

The Great Powers'  
Nuclear Diplomacy  
toward Iran,  
2003-2015



# The Great Powers' Nuclear Diplomacy toward Iran, 2003-2015

By

Ioana Constantin-Bercean

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*This book is for you, Mom. As you look down from heaven,  
I hope you're proud of your daughter.*



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .....	xii
Note on Transliteration.....	xiv
Preface .....	xv
<b>Section I: Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. Nuclear Requiem.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Research Interest .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3. Literature Review .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>4. State of Art .....</b>	<b>19</b>
4. 1. Methodological Landmarks .....	19
4. 1. 1. Qualitative Exploratory Analysis .....	22
4. 1. 2. Quantitative Method.....	23
4. 1. 3. The Thinking Model.....	25
4. 1. 4. Oliver Richmond’s Approaches on Conflict Management.....	26
4. 1. 5. James Rosenau’s Model Analysis of Foreign Policy .....	30
4. 1. 6. Discourse Analysis of Elite International Editorials .....	33
4. 1. 7. Game Theory 101 – Nuclear Negotiations Between the P5+1 and Iran .....	35
4. 2. Conceptual Map .....	39
4. 2. 1. Concepts .....	40
4. 2. 2. Definitions.....	57
<b>5. Theoretical Framework.....</b>	<b>60</b>
5. 1. Realism .....	61
5. 1. 1. The Balance of Power Dilemma: “Why Iran Should Get the Bomb?” .....	66
5. 1. 2. Calculating Aggression .....	70

5. 1. 3. President Barack Obama's Doctrine and the Hegemonic Power .....	72
5. 2. Liberalism .....	74
5. 2. 1. Institutionalism: Negotiating Agreements in International Relations.....	77
5. 2. 2. "When Multilateralism Met Realism – and Tried to Make an Iran Deal" .....	81
5. 3. Constructivism .....	83
5. 3. 1. Iran's Nuclear Aspirations – A Constructivist View .....	84
5. 3. 2. P5+1 – Iran Relations: A Constructivist Approach .....	87
5. 4. Personal Findings: Analytic Eclecticism in the Study of Nuclear Negotiations.....	89
<b>6. Research Limitation .....</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>7. Outline of the Book.....</b>	<b>92</b>
 <b>Section II: Iran's Nuclear Ambitions.....</b>	 <b>96</b>
<b>1. Iran's Foreign Policy Determinants .....</b>	<b>96</b>
1. 1. International Relations vs. Regional Studies.....	97
1. 2. War and Order in the Regional System.....	99
1. 3. The Revolutionary Roots of Iranian Foreign Policy .....	101
1. 3. 1. Quran Meets Realism .....	101
1. 3. 2. Iran's Islamic Political System and Its Impact on Foreign Policy .....	103
<b>2. Iran's Nuclear Odyssey .....</b>	<b>105</b>
2. 1. Iran's Nuclear Program: A Theoretical View .....	107
2. 1. 1. Neorealism and the Nuclear Logic .....	107
2. 1. 2. A Constructivist Perspective on the Iranian Nuclear Program .....	108
2. 2. Revelations and Continuities.....	109
2. 2. 1. A Timeline of the Iranian Nuclear Program .....	109
2. 2. 2. 2002: Disclosure.....	113
2. 2. 3. 2010: Advancement in Enrichment Rate Amid Stuxnet .....	115
<b>3. From the "Grand Bargain" to the JCPOA.....</b>	<b>119</b>
3. 1. President Khatami's Dialogue Among Civilizations .....	119
3. 2. Ahmadinejad's Presidency – "Nuclear Power Is Our Right!" ..	122



3. 3. President Rouhani's High End – Toward a Comprehensive Agreement.....	126
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### **Section III: Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action –**

