear weapon. Ever since, the US sanctions have attempted to thwart Iran from acquiring nuclear development technology. Since 2006, the United States also mobilized the international community to strengthen the sanctions regime due to Iran's failures to comply with the IAEA requirements and its continuing uranium-enrichment activities. Six sets of sanctions were imposed by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) between 2006 and 2010 and sanctions were also

imposed by the EU between 2010 and 2012. Thus, EU Member States cooperated with the US regarding Iran's sanctions (Katzman, 2016). However, those still remained strongly characterized by American unilateralism.

Iran has the second largest natural gas reserves and the fourth largest proven crude oil reserves in the world (World Bank, 2015). Since its economic activity and government revenues still depend mostly on oil revenues, the US sanctions have mainly targeted Iranian's oil exports. American sanctions were also aimed at freezing out Iranian banks and forcing most foreign countries trading with Iran to stop doing so. However, those sanctions have drawn harsh criticism over the years due to their lack of efficiency and due to their negative effects on the US and on other foreign countries. Three main issues will be put forward below.

Firstly, the arising problem is that the more sanctions Iran gets, the more self-reliant and the more suspicious towards the west Iran becomes. Moreover, most nuclear achievements Iran has had so far were made while sanctions were imposed on the country. Sanctions didn't seem to alter Iran's will to acquire nuclear capability. Therefore, it can be assumed that sanctions failed in achieving Washington's main goals which are non-proliferation and Iran's change for a more positive political outlook towards the international community (the effects of the American sanctions on Iran will be discussed more in depth in the next sub-section).

Secondly, economic sanctions imply costs, especially in terms of trade and do not only harm the target-country. Indeed, sanctions against Iran also cost the US billions in lost export opportunities. Before the 1979 Iranian revolution, the US was one of Iran's major trade partners. In 1992, before the Clinton administration toughened sanctions, the US exports amounted up to \$746.8 million. In 2015, US exports to Iran dropped to \$271.4 million (US Census Bureau, 2016). Even if the damage to the American economy was negligible due its large size and even if successive administrations have viewed the sanctions' cost worth bearing due to the risk of a nuclear Iran, it is still considered a loss geopolitically speaking since the US did lose a strategic trading partner in Iran.

Thirdly, the United States have been accused of 'bullying' foreign countries and especially Europe in breaking off its relationship with Iran. When Washington imposed sanctions on Iran in 1984, it expected that its allies would also boycott Iranian oil.



However, as none of them wanted to cut economic ties with Tehran since their trade volume with Iran could replace the falling US exports, the sanctions ended up being ineffective. As a result, the US tightened Iranian sanctions over and over again until those were tailored to penalize any foreign individual investing in Iran's energy sector thus forcing them to comply with the sanctions' rules. Journalist Vivienne Walt (2010) explained that: *"under the rules, banks, oil companies and others who do business with Iranian entities on the US sanctions list can be blocked from doing business in the US. That threat alone has persuaded many companies to drop their business with Iran rather than risk being frozen out of the world's biggest economy."* This especially deteriorated the United States' relations with the EU which used to trade a substantial amount with Iran. In 2012, the European Union Member States, weighing their ties with Iran against their ties with the US, decided to levy an embargo on Iranian oil exports which was justified by their concerns about the growth of Iran's nuclear program.

As some countries withdrew from trading with Iran, others still benefit from Iranian oil. China, Japan and South Korea remain important importers (see Table 4). This is because only a few other countries have treated Iran as a pariah state. Actually, Russia and China have opposed UN sanctions on Iran for economic and geopolitical reasons. As Takeyh and Maloney (2011) explain: *"in Moscow, Beijing and other capitals, Iran remains a useful interlocutor in a critical region of the world, and these countries are loath to jeopardize their relationship with this important agent"* Therefore, it seems that the US cannot make every single country comply with its own arrangements and it seems that, by protecting its interests with sanctions towards Iran, the United States was penalized twice over; diplomatically and economically.

### ***The political vs the economic aspects of the American sanctions on Iran***

To assess the effectiveness of the American sanctions against Iran, it is important to distinguish between the political and the economic impacts. In regards to the latter, it appears that sanctions did damage Iran's economy. In analyzing the economic sanctions of the US on Iran, economist Akbar E. Torbat (2005) came to the conclusion that the economic impact is often successful especially when the country targeted is less influential and less prosperous than the country imposing the sanctions. This is definitely the case between Iran and the United State. As seen above, by imposing economic

sanctions to Iran, the US only lost a tiny fragment of its exports' market, hence the economic risk was minimal on the American side. On the Iranian side however, US sanctions, especially financial measures, weakened Tehran's economy. As Torbat (2005, pp. 418-419) analyzes: *"financial measures weakened Iran's financial ability and forced it to find [foreign] alternative financing at substantially higher cost. [...] The most important damage to the Iranian economy from the financial sanctions is due to the poor investment environment that has resulted. In the absence of the sanctions, Iran could have obtained much better terms and/or could have financed the oil projects itself."* Nonetheless, Iran still managed to attract some foreign funds with specific contract models such as the buyback scheme, first introduced in the 1990s, that gave the international oil companies' (IOCs) contractors a fixed remuneration in the form of a share of project revenue in exchange for exploration and production services<sup>10</sup>. However, even if Iran still benefited from foreign investments, any oil development project became more difficult to achieve do to the investors' fear of American secondary sanctions. Those curtailed Iran's ability to obtain funds and the country had to sign buyback contracts at high inflated rates of return as well as borrow money at high cost. However, Iran was still able to finance its oil development projects by non-American firms (Torbat, 2005).

Contrary to the financial measures that were economically effective to some extent, the oil import embargo was not. In 1995, when the US imposed a ban on all American companies from investing in Iran's petroleum sector coupled with a trade and oil embargo, Iran suffered some losses because trade with a major partner ended. However, those losses only lasted in the short run because Iran quickly found new buyers for its oil and was not affected by the sole American oil boycott<sup>11</sup> (Torbat, 2005). The unilateralism of the American embargo made it ineffective since the international community still conducted trade with the country. To remedy to this problem and in order to make sanctions multilateral, the US mobilized the UNSC and the EU who started imposing