<b>A Conclusive Guide .....</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>1. The Discursive Background.....</b>	<b>131</b>
1. 1. Political Orientated Discourses. “Self” vs. “Other” .....	133
1. 2. Representation in Western Editorials.....	138
1. 2. 1. Orientalist Themes in Western Editorials between 2002 and 2004 .....	140
1. 2. 2. Iran's Nuclear Program in Western Media between 2009 and 2012 .....	143
1. 3. Representation in the Iranian Media .....	149
1. 4. Findings on the Representation of the Nuclear Negotiations in the Media .....	152
<b>2. Roadmap of Nuclear Negotiations.....</b>	<b>154</b>
2. 1. Constructive Engagement Dilemma.....	154
2. 2. 2003-2012: A Decade of Experiments in Strategic Risk-Taking.....	160
2. 2. 1. 2003: The Tehran Declaration.....	163
2. 2. 2. 2004: The Paris Agreement.....	166
2. 2. 3. 2005-2007: Scattered Opportunities.....	170
2. 2. 4. 2008: The 14 <sup>th</sup> June Proposal .....	174
2. 2. 5. 2009-2011: The Geneva Deal and Istanbul Talks .....	179
2. 2. 6. 2012: The Moscow Talks via Baghdad .....	184
2. 3. 2013-2014: Toward a Comprehensive Agreement.....	187
2. 3. 1. Approaching the Endgame: From Prolonged Deadlock to Breakthrough.....	187
2. 3. 2. November 24, 2013: Joint Plan of Action .....	190
<b>3. July 14, 2015: The Endgame of Great Powers' Nuclear Diplomacy Toward Iran.....</b>	<b>193</b>
3. 1. The JCPOA: An Analytical Appraisal .....	193
3. 2. Constraints, Critics and Criticism .....	199
3. 2. 1. Israel.....	200
3. 2. 2. The Gulf Cooperation Council .....	205
3. 2. 3. The US Congress.....	207

3. 3. The JCPOA and the Future of Nonproliferation: An Eclectic Approach.....	209
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#### **Section IV: Benchmarks of the Great Powers' Nuclear Diplomacy toward Iran ..... 214**

##### **1. Brief Assessment of Relations Between the Great Powers and Iran at the End of the Cold War ..... 214**

##### **2. US Nuclear Diplomacy Toward Iran: From the “Grand Bargain” to the JCPOA..... 219**

###### **2. 1. A Background of US-Iran Relations Until 2003 HERE..... 222**

###### **2. 1. 1. 1953-1979: From the CIA Coup to Revolution..... 222**

###### **2. 1. 2. The US and the Islamic Republic: The Sanctions Game ..... 224**

###### **2. 1. 3. US-Iran Relations in the Shadow of the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks ..... 227**

###### **2. 2. George W. Bush Administration’s Strategy Toward Iran: 2003-2008 ..... 229**

###### **2. 2. 1. The “Grand Bargain”: A Missed Opportunity..... 229**

###### **2. 2. 2. The Bush Doctrine vs. Diplomacy ..... 232**

###### **2. 3. The Barack Obama Administration: The Pursuit of Diplomacy ..... 236**

###### **2. 3. 1. Breaking a Taboo: Engaging with Iran..... 236**

###### **2. 3. 2. Institutionalism Embedded in Neorealism ..... 239**

###### **2. 3. 3. An Agreement of Necessity ..... 243**

###### **2. 4. Ex Post Facto Analysis ..... 248**

###### **2. 4. 1. The Donald J. Trump Administration: Emphasizing Tough Policy ..... 249**

###### **2. 4. 2. The Joseph R. Biden Administration: Back to Multilateralism ..... 253**

##### **3. European Nuclear Diplomacy Toward Iran: Challenges and Opportunities..... 256**

###### **3. 1. Europe’s Constructive Engagement..... 256**

###### **3. 2. E3 Leadership / EU Ownership: The Resilience of Diplomacy ..... 261**

###### **3. 2. 1. From Paris to Tehran: 2003-2011..... 261**

###### **3. 2. 2. Endgame: 2012-2015 ..... 263**

3. 3. EU: A Linchpin for the JCPOA's Survival.....	266
<b>4. Sino-Russian Nuclear Diplomacy Toward Iran .....</b>	<b>269</b>
4. 1. Mutual Foreign Policy Drivers: Ideology and Pragmatism...	269
4. 1. 1. Post-Revolutionary China and Revolutionary Iran.....	270
4. 1. 2. Russia and Iran: Allies of Necessity.....	272
4. 2. JCPOA: A Sino-Russian Perspective.....	275
<b>Section V: Conclusions.....</b>	<b>278</b>
1. Personal Findings.....	278
2. The Future of the JCPOA: A Framework Toward Regional Security .....	283
Acronyms and Abbreviations .....	287
List of Figures.....	290
List of Tables.....	291
Annexes .....	292
Bibliography .....	304
Index.....	366

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I will always be grateful to those who supported me along the way.