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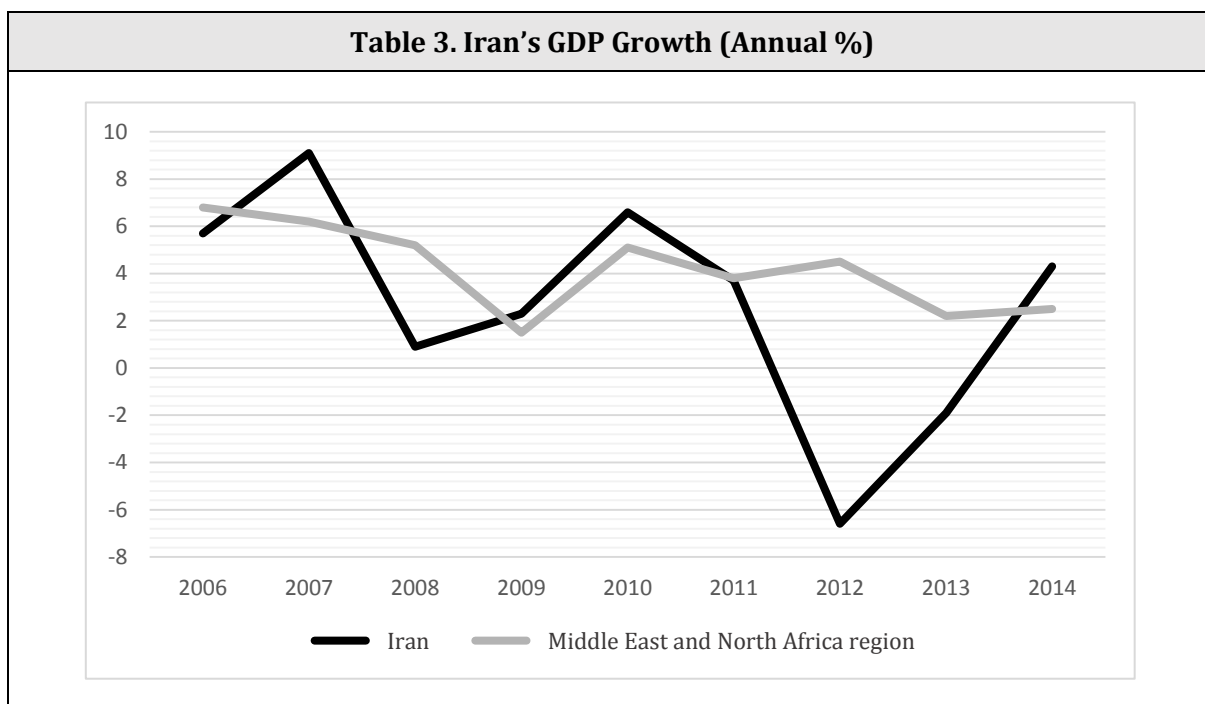
<sup>10</sup> Those contracts have however been widely unpopular with international oil companies due to their inflexibility and limited returns. In 2015, the Iran Petroleum Contract (IPC), that guarantees transfer of technology to Iran by foreign companies, was set to replace buyback contracts to attract more foreign investment (Bozorgmehr, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> The US's economy has high elastic trade curves because it is large and diverse. Therefore, trade losses induced by sanctions on an economically small country like Iran are easily replaced. For Iran, however, the US constitute a big part of its trade and sanctions strain its economy in the short-run. But in the long-run, as elasticities get higher, Iran has been able to find alternative sources of trade and has thus been less affected by the American sanctions.

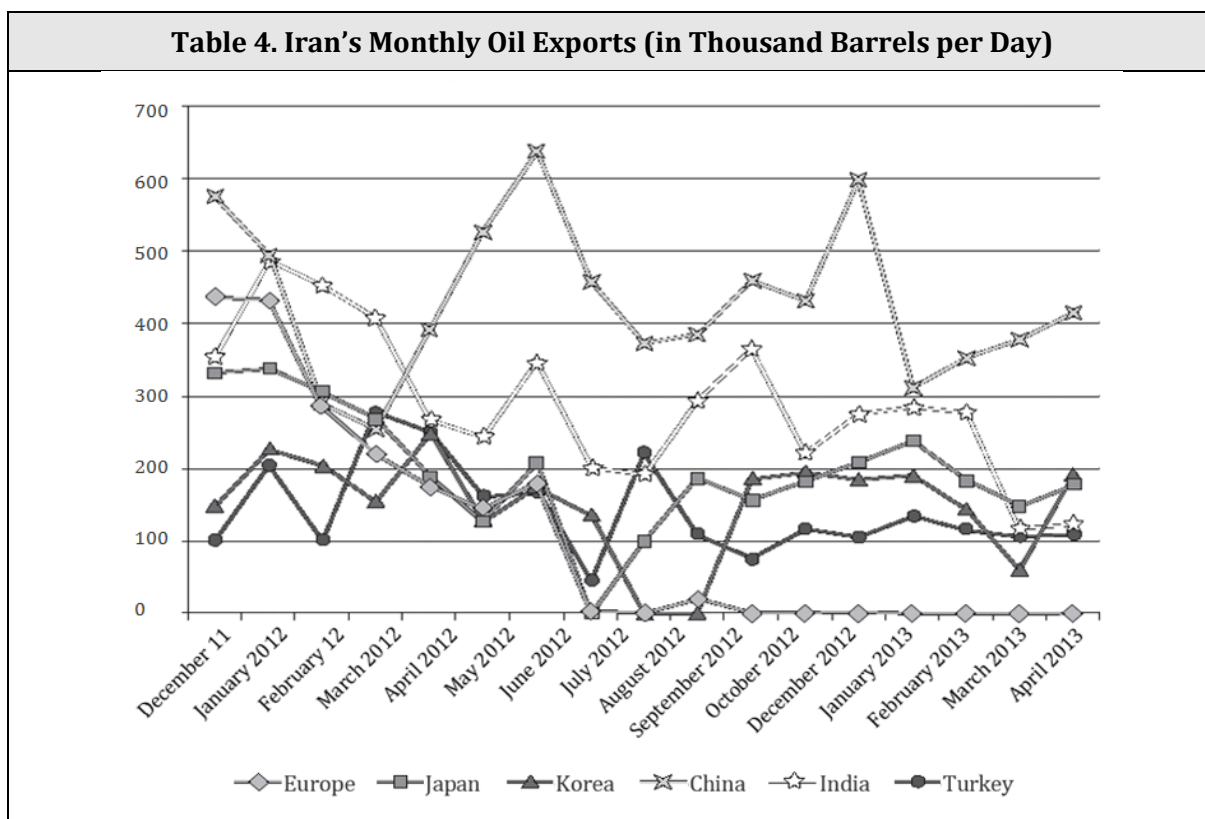
sanctions on Iran in 2006. Those international sanctions were the ones that strongly contributed to the worsening of Iran's economy that shrunk by 9 percent from 2010 to 2012. Iran's GDP growth rate went from +9.1 percent in 2007 to a striking -6.6 percent in 2012 (see Table 3). This decline in Iran's economic growth was mostly due to the fact that the Iranian oil exports have plummeted during the most recent multilateral round of sanctions. Iran's Minister of Petroleum, Bijan Namdar Zangeneh, disclosed that Iran's most important export, crude oil, fell by approximately 40 percent in 2012 (Gladstone, 2013). In the summer of 2012, Iranian exports were the lowest due to the enforcement of the US financial sanctions and the European import ban.

The most effective part of the sanctions were from the EU as they dealt with forbidding Iran from using the international banking via Brussels-based SWIFT (Society of Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications) in 2012. This banned some thirty sanctioned Iranian banks from the global financial network, banks which Tehran depended upon to sell its oil internationally. Since those sanctions directly targeted the Iranian government's financial revenues and particularly those from oil exports, they managed to hurt Iran's economy. The EU sanctions on Iran Central Bank and the exclusion from SWIFT were lifted thanks to the Nuclear Deal (Katzman, 2016). Among Iran's major customers, all countries reduced their oil imports from Iran tremendously or stop them altogether like EU Member States. However, and as mentioned above, Japan, China and Korea still remain major importers of Iranian oil as their exports recovered in 2013 (see Table 4).

In 2012, Iran's sharp recession and the rapid devaluation of the rial, Iran's currency, were both attributed to the Islamic Republic's mismanagement of its economy and to the multilateral sanctions (Gladstone, 2012). Nonetheless, Iran's bad internal management played a greater role in Iran's lack of economic performance. Torbat (2005, p. 428) explains: *"aside from the sanctions' economic damages, the ruling clergy's ideological economic policies are much to be blamed for Iran's economic ills. The Islamic government policy of economic independence detached Iran from the globalization process and has been an obstacle to the transfer of capital, technology and knowhow to the Iranian economy."*



Source: Author's creation based on World Bank's data (2015).



Source: Van de Graaf (2013).

As discussed above, American economic sanctions, especially financial ones, have succeeded in deteriorating the Iranian economy. However, when looking at the political impact, sanctions did not achieve their goals. This is not surprising knowing that the ineffectiveness of the economic sanctions has been investigated in an important number of studies. Indeed, a lot of existing literature and empirical research argue that sanctions are only modestly effective regarding their political objectives. To cite a few major examples, Hufbauer, Schott and Elliott (1990) found that sanctions succeeded about 35 percent of the time. Pape (1997) argues for an even smaller success rate of 5 percent. One recent estimate is attributed to Morgan, Bapat and Kobayashi (2014) who concluded that the success rates range between 27 and 56 percent.

In the case of Iran, the political objectives of American sanctions were, for the most part, not achieved. Torbat (2005) claims that even if US sanctions did harm Iran's economy, the political effects were less effective. If one examines the targeted issues, it seems that Torbat was correct. First of all, in the case of terrorism, Iran is still listed as an ongoing supporter of it (see Appendix). Secondly, the Islamic Republic continues to ignore human rights and civil liberties. A large number of ethnic and religious minorities as well as women face discrimination and marginalization. Authorities arbitrarily keep arresting and detaining thousands of opposition figures such as journalists, university students and political dissidents. Moreover, public unrest inside Iran has mostly been against the actual regime's lack of civil liberties and not against US sanctions. Torbat (2005, p. 430) says:

"There have been fewer disorders as a result of economic miseries than discontents due to lack of political freedom and social justice. [...] Despite the economic hardship that the sanctions have brought to the Iranian people, the ruling clergy have continued to stick to its Islamic slogans. [...] The clergy regime has blamed US sanctions for failure of its own economic policies [and] has been able to hold on to power by arresting and imprisoning the key opposition figures, and closing the critical press. It appears, therefore that no significant progress has been made to date on the human rights issue despite the sanctions."

Thirdly, sanctions have failed to dissuade Iran from continuing its uranium enrichment (as seen in Chapter V). And finally, the United States have failed to weaken the Iranian government and generate a pro-US one. US policymakers have claimed that sanctions were the main reason Iran returned to nuclear negotiations in 2013 (Katzman, 2016). However, this is only half correct. For more than thirty years, unilateral sanctions imposed

by the United States were not successful in curbing Iran's nuclear ambitions. Besides, opposition to the US was a defining policy of Iran's government. "*Sanctions were a convenient scapegoat on which Ahmadinejad could place the blame for Iran's economic woes*" (Van de Graaf, 2013). For instance, after the parliamentary elections of 2004, the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei claimed that "*the losers in this election are the United States, Israeli Zionists and the country's enemies.*" (Vick, 2004). Washington tried interfering with Iran's elections by backing reformist parties but failed to set a pro-US new parliament in Iran. Even though the American sanctions succeeded on a purely economic basis, they have been backfiring politically as they escalated the crisis and hardened the regime's hand. The consequence on Iran was a newly found self-reliance which was the opposite of Washington's objective. It was only broad and multilateral international sanctions that contributed to Iran's acceptance of reducing its nuclear program in exchange of sanctions relief and only a comprehensive agreement with Iran managed to make it stop its uranium enrichment altogether. The extent of multilateral sanctions relief was a major issue in the nuclear talks and most of the debate was about EU, UN and only American financial sanctions. US policy makers have also argued that sanctions have persuaded Iranians to elect the moderate Hassan Rouhani who made a priority of obtaining relief from international sanctions and isolation in 2013 (Katzman, 2016). But then again, multilateral sanctions, not unilateral American sanctions played a part in the elections.

Even if many authors have argued that the US sanctions failed to fulfill their political objectives – persuading Iran to stop its uranium enrichment, its terrorism financing and its human rights infringement, and weakening the government while helping the democratic opposition, – they have gained momentum and still appear as an appealing foreign instrument as they are an attractive alternative to preventive war (as seen in Chapter II). But if sanctions are not effective, why do countries continue using them? From a realist perspective, we assume that Iran and the US are both rational agents and the main argument in favor of sanctions is that Iranian policy is shaped by rationality, weighing its costs and benefits. However, strategic culture analysis posits that rational behavior is dependent on cultural and historical background. After the Islamic Republic proclamation and the hostage crisis of 1979, Iran and the US were not entirely acting rationally towards one another. As seen in Chapter V, the two nations followed blind ideologies that pushed them to be mostly conflictual towards one another. Because of this,

the US kept imposing more and more sanctions to isolate its Middle Eastern enemy. As Takeyh (2006, p. 220) points out:

“Since the inception of the Islamic Republic, the United States has pursued a policy of containment [...] relying on political coercion and economic pressure to press Iran in the right direction. The failure of this policy is routinely documented by the US State Department, which insists on issuing reports denouncing Iran as the most active state sponsor of terrorism and warning that its nuclear program is rapidly advancing toward weapons capability. [...] The failed policy of containment enjoys a widespread bipartisan consensus, as governments as different as the Clinton and Bush administrations have largely adhered to its parameters. [...] In Washington policy circles evidently nothing succeeds like failure.”

Iran sanctions also became more of an ideology and morale matter especially when the Iranian government kept displaying hostility towards the west. An Iran expert scholar, Suzanne Maloney, explained that in 2009, the former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s anti-Semitic and anti-Israel views as well as overall rejection of the west and of the US in particular “*galvanized a moral case for isolating Iran – it [was] no longer treated as just a policy discussion*” (Schectman, 2014). Moreover, to quote the former American National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski: “*most Americans are close to total ignorance about the world. [...] That is an unhealthy condition in a country in which foreign policy has to be endorsed by the people if it is to be pursued. And it makes it much more difficult for any president to pursue an intelligent policy that does justice to the complexity of the world*” (Schmitz, 2010).

On the Iranian side, sanctions follow the country’s ideological narrative. Tehran kept trying to pursue its nuclear program out of anger, self-reliance and resentment. Takeyh and Maloney (2011) write: “*under punitive financial measures, Iran has persisted with its objectionable policies ranging from terrorism to proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. [...] Ideological regimes that put a premium on their political priorities and [are] insensitive to the mounting costs of their belligerence may not be suitable candidates for the type of cost-benefit analysis that sanctions diplomacy invites.*” It was only after the Nuclear Deal negotiations were successful that Iran-US relations went back on a realist path and managed to overcome Iranian religious fundamentalism and American interventionism.

Economic sanctions yield very different results depending on which perspective one looks at them. As seen above, because it is mainly empowered by oil exports, financial sanctions have succeeded in damaging the Iranian economy. Hence the sanctions have been economically successful. However, harming Tehran's economy is not Washington's ultimate goal and the political objectives behind the sanctions have not been met. US sanctions have mostly failed to achieve their policy results because of the Islamic Republic's capacity for resisting international pressure. But there was one political gain, both former friends were able to sit together at the negotiation table and reach an agreement.

Sanctions can be an important foreign policy option if they are targeted smartly and with the cooperation of other countries. The problem with the sanctions that were imposed on Iran is that those were imposed gradually, remained unilateral for too long and lacked international support at first. This created a rejection on the Iranian side of the country imposing the sanctions, namely the US. It was only almost thirty years later when the EU and the international community started to back the American sanctions by imposing their own, that Iran thought of getting rid of them choosing the diplomatic route.

As seen in Chapter III, the features of the American strategic culture have influenced how the United States has approached WMD proliferation and this influence can be extended more broadly to the US's foreign policy towards 'enemy states'. As discussed before, preventive war failed in Iraq. If we extend the scope of American policies from foreign policies to economic ones, we witnessed in this chapter that the financial and economic sanctions also failed in regards to Iran. However, it is very difficult to say that the US sanctions did not achieve anything and Washington did manage to convince the international community to impose sanctions on Iran. Moreover, sanctions are only useful if they induce the punished party to negotiate and in the JCPOA case, sanctions were a big part of the negotiations. However, the multilateral sanctions were only a way to reach the Nuclear Deal and the Nuclear Deal was a mean to an end itself; the end of Iran's nuclear enrichment. What is important to remember is that the American sanctions couldn't achieve this end by themselves.