—Ioana Constantin-Bercean  
July 6, 2021

## NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

For the rendering of Persian terms, I have used a modified version of the method used by the *Encyclopædia Iranica*; if place names have a Latinized form in common use, it is this that is used. Names of places, institutions or well-known personalities are rendered in the way they are most commonly known in the English literature or how they have been reflected in the sources. Also, the texts from Farsi editorials and sources have been translated into English for an easier understanding, and the original version can be found in the bibliographical references.

## PREFACE

*Nuclear threat, power relations, diplomacy: a deconstruction of the JCPOA, in the context of pressures bearing on the global liberal order*

—Valentin Naumescu

There is no more serious and relevant topic in diplomacy and in the system of international relations than the threat of nuclear war and the need to limit it. After August 6, 1945 it has become the number one priority of priorities, the “mother of all topics” for diplomacy, the global agenda and postbellum world order. Both before and after the end of the Cold War, nuclear power played a major role in the complicated equation of global and regional strategic influence. Most of the security files targeting Europe, Asia and the Middle East also had a nuclear dimension.

That is why the Iranian nuclear issue has been, and still is, one of the most sensitive landmarks of *the Great Powers' ability to control* nuclear proliferation, maintain global and regional strategic balance, and ultimately defend world order. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the Tehran theocracy quickly emerged as an enemy of the United States, Israel, and the West. If pro-Western Iran's first nuclear reactor was operationalized in 1967 with US technological support based on a Washington-Tehran collaboration in the field of atomic energy that had begun since the 1950s, the Islamic Republic (re)discovered, after several years of interruption, the potential of nuclear power. The international community's fears that nuclear power would no longer be used by the Islamist regime in Tehran exclusively for civilian purposes began to emerge in the late 1990s; and in his 2002 State of the Nation address, President Bush already included Iran on the “axis of evil” along with Iraq and North Korea.

Ioana Bercean's work makes a valuable and timely contribution to understanding, clarifying and analysing the sources that shaped the Iranian nuclear issue between 2003 and 2015, up to the diplomatic success of the *Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action* (JCPOA). At the time of signing, this

Agreement seemed to bring an end to regional and global tensions over the Iranian nuclear issue. Developed between 2017 and 2021, this research extracts and expounds the theoretical essence and practical significance with the greatest impact on the system of international relations of the political and diplomatic processes related to the topic. The book covers the developments that took place in the 12-year reference period, but also offers assessments of the period following the US withdrawal from the JCPOA, and of the current prospects and efforts to save the Agreement.

For me, it was a real pleasure to supervise this substantial doctoral research, completed by a book that acquires international scientific relevance and can be a useful source of information, analytical content and evaluation for the topic for decision makers, diplomats and all interested specialists.

The work efficiently captures, even from the beginning, the passion for the subject and the dedication with which the author engages in research. Ioana Bercean attached herself to the topic of this doctoral project and explored it to the deepest and subtlest levels of analysis. Beyond the theoretical aspects of international, strategic and politico-diplomatic relations which were supposed to occupy the centre of the stage, the book investigates complex historical, cultural, discourse analysis, image and media representation topics etc., which are always useful in understanding the big picture in a theme of such magnitude.

As both I and Ioana agreed at the beginning of the doctoral project, this research focuses on the diplomacy of the Great Powers in relation to Iran, not on Iran's policy / relationship with the West. The perspective from which we study things always matters. We are therefore interested in the strategy, interests and mode in which the Great Powers (P5 + 1), both Western and non-Western, have led their politico-diplomatic action in this complicated case, which numbers two decades since its appearance on the international agenda.