Kamran Dadkhah and Hamid Zangeneh (1998) estimate that the US can better achieve its political objectives through dialogue with Iran and this is what Washington has been doing with the Nuclear Deal. Indeed, the more tailored approach that was made with



the JCPOA is the only one that have seemed to work towards Iran thus far in order to remedy to the US's policies' failure – namely economic sanctions and preventive war.

### ***The Nuclear Deal Framework***

After several rounds of high powered negotiations that took over nine years, the P5+1 and Iran agreed, on April 2, 2015 on a historical Nuclear Deal Framework for Iran. Those negotiations were attended by the foreign ministers of China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States as well as the European Union. The negotiations were mostly due to the fact that, with the administrations of Obama and Rouhani, Iran and the US decided to resume talks after decades of deep hostility. Ultimately, a final agreement, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), was agreed upon on July 14, 2015 to ensure that Iran's nuclear program will be exclusively peaceful. The outline deal touched on several major issues (see Table 5).

<b>Table 5. Summary of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action</b>	
<b>Nuclear Enrichment</b>	<p>Iran accepted to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce its nuclear centrifuges by two-thirds for ten years.</li> <li>• Limit its enrichment to 3.67%</li> <li>• Reduce its stockpiles of enriched uranium by 97% for fifteen years.</li> <li>• Remove the core of Arak heavy water reactor and fill it with concrete so that it cannot produce plutonium for a nuclear weapon.</li> <li>• Stop building any more heavy water reactors for fifteen years</li> <li>• Utilize a light water design for any new reactor that reduce risk for proliferation</li> </ul> <p>Iran is however allowed to pursue a peaceful nuclear program.</p>
<b>Inspection and Verification</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The AIEA is put in charge of controlling and monitoring all nuclear sites including uranium extraction mines for 25 years and all centrifuge production facilities for twenty years.</li> <li>• Iran has to notify the IAEA if it seeks to build any new nuclear facilities.</li> </ul>
<b>UN, EU and US Sanctions Relief</b>	<p>If Iran respects the commitments above, the following sanctions are to be removed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All provisions of the previous UNSC resolutions relating to Iran.</li> <li>• All US and EU nuclear-related sanctions (including banking, energy, and trade sanctions).</li> </ul> <p>However, some sanctions will remain in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• US sanctions on Iran's support for terrorism, human rights abuses, and missile activities.</li> <li>• US trade ban (but certain items will be exempted such as the exports of civilian aircraft and the imports of carpets and foodstuffs).</li> <li>• A new UNSC resolution restricts the sale of arms to/from Iran for five years and Iran's development of ballistic missile technologies for eight years.</li> </ul>

**Source:** National Iranian American Council (2015).

Since October 2016, Iran has complied with the JCPOA and sanctions were lifted on January 16, 2016, called the 'Implementation Day' (The White House, 2016a). Thanks to the sanctions relief, Iran can now export its crude oil with no restrictions and access its foreign exchange reserves which are of nearly \$60 billion (Katzman, 2016). However, secondary sanctions imposed on foreign firms as well as most sanctions to US companies remain in place (see Table 5 and Appendix).

Washington has also been negotiating with Tehran in parallel to the P5+1 talks. It is fairly possible that the US, taking into consideration Iran's geopolitical success in Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and others Muslim states, wanted to secure its position in the Middle East through an agreement with Iran. By doing so, Washington could focus all its military potential on Asia and Europe in order to increase the US leverage with Russia and China. In exchange, the US could have made sure that their allies would unlock the P5+1 negotiations on Nuclear Deal in order to end the nuclear-related sanctions against Iran.

On the Iranian side, as seen in Chapter IV, it has often been said that the pursuit of nuclear weapons was a way to counter Israel's nuclear capabilities due to the unique characteristic of antagonism between the two countries. Therefore, this deal comes at the expense of Israel that has been a burden for the US regarding Iran's nuclear negotiations. This deal was unacceptable from the point of view of the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu since for him, Iran's possibility of getting WMD was a major threat to his country. Israel, with its close ties to the US, could have been possibly influencing the negotiations until now. Nonetheless, Washington denounced Israel's "*hysteria*" regarding the Nuclear Deal (Kreiter, 2015).

Because Israel is not in a position to prevent Tehran from going nuclear, it has brought the US into its dangerous game with Iran. But it looks like the Washington refuses to play by Jerusalem's rules. Therefore, the Nuclear Deal appears to have created a break between the two countries. This is reflected by a political vision and interests that are completely diverging. The US does not want to put the Arab-Muslim world on its wrong side, and understand perfectly that this isn't the right strategy. Indeed, the Jacksonian strategy towards Iraq resulted in a failure – the conflict led to thousands of deaths, the US's image was tarnished worldwide and within its own borders, and, ultimately, China got the Iraqi oil (Arango and Krauss, 2013). It seems that the US is experimenting a new

Jeffersonian strategic culture, as detailed in Chapter III, a friendlier option towards those nations, including Iran. But, this has only been done to serve the US strategic interests in the region. Although the US gambles with the JCPOA, making Israel's geopolitical environment more dangerous, the US-Israeli relationship will continue since Israel remains an important asset for the US's goal of creating a balance of power in the Middle East. Interestingly enough, if Iran's influence extends thanks to the Nuclear Deal as Israel fears, this will create a security dilemma and Tel Aviv would have to establish surprising strategic alliances with Sunni-Muslim states such as Saudi Arabia to counterbalance the common Shia threat. Those states could potentially ask as a condition for this kind of cooperation that Israel settle the Palestinian issue. This would contribute to regional stability.

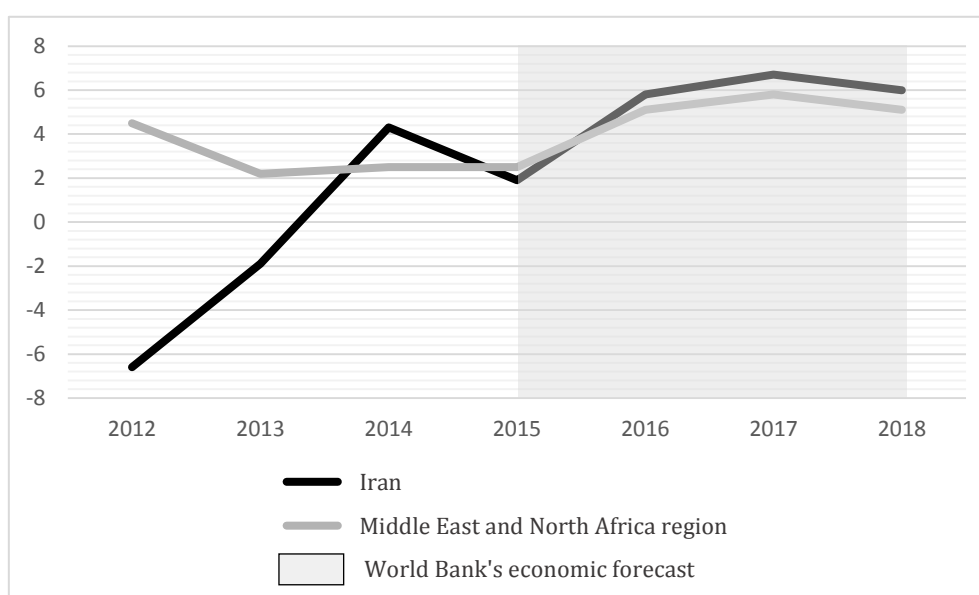
Even if the American foreign policy towards Iran is shifting from "sticks" to "carrots", it doesn't necessarily mean that those are shifting from realist to liberalist actions. Indeed, the US is still driven by its own interests in the Middle East and changing its strategy is only for the purpose of its personal gain. The same can be said about Iran's strategy. By signing the Nuclear Deal, it seems that both Iran and the US don't entirely trust the liberal idea of international institution (such as the NPT) since they had to go above it to reach a special, tailored treaty. Realist ideas are still strongly ingrained in both countries' strategic culture and those overcame the blinded ideology of Islamic fundamentalism and American interventionism that led to confrontation and profound hostility after 1979. It is realist strategic interests and not liberal values that nowadays shape Iran-US relations and make both countries not enter war with one another, not Owen's Democratic Peace Theory (1994). Even if Iran potentially becomes a more democratic state, its strategic culture showed that the country will still be driven by its own interests and by self-reliance and will still hold suspicion towards the international community.

Nonetheless, the Nuclear Deal will improve both countries' relationship as it makes them cooperate and finally unfroze their relations after a long-strained period of mutual distrust. Moreover, oil keeps Iran from sinking economically but it can alone make Tehran a world power especially when an international embargo is in place. The sanctions imposed on Iran over the years isolated the country from relatively important international trade. In 2014, Rouhani even called sanctions against Iran "*a crime against*

*humanity*” (Sanchez, 2014). Therefore, the JCPOA could strongly benefit Iran’s economy with sanctions removal (see Table 6). The deal also benefits the US since it allows the country to keep a watchful eye on Iran’s uranium facilities, with the potential for non-proliferation, and tremendous geopolitical benefits. The enhanced investigation and transparency of Iran’s nuclear sites would definitely benefit the international community. Therefore, both countries would most likely gain more in following the JCPOA and cooperating than in maintaining the status quo.

In 2013, after having spoken with Rouhani on the phone, Obama affirmed during a press conference, that: *“resolving this [nuclear] issue, obviously, could also serve as a major step forward in a new relationship between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran, one based on mutual interests and mutual respect. It would also help facilitate a better relationship between Iran and the international community, as well as others in the region”* (Baker, 2013). Since the ‘issue’ seems to be resolved for now, or at least on the road to recovery with the Nuclear Deal, we can assume that it is in both countries’ strategic interests to cooperate. Obama’s mentioning of mutual interests with Iran can be translated with the ongoing fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) which is a urgent objective for both the US and Iran.

**Table 6 . Iran’s GDP Growth Forecast after the JCPOA Implementation (Annual %)**



**Source:** Author’s creation based on World Bank’s data (2015).

However, the US still remains prudent towards Iran's hegemonic ambitions. Each March since 1995, the American Administration has renewed a national state of emergency declaration against Iran. Despite the Nuclear Deal implementation, Obama extended this national emergency on March 6, 2016. Due to this executive order, all non-nuclear American sanctions against Iran will remain in effect for at least another year. Obama justified this action stating that: *"despite the historic deal to ensure the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program, certain actions and policies of the Government of Iran continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States"* (The White House, 2016b).

On March 8 and 9, 2016, a branch of Iran's armed forces, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) conducted ballistic missile tests as part of its military drills and the same month, the US Treasury Department sanctioned Iranian and British companies involved in the ballistic missile program. Adam J. Szubin, Acting Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence says (US Department of the Treasury, 2016): *"Iran's ballistic missile program and its support for terrorism pose a continuing threat to the region, to the United States, and to our partners worldwide. We will continue to use all of our tools to counteract Iran's ballistic missile program and support for terrorism, including through sanctions."* In May 2016, even if Obama's administration officials said they would oppose them if they undermine the Nuclear Deal, the House and Senate members were drafting new sanctions, again with the same rationales of terrorism, human rights abuses, and missile weapons programs (Zengerle, 2016).

Those ongoing sanctions shed a light on a deeper problem. Specialist of US relations with the Islamic world, Shadi Hamid (2015) explains that:

*"The United States has paid a tremendous cost for what can only be described as a narrow focus on the minutia of Iran's nuclear program. [...] Any Iran deal depended on "dissociating" the nuclear issue from everything else, but the problem was that everything else mattered a whole lot, and perhaps just as much. [...] In short, the belief that the US government can [isolate] the Iranian nuclear issue, or even Iran, suggests a detachment from the region's realities as they're actually lived. [...]"*

The US should have included other issues such as ballistic missile use or terrorism aid in the Nuclear Deal but made a lot of concessions leading to an asymmetry in the negotiations. Many Iranians believe that Obama, unwilling to settle his presidency on a

failure, decided to isolate the nuclear issue in order to be sure that Iran would be on board. *“Whether or not this perception is fair, it’s a perception nonetheless, and perceptions drive behavior”* (Hamid, 2015).

The rationale between the JCPOA has been that Iran would use sanctions relief to resurrect its economy instead of trying to expand its influence. But as seen in Chapter IV, Iran is unlikely to give up its regional hegemon status. Even if Iran wants to prioritize the economic benefits of oil trade in the short-run, this trade is most likely to be exploited for political means in the long-run. Moreover, the Nuclear Deal contains no requirements on how Tehran should spend its national funds. It is fairly likely that the Islamic Republic will keep seeking to strengthen its deterrence by building up military capabilities and through a variety of non-military activities. Iran has also managed to keep its nuclear program at a high level making the JCPOA rather unbalanced. Therefore, Iran seems to be having the upper hand. After the Deal expires, the country could potentially get WMD (even if it is unlikely in the near future) and by then, its economy would be in better shape and its regional influence even greater. The deal will thus be unilaterally beneficial for Tehran.

What is also important to assess is that both Iran and the US policy makers must think beyond Iran’s nuclear weapon program and refocus their attention on the Iranian population. Actually, the Nuclear Deal doesn’t only serve economic and hegemonic purposes. Twenty-two leading Iranians human-rights activists have supported the deal in a 2014 survey, claiming it will help make progress in the human rights domain since it is linked to Iran’s global re-integration and rehabilitation (Ghaemi, 2014; Hamid, 2015).

## VII. Concluding Thoughts

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### *Implications of Analysis*

In the Middle East, the realist drive for power and influence coupled with security concerns dominate. As for the particular relationship between Iran and the US, it has undergone tremendous changes throughout the years and was not always only underpinned by realism. Before the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the Iran-US relations were based on a realist model of mutual cooperation and shared interests. However, after the revolution and the events that ensued, it shifted to a model of strong competition based on blind ideologies (i.e. the Iranian religious fundamentalism and the American interventionism). Nonetheless, in regards to the specifics of nuclear enrichment, Iran's will to acquire Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and the US's concern in stopping this proliferation have to be considered within both a divergent realist and strategic cultural framework since strategic culture helps understanding the cultural context for US foreign policy, especially with respect to combating the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, as well as understanding the cultural context for Iran's domestic policy and nuclear ambitions.

Iran's strategic culture towards nuclear weapons is based on several elements which makes the country prone to proliferation. First of all, Iran's geopolitical features, history and culture are important in understanding why the country always perceived itself as a natural hegemon of its neighborhood. From Iran's viewpoint, the country's key location on the Strait of Hormuz, its abundant natural resources and its strong military and economy for a Muslim country standards, make it a deserving Islamic regional leader. Secondly, Iran's ethnic features lead the country to feel a deep sense of vulnerability. As Iran is divided into a large number of cultural and ethnic groups, manipulating Iranians inside the country is possible. Moreover, Iran's geopolitical neighborhood is surrounded by states owning nuclear arms hence emphasizing the need for protection and deterrence. Thirdly, Iran's subjection to numerous invasion coupled with a strong sense of Persian nationalism make the country self-reliant and thereby suggest a sense of nuclear entitlement as most Iranians consider that the international community shouldn't interfere with their national right to nuclear accession especially since Israel, Pakistan,

and India already own WMD. The nuclear power program is seen by many Iranians as an important technological power achievement as it would make Iran an important regional and global power as well as serve deterrence and self-reliance purposes. Although Iran has stressed repeatedly that its nuclear program was only civilian and peaceful, all of the strategic ambitions listed above could be instantly fulfilled by acquiring nuclear capability and therefore, it is hard to believe that Islamic Republic would give up its nuclear ambitions. Moreover, Tehran does play with this ambiguity for deterrent purposes.