The United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, China and Germany comprise a unique format, which we do not find in other files. The five Permanent Members of the UN Security Council, plus Germany, have expressed in the JCPOA the political will of the world's major military and economic powers, not limited to the classic P5 but still not using the G7 format, which would exclude China and Russia as non-



Western powers. P5 + 1 was therefore a compromise formula, in which four Western democratic powers and the authoritarian regimes in Moscow and Beijing agreed to work together to generate a credible agreement for limiting Iran's nuclear capacity.

We asked ourselves, at the beginning of the investigative approach, many questions regarding the theoretical perspective that the research would use. We soon came to the conclusion that theoretical eclecticism was the only acceptable frame of reference, which could have provided a close explanation of the reality of developments in this complicated case, in which such different actors acted over a long period of time. Ioana Bercean understood the need to open her analysis to multiple theoretical “*azimuths*” / “*coordinates*”, in order to be able to extract from each relevant theory of international relations the functional approaches in this case.

Realistic and liberal theories dominate the interpretive framework of political-diplomatic processes, emphasizing either the interests of states and their power relations, or multilateralism and values, that is, trust in liberal internationalism. As the author pertinently notes, “*even if the contribution of realism cannot be ignored, JCPOA is also a result of multilateral negotiations and the demonstrated outcome that non-proliferation can be addressed by diplomacy. Commitment to “international law” and the “well-functioning international institutions” lead to that type of multilateralism that brought together at the negotiations table all the parties involved. However, while the EU advocated effective multilateralism, the US preferred the concept of assertive multilateralism – a combination of liberalism with realism.*” Neither would constructivism be foreign to the Iranian nuclear file, in Ioana Bercean's vision. Thus, we can observe that “*since constructivism works at the macro level, deconstruction of ideas at the level of the state is essential for an enduring West-Iran relationship, and also a sustainable solution to the Iranian nuclear issue. The constructed reality could be changed only through a process of deconstruction which requires further interactions between the states, based on concessions and compromise.*”

The analytical eclecticism that the research finally proposes is based, in the author's words, on the following assumptions: “*while paradigm-bound approach has generated powerful insights of nuclear*

*negotiations between the Great Powers and Iran, it also offers the researcher the opportunity to widen the theoretical framework, embedding one theory in another, as the demarcation lines proved to be very thin. So it can be strongly stated that the diplomatic process that led to the conclusion of the JCPOA is the product of an eclectic approach, which integrated many mechanisms and processes. Even if some theories juxtapose in the presented case, the analysis remains rigorous while offering a richer interpretative and explanatory understanding of the nuclear negotiations process between the P5 + 1 states and Iran.”*

An interesting and pertinent observation by the author refers to the different perspectives from which the conflicts, tensions and disputes related to the Middle East are viewed. In the field of international relations, most approaches being realistic and liberal, the tendency is to apply / impose the same fundamental set of assumptions, principles or, as the case may be, universal values to all actors and regions of the world, as international norms. Inevitably, these are the ones inspired by the Western world. From the direction of field studies, specialists in Middle East problems seek to identify historical and cultural specificities, to look for “exceptionalities” and justifications for non-compliance with universal norms and values; while specialists in regional studies tend to favour constructivist and relativistic approaches.

As a book based on a doctoral research in international relations, Ioana Bercean's work reviews the current state of knowledge and the main approaches / papers / authors in the field of IR that referred to this file. The solid documentation and the clever combination of primary and secondary sources, together with the refined analysis of the impressive amount of information accumulated are the main virtues of the volume we propose.

The doctoral research contained in this volume has the quality of remaining current, valid and useful even if the main reference period is 2003-2015. The “story” of the Iranian nuclear issue and especially of the way the Great Powers report to the Tehran regime does not end with the 2015 signing of the JCPOA in Vienna. Today we see new developments in the region. Following the withdrawal of Donald Trump from the JCPOA in 2018, President Biden and the Great Powers are seeking to save the Accord, and new negotiations are set to begin in Vienna. China, meanwhile, signed a 25-year strategic deal with Iran in March 2021,

pledging \$ 400 billion investments in the economy of this enemy of the US. In turn, Israel threatens Iran with military strikes if the Tehran regime does not accept new diplomatic negotiations under the new conditions. Many of the current aspects can be understood, or find their roots, in the springs that outlined politico-diplomatic processes between 2003-2015, to which Ioana Bercean's book refers.