From an American perspective, Iran's claim to regional hegemony as well as nuclear enrichment seem unmerited for several reasons. First and foremost, the US's realist drive for power makes it determined to keep its influence in the Persian Gulf region. Washington started to see Iran as a threat ever since 1979 and tried to contain the country using sanctions with the rationale of arms control and nonproliferation. In addition, the US seeks to protect the security of its major ally, Israel, Iran's main geopolitical rival and enemy. Finally, security concerns have increasingly become important for the US ever since 9/11. Because of Iran's position in the international system, as an alleged supporter of terrorism who keeps violating human and civil rights, Washington has relied on sanctions and containment in order to prevent the country from getting an atomic weapon and to force it to change its hostile behavior towards the west.

The sanctions regime has been influenced by the American strategic culture which is tainted by its historical, and especially political, background. Those sanctions undergone harsh criticism and only managed to exacerbate the tensions and Iran's vulnerability feeling. Even if both countries are by themselves rational agents in a realist world, Iran-US relations after 1979 were based on antagonist blind ideologies and made the two countries acting in a conflictual manner towards one another and not entirely rationally. The US's main tenant was the isolation of its Middle Eastern nemesis while Iran kept a provocative discourse towards the west, especially towards the US and Israel. US sanctions only managed to have momentum when Washington convinced the international community to impose their own set of sanctions towards Iran, in 2006. Those multilateral sanctions – namely, UN, EU and US sanctions – contributed to Iran's acceptance of stopping its nuclear enrichment with the signing of the Nuclear Deal in



return for some international sanction relief and to regain a place in the international community.

Tehran's search of nuclear enrichment and the US ability to project power over Iran to prevent this from happening show that the notions of power and security are foundational dynamics of strategic interaction between the two countries. This creates a security dilemma and a balance of power that are the main tenants of the realist school of thought (Herz, 1950; Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979). Since the concept of strategic culture (Johnson, 1995) allows for more depth in foreign policy explanation and focuses on each country as having their own distinct history, values and beliefs, it also explains how states act towards one another, influenced by their own cultural background. As conflict characterizes American policy towards Iran and Iran's reaction towards those policies, their strategic cultural and structural environment further helps fostering this conflictual atmosphere. Therefore, both realism and strategic culture shaped Iran-US relations after 1979. It was only after the Nuclear Deal implementation that the two countries' relationship went back on a true realist path, overcoming the blind ideologies mentioned above.

Even if a more tailored approach has been made by the US with the Nuclear Deal and even if Iran's new government has been keener on compromises and discussions with the international community, Tehran and Washington don't especially seem to be following the liberal way of thinking. It is realist theoretical ideas that shape both countries' relations and strategic culture as of today. Iran and the US use the deal to serve their own interests. American foreign policy towards Iran is not shifting from realist to liberalist actions. Even if both countries cooperate, they still share a security dilemma as explained above. The Nuclear Deal involves selfish interests and both countries are operating under realist agendas even if the deal seems to be a liberal action. Moreover, the Democratic Peace Theory (Owen, 1994) doesn't apply to Iran-US relations since after the Nuclear Deal, realist strategic interests and not liberal values make both countries not enter war with one another. Even if Iran is potentially moving towards being a more democratic state with the rise of the moderate Reformist party in the 2016 legislative elections (Naji, 2016), the Islamic State's strategic culture showed that the country is still driven by its own interests and still holds suspicion towards the international community. This comforts us in the idea that Iran will remain self-reliant for years to come.

It is against this complex background that both countries started building a common future. Despite the anger and resentment running deep on both sides, Iran and the US managed to put their different perspectives aside to reach a nuclear agreement. On the surface, the deal, which is a more tailored approach to deterrence on the American part, is beneficial to all parties. It is in both countries' interest to cooperate and be allies for many reasons. Firstly, with sanctions removal, Iran can get access to a larger trade and investors' market which could help its economy tremendously. Secondly, by choosing the diplomatic route, Iran could be seen as an important international actor and this could help its regional hegemon status. Thirdly, the deal also benefits the US and the international community since it allows for the supervision, investigation and transparency of Iran's uranium facilities. Then, both countries share mutual interests; their security and the protection of the Middle East against ISIS which are major objectives that lead to urgent cooperation. Therefore, it is better for both countries to cooperate.

My analysis attests that the Nuclear Deal is as a geopolitical breakthrough that should improve the relations between Iran and the US. However, when one digs a little deeper, it appears that the deal will create a tradeoff that will be unilaterally beneficial for Iran as it will make the country a great economic and geopolitical powerhouse in the Middle East. My reasoning is that the Nuclear Deal is asymmetric on several points. First, it only focuses on Iran's uranium enrichment issue and eclipses other issues such as ballistic missile use or terrorism aid. Then, the Nuclear Deal contains no requirements on how Iran has to spend its unfrozen funds after the sanction relief. Finally, Iran is still allowed to pursue a peaceful nuclear program, but a nuclear program nonetheless. By wanting to settle the nuclear issue, Obama and the US government made a lot of concessions and Iran appears, per my analysis, to be the main beneficiary of the deal.

As I showed that the realist school of thought explains Iran-US's behavior of cooperation, I also contend that relative, not absolute gains are made in this cooperative action and thus, one party will be benefiting more than the other. This party will be Iran. Allowing Iran's economy to recover will strengthen the country's position in the Middle East as it is unlikely to give up its regional hegemon status. Moreover, as seen by Iran's strategic culture, the country surely continues to harbor some nuclear ambitions. In the

short-run, Iran challenges the prevailing realist rationale that weaker powers must get WMD to protect themselves. However, in the long-run and when the JCPOA expire in fifteen years, Iran could potentially be continuing its military nuclear program. Therefore, Washington has more to lose than Iran with the deal. If Iran respects its engagement, not much would change from now for Washington and if not, Iran will become a nuclear power and this will be an important loss for US's strategic interest in the Middle East.

Since realism fuels the power dynamics between Iran and the US, one country is always gaining more than the other. I would advise that both parties would actually gain if a long-term liberal strategic outlook crowded out the short-term realistic outlook. With long-term liberal cooperation, both countries' relations would be on the road the recovery, understanding that shared interests are more important than power.

### ***Forecasting the Future of Iran-US relations***

The question whether the Nuclear Deal might be a breakthrough in order to solve the nuclear proliferation issue in Iran cannot be answered as for now. It is too early to assess whether the deal is a good or a bad thing to happen, both on the Iranian and the American side. It is the behavior of all actors involved in the deal over the next fifteen years that will determine whether the agreement succeeded in making the Middle East and de facto the world more stable and secure. However, it is clear that Iran is heading towards important changes. The new government of Rouhani has been pushing Iran towards a more diplomatic state, the Nuclear Deal being a case in point. As Washington stopped being openly hostile towards Tehran, there is potential for a new era in Iran-US relations. With the deal, now there is a possibility of a different Iran, even if many obstacles to democratic reforms remain.

Nowadays, Iran is arguably one of the most powerful and important nations in the Persian Gulf (with Saudi Arabia) as it stopped being subjected to any foreign power since the early 1950s. With the Nuclear Deal, Iran's influence will be enhanced tremendously, not only regionally but internationally as trade and international relations resumed with old-Western partners. In the short-run, the Iranian nuclear impasse has ended and it is likely that Iran will restore its relationship with the United States and with Europe in the near future.

With the Nuclear Deal, the impact on the Persian Gulf region could be positive. The reward may be a more stable and peaceful Middle East and geopolitical tensions could decline, at least in the short-run. Of course, such a truce would not lead to the resolution of all conflicts in the region. Geopolitical rivalry between Iran, Saudi Arabia and Israel would continue to have a destabilizing effect. But since the tensions between the US and Iran exacerbate these conflicts, an improvement in their relations would help to appease the situation. Since ISIS and other actors of the radical Islamist movement represent the greatest threat not only to the regional stability but also to Iranian and American interests in the region, cooperation between the two nations could be the best solution. This would help them overcome their mutual distrust and encourage them to go beyond a simple truce. Moreover, the deal could produce a more powerful but more moderate Iran and an environment in which America's influence increase as a result of the Nuclear Deal.

In the long run, a few hypotheses could be raised. The first one is that Iran will try to get nuclear weapons despite the American nuclear umbrella. This is a highly unlikely scenario. However, as demonstrated by Iran's uranium enrichment efforts, it is too late to prevent Iran from acquiring the materials or knowledge needed to develop nuclear weapons. It is therefore technically possible for Iran to get WMD. The possibility for Iran to get nuclear weapons, could also announce regional proliferation and lead to a nuclear domino effect where Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey might seek to join Israel and Iran in the club of nuclear nations. Even smaller states such as Bahrain and Kuwait could opt for a nuclear force as well. This could potentially increase regional tensions, further destabilize the region in the long-run and would also significantly harm American interests. As it would also be a double-edged sword since Iran would lose its superiority if every state in the region own WMD, Tehran would probably not seek WMD as long as its regional hegemon status remains without it.

The second hypothesis is the most likely one. If Tehran tries to get WMD, the re-introduction of sanctions will harm Iran more than what the country would benefit from nuclear weapons. As Tehran's gains with the Nuclear Deal are a tremendous help to its economy, once the living standards keep rising, Iranians would certainly not prefer a return to previous autarchy. The trade-off between WMD restraint and gains from the lifted embargo is not a repeatable game. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that Iran will get nuclear weapons. If the country tries to keep its nuclear ambiguity, it is mostly for

deterrent and protective purposes which are now overshadowed by the gains from the Nuclear Deal. As both hypotheses require more testing of their probability, one thing is worth mentioning; regardless of the Nuclear Deal's influence on the Middle East – making it a more stable or unstable region, – it is better to have the Iranian nuclear program under international supervision than maintaining the status quo.

American perception of Iran as an irrational and unpredictable state biased US policy ever since the Iranian revolution. As Iran-US relations went back under a realist paradigm with the Nuclear Deal, it would be a policy mistake on the American part to pin Iran as totally irrational. As Iran weighs its relative gains, keeping imposing sanctions could encourage Tehran in WMD proliferation. Accordingly, US policy makers are left with a dilemma; either accepting a potential nuclear-armed Iranian Islamist regime or committing US resources to a policy of regime change in Iran. For the US, it is important to contain Tehran without being drawn into war, that is why the Nuclear Deal was created. However, the US has to start being at peace with the fact that Iran is already and will remain an important and influential geostrategic power in the Middle East and stop trying to contain its influence within the region. US policy makers have to acknowledge Iran's legitimate aspirations to regional leadership. Influential international countries such as China and Russia already consider Iran as an important regional leader. Helping the country reach this regional hegemon status without a nuclear bomb but with a democratic change has to be Washington's policy makers new challenge. In the meantime, Iran's leaders have to abandon their historic support for militant groups, pinned as terrorist groups by the US, that threaten many Middle Eastern governments.

As the Iranian economy is plagued by corruption, clientelism and inefficiency, its opening to international free and transparent markets would undermine rent-seeking behavior and the abuse of public and private resources for unfair personal gain. Moreover, Iranian society should undergo dramatic change as more and more of its population attend higher education and seek for social freedom, economic growth, and cultural advancement (The World Bank, 2014). If Iran doesn't adopt the necessary policies leading to much sought-after social reform, a social revolution could happen and the US has to be make sure not to repeat the same mistakes of the past (antagonizing a post-revolution Iran).

The first challenge after the Nuclear Deal implementation will be the 2016 American presidential elections. Whether the Republicans or Democrats win, the United States has to make a point of following through on the agreed-upon commitments. From an Iranian perspective, the Democratic candidate Bernie Sanders would have been the best choice since he endorsed the Nuclear Deal and since his foreign policies lean towards isolationism, meaning that American forces would get out of the Middle East region, one of Iran's principal goals (Rafizadeh, 2016). However, as Sanders endorsed Hillary Clinton on July 12, 2016, it seems that the presidential race will unfold between her and Republican Donald Trump (Jova, 2016). Depending on who will get elected, it seems on the surface that different strategies will be put in place as both candidates offer different views on the US's role towards Iran.

Like all Republican presidential candidates, Trump has been extremely critical about the Nuclear Deal. According to him, the "*disastrous*" deal with Iran is one of the "*worst agreements*" the US ever made as Washington received few concessions as part of the deal, making Iran a great power as the expense of the US's friend and ally, Israel. Trump claims that with the deal: "*[Obama] dislikes our friends and bows to our enemies*" (Federal News Service, 2016). Trump says he would renegotiate the Nuclear Deal but hasn't made any statement about the structure of any agreement. The Republican candidate only called for more sanctions towards Iran to force them to make more concessions. Nevertheless, as the deal is global, Trump, if president, could only potentially withdraw from it, imposing stringent sanctions on Iran. This will prevent US companies from profiting from trading with Iran, which would be disadvantageous compared to their European and Asian counterparts that eventually want to benefit from potential lucrative economic opportunities in Iran. Even if Iran's reintegration into global markets has been very slow, more US sanctions under Trump could lead to tensions within the sanctions coalition and this could alienate the US, potentially in favor of Iran (Shapiro and Geranmayeh, 2016). Even if Trump's foreign position has mainly been one of isolationism – claiming that US implication abroad to help allies contributes to the country's weakness – he criticizes Tehran's behavior of domination and military role in the Middle East, saying that he is willing to put forces on the ground in the region (Rafizadeh, 2016). Trump's aggressive rhetoric towards Iran and willingness to undo what the Nuclear Deal took many years to achieve, could lead to more confrontation and tensions with the country.

Clinton, on the contrary, has endorsed and defended the Nuclear Deal although she took a tough position on enforcing the deal and on Iran in general by calling for new sanctions. Clinton is known as the “sanctions lady” in Tehran because she was a major actor calling for the historic increase in sanctions in 2010, strongly impeding the Iranian economy. Because of that, Clinton is not well liked in Iran as she also aims at strengthening Israel’s and Saudi Arabia’s positions in the Middle-East. Moreover, she warns that she would be willing to use military force if Iran ever violates the terms of the agreement (Shapiro and Geranmayeh, 2016). The problem with Trump is that he is seen as more unpredictable compared to Clinton and Iranian leaders would rather prefer predictability regarding US policy. However, Clinton uses a lot of the same arguments as Trump regarding Iran such as accusing the country of threatening the peace and security of the Middle East. She most likely will remain tough on Iran if she becomes president, leading to more tensions as well.

Both Trump and Clinton view Iran’s geopolitical dominance as a danger for the Middle East and seem to be willing to use force to contain Iran’s influence. It seems that none of them will be as favorable to Iran as Obama was. Iranian economist Fariborz Raisdana believes that Rouhani’s administration will *“take a ‘wait and see approach’ toward the US elections [and] will try to make a deal with whoever emerges victorious in November, a policy will help the Iranian president implement his economic structural adjustment program in his second term”* (Ramezani, 2016). Once again, it seems that a tailored approach, this time from Iran, will be adopted in regards to foreign policy towards the US. If Rouhani tailors a deal with the new president, there could be prospects for the improvement of both countries’ relations. However, it is most likely that both Trump and Clinton would carry on Obama’s legacy, i.e. the Nuclear Deal, because no better option seems to have been mentioned by either one of them. One could hope that the best days are ahead giving a steadfast hope for the future of Iran and US relations.