Those interested professionally, scientifically or politically in the evolution of this file will find in this volume not only details about the recent past, but also numerous openings to the present or even interesting assessments and evaluations of the directions in which the relations between the Great Powers and Iran can evolve in the short and medium term.

November 2021



# SECTION I

## INTRODUCTION

“If a danger exists in the world, it is a danger shared by all;  
and equally...if hopes exist in the mind of one nation,  
that hope should be shared by all”<sup>1</sup>

(Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1953, “Atoms for Peace” speech)

### 1. Nuclear Requiem

For almost eight decades the nuclear threat has been a presence in our lives. In military terms, nuclear weapons are unthinkable in terms of use, and yet, in a world that allows them to exist, morally and politically, those weapons still make a difference. The nuclear threat is still with us today and is more complex than it was during Cold War era. In recent years, new nuclear-armed states have emerged, such as North Korea, India, Pakistan and Israel, others formerly possessed nuclear capability (the former Soviet Republics of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, whose nuclear capabilities have been repatriated to the Russian Federation) and other states thought of beginning and following the path of nuclear arming (South Africa, Brazil, Libya and the Islamic Republic of Iran). The United States and Russia are still nuclear rivals; India and Pakistan are growing their arsenals and continue to be in conflict on their common border, the North Korean situation is worsening and Iran’s nuclear program was moving with a very concerning speed toward the breakout capacity. So, there are problems all around and it is mandatory for the Great Powers – those international actors that make a key contribution to current and future global strategies – to bring this issue to the negotiation table, to

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<sup>1</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA] (1953), “Atoms for Peace Speech”, December 8. <https://www.iaea.org/about/history/atoms-for-peace-speech>. [March, 2016].

pursue diplomacy and to find solutions to curb the phenomenon of nuclear proliferation.

Twenty-one days after the Trinity Test detonation, “on July 16, 1945 in New Mexico”<sup>2</sup> the atomic bomb “Little Boy was dropped on Hiroshima, on August 6, 1945,”<sup>3</sup> and 140,000 people lost their lives instantaneously. Three days later, on August 6, 1945, the Fat Man atomic bomb exploded over Nagasaki and 70,000 people died on the spot. Hundreds of thousands of lives were lost afterwards, mainly due to radiation and the effects that appeared years later.

“As the bomb fell over Hiroshima and exploded, we saw an entire city disappear. I wrote into my log the words: ‘My God, what have we done’” (Robert Lewis, pilot of the plane that dropped the ‘Little Boy’ bomb, April 1947)

Since then, the world has twice faced the peril of a nuclear war: the Cuban Missile Crisis (October 16-20, 1962) and the malfunction incident “at the Serpukhov-15 bunker near Moscow which housed the command center of the Soviet early warning satellites, code-named Oko.”<sup>4</sup> In the first case it was diplomacy and back channels that saved the world. The second brought Stanislav Yevgrafovich Petrov, a former lieutenant colonel of the Soviet Air Defense Forces, to the center of the world’s attention and it was solely his own decision to disobey orders, against USSR military protocol, that “prevented an erroneous retaliatory nuclear”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> \*\*\* (2014), “Trinity Test – 1945”, *Atomic Heritage Foundation*, June 18. <https://www.atomicheritage.org/history/trinity-test-1945>. [June 7, 2021].

<sup>3</sup> \*\*\* (2010), “Hydrogen, Plutonium and Uranium Bombs”, *Journey to the World of Science*, July 17. <http://yongbaoenjanelleace.blogspot.com/>. [June 7, 2021]; C. LeMay, P. Tibbets (2014), “Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – 1945”, *Atomic Heritage Foundation*, June 5.

<https://www.atomicheritage.org/history/bombings-hiroshima-and-nagasaki-1945>. [June 7, 2021].

<sup>4</sup> D. Court, J. Jett (2020), “The 1983 War Scare”, *White Sands Missile Range Museum*, December 8. <https://wsrmuseum.com/2020/12/08/the-1983-war-scare/>. [July 2, 2021].