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## Appendix

### Historical Timeline of American Sanctions against Iran Before and After the Nuclear Deal Implementation

Date	Official Name	Rationale	Sanctions
1979	Executive Order 12170	National emergency declared after the hostage crisis at the Tehran US Embassy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All Iranian assets held by the Iranian government and Central Bank in US were frozen and Iran couldn't access more than \$12 billion in holdings and property.</li> <li>• Oil import embargo from Iran and US export embargo (except food and medicine) to Iran.</li> <li>• Aid and military assistance to Iran were prohibited.</li> </ul> <p><b>Post-JCPOA: still in effect.</b></p>
1984	Section 6 (j) of the Export Admin. Act of 1979	Iran accused of the 1983 US Marine bombing in Lebanon	<p>Iran included on the US support for terrorism list leading to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ban on US foreign aid, grants, use of credit or financial assistance and arms sales to Iran.</li> </ul> <p><b>Post-JCPOA: still in effect.</b></p>
1987	Executive Order 12613	Anti-terrorism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ban on the import of Iranian commercial goods into the US, mainly crude oil.</li> </ul> <p><b>Post-JCPOA: still in effect – not covered by JCPOA.</b></p>
1992	Iran-Iraq Arms Nonproliferation Act	Nonproliferation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sanctions against anyone assisting Iran weapons development technology.</li> </ul> <p><b>Post-JCPOA: still in effect.</b></p>
1995	Executive Orders 12957 and 12959	National security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ban on all US companies from investing, managing or developing activities in Iran's petroleum sector coupled with an embargo on trade, financial and commercial transactions.</li> </ul> <p><b>Post-JCPOA: minor relaxations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Import ban relaxed to allow only importation of Iranian luxury goods to the US,</li> <li>- Restrictions on sales of parts for commercial aircraft relaxed and Iran Air de-listed as a sanctioned entity,</li> <li>- End to EU embargo on Iranian oil leading to US imports from European refiners containing Iranian oil.</li> </ul>

1996	Iran and Libya Sanctions Act (renamed Iran Sanctions Act - ISA in 2006)	Anti-terrorism Nonproliferation	Sanctions against any foreign company investing more than \$20 million in Iran's energy sector, so that Iran could not develop its nuclear program including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ban on licenses for export of US military or nuclear technology,</li> <li>• Ban on private US bank loans exceeding \$10 million and US government procurement contracts,</li> <li>• Ban on foreign exchange and financial transactions subject to US jurisdiction,</li> <li>• Ban on export assistance and on transactions relating to import into the US</li> </ul> <b>Post-JCPOA: all provisions virtually waived.</b>
1997	Executive Order 13059	National security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ban on all US companies exporting goods to a third country where the end-user is Iran.</li> </ul> <b>Post-JCPOA: still in effect – not covered by JCPOA.</b>
1999	Iran Non-proliferation Act (renamed Iran, North Korea, and Syria Nonproliferation Act Sanctions – INKSNA in 2006).	Nonproliferation	Sanctions against anyone engaging in nuclear proliferation activities including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ban on US government procurement contracts,</li> <li>• Ban on transactions relating to import into the US,</li> <li>• Ban on arms sales from the US</li> </ul> <b>Post-JCPOA: still in effect – JCPOA requires the US to suspend sanctions against anyone engaging in peaceful proliferation activities but no one sanctioned under INKSNA have been de-listed.</b>
2001	Executive Order 13224	National emergency declared in the aftermath of the events of 9/11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ban on US transactions with and freezing of the US-based assets of anyone supporting international terrorism. This was not specific to Iran but dozens of Iranian individuals, organizations, and financial institutions were designated under the terrorism list.</li> </ul> <b>Post-JCPOA: still in effect – no one was de-listed from the terrorism list.</b>
2005	Executive Order 13382	Nonproliferation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freezing of the US-based assets of anyone providing Iran with nuclear technology.</li> </ul> <b>Post-JCPOA: still in effect – but some entities de-listed.</b>
2010	Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act (CISADA)	Anti-terrorism Human rights Nonproliferation	Amending the ISA, the CISADA applies further sanctions on the government of Iran: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial embargo against Iran banks prohibiting US and foreign financial institutions from engaging in financial transactions with Iran or investing in Iran's energy sector due to the potential connection between Tehran's energy sector and its nuclear program. Sanctioned societies were ban from US imports.</li> <li>• Anyone committing human rights abuses against Iranian citizens or their family members were subject to a visa ban for travel to the US as well as economic sanctions, including the blocking of their property subject to US jurisdiction.</li> </ul> <b>Post-JCPOA: still in effect.</b>

May, Nov. 2011	Executive Orders 13574 and 13590	Nonproliferation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ISA sanctions applied to any US financial institution making loans or providing credits to the ISA sanctioned people. Also restrict or prohibit imports of goods, technology, or services, directly or indirectly, into the US from the sanctioned person.</li> </ul> <p><b>Post-JCPOA: revoked by E.O. 13716.</b></p>
Nov. 2011	Section 311 of the USA Patriot Act	Anti-money laundering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Iran's financial system identified as a money-laundering jurisdiction.</li> </ul> <p><b>Post-JCPOA: still in effect.</b></p>
Dec. 2011	Section 1245 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012	Anti-money laundering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preventing foreign banks from opening accounts in the US and imposing strict limitations on existing US accounts if those banks were dealing with Iran's Central Bank. Those sanctions were waived if the bank's home country reduced its purchases of Iran's oil every 180 days. The goal was to shrink Iran's oil export markets, and to isolate its Central Bank from the world financial system.</li> </ul> <p><b>Post-JCPOA: all provisions waived.</b></p>
Feb. 2012	Executive Order 13599	Anti-terrorism Nonproliferation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Block of Iran-owned assets in the US. All American financial institutions were prohibited from dealing with such entities.</li> </ul> <p><b>Post-JCPOA: still in effect – but some entities de-listed.</b></p>
July 2012	Executive Order 13622	Nonproliferation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ISA sanctions applied to anyone engaging in the purchase of Iranian crude oil and petrochemical products as well as anyone helping Iran purchase US bank notes or precious metal.</li> </ul> <p><b>Post-JCPOA: revoked by E.O. 13716.</b></p>
Aug., Oct. 2012	Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act (ITRSHRA) and Executive Order 13628	Anti-terrorism Human rights Nonproliferation	<p>Amending the ISA and the CISADA, the ITRSHRA applies further sanctions including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Frozen US assets for anyone facilitating transactions for a person in connection with Iran's proliferation activities or support for terrorism and on anyone facilitating access to specialized financial messaging services for the Central Bank of Iran. Any funds owed to Iran as a result of exempted transactions had to be credited to an account located in the country with primary jurisdiction over the foreign bank making the transaction. This locked up any foreign exchanges Iran earned in foreign banks and led to an Iranian oil embargo.</li> <li>Visa ban and block of US property for anyone engaging in activities related to human rights abuses in Iran.</li> </ul> <p><b>Post-JCPOA: foreign exchange reserves "lock up" provision waived.</b></p>

2013	Iran Freedom and Counter-Proliferation Act (IFCA) and Executive Order 13645	Nonproliferation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Block of transactions and interests in property under US jurisdiction.</li> <li>• Implementation of ISA-based sanctions for anyone engaging in trade, transport or finance services for Iran's oil and automobile industries, as well as those helping Iran acquire precious metals, industrial software and US bank notes.</li> </ul> <p><b>Post-JCPOA Status: all provisions waived.</b></p>
Jan. 2016	Executive Order 13716	Nonproliferation	<b>Revocation of Executive Orders 13574, 13590, 13622, and 13645, amendment of Executive Order 13628 and of certain nuclear-related sanctions under the JCPOA.</b>

**Source:** Compiled from Katzman (2016), Rennack (2015) and National Archives (1979-2016).