<sup>5</sup> L. Scott (2020), “November 1983: the most dangerous moment of the cold war?”, *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 35, Issue 1, pp. 131-148. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02684527.2019.1664362>. [January 4, 2021]. For more details on this issue see T. Downing (2018), *1983, Reagan*,

attack on the US and its NATO allies “that could have resulted in a large-scale nuclear war.”<sup>6</sup>

The Nonproliferation Treaty, signed on July 1, 1968 was ratified by 43 nations and went into effect in 1970. All five states, now known as the P5<sup>7</sup> or the Great Powers (the US, the Great Britain, the Russian Federation, China and France), which had detonated a nuclear bomb before 1968, are the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the only legitimate holders of nuclear capabilities, “often referred to as the Nuclear Weapons States (NWS)”.<sup>8</sup>

But the Odyssey of the danger posed by nuclear weapons did not stop with the signing of the NPT. The end of the twentieth century will reveal a new weapon, which juxtaposes itself over the existing nuclear capabilities, and will create new threats to international security, some of the most terrifying known to mankind in its existence: cyber-attacks. One of the best-known cases of this kind is that of the *Stuxnet code*, developed under the US program known as *Olympic Games*,<sup>9</sup> initiated during George W. Bush’s administration (as a cooperative action between the intelligence agencies of five countries, namely the US, Israel, the Netherlands, Germany and the UK)<sup>10</sup> and taken over and continued by the Barack Obama administration. Designed to take out Iran’s nuclear facilities, Stuxnet has proven to work just as well in an attack on a power or nuclear

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*Andropov and a World on the Brink*, New York: Da Capo Press; M. H. Maggelet and J. C. Oskins (2010), *Broken Arrow. A Disclosure of Significant U.S., Soviet, and British Nuclear Weapon Incidents and Accidents, 1945-2008*, Raleigh, NC: Lulu.com; and M. Ambinder (2018), *The Brink: President Reagan and the Nuclear War Scare of 1983*, New York: Simon & Schuster.

<sup>6</sup> P. Aksenov, (2013), “Stanislav Petrov: The man who may have saved the world”, BBC Russian, September 26. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-24280831>. [October 15, 2017].

<sup>7</sup> A. Futter (2021), *The Politics of Nuclear Weapons*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 117.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> D. E. Sanger (2012), *Confront and Conceal. Obama’s Secret Wars and Surprising Use of American Power*, New York: Crown Publishers, pp. 10-11.

<sup>10</sup> N. Perlroth (2020), *This Is How They Tell Me the World Ends. The Cyber-Weapons Arms Race*, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, p. 417.

plant, or a water treatment facility,<sup>11</sup> in the US or anywhere else around the globe.

On May 27, 2016, Barack Obama was the first sitting US President to visit Hiroshima<sup>12</sup> and in his speech he stated,

“The scientific revolution that led to the splitting of an atom requires a moral revolution, as well. (...) An international community established institutions and treaties that worked to avoid war and aspire to restrict and roll back, and ultimately eliminate the existence of nuclear weapons.”<sup>13</sup>

and made his administration’s mission to create the necessary tools to curb proliferation and to impede the occurrence of new nuclear states.

The historic “agreement known as the *Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action* (JCPOA)”<sup>14</sup> signed in 2015 between the P5+1 (the United States, France, the United Kingdom, China, Russia and Germany) and Islamic Republic was meant to stop the Iranian path towards the nuclear bomb. At the time of the writing this research the US withdrew unilaterally from the nuclear accord, during Donald Trump’s administration, in May, 2018, and Iran gradually began to violate the provisions of the JCPOA, increasing the stockpile of its fissile materials and enriching uranium up to 60%. The current US administration, led by new President Joe Biden, is working hard to return to compliance and to revive the Iranian nuclear deal. The nuclear deal with Iran is not just a tool meant to curb the Islamic Republic’s path toward the nuclear capability, but also might become a **corner stone** for a global prospect of international non-proliferation and can complete the puzzle of nuclear debates, as long as it is “the strongest

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> \*\*\* (2016), “President Obama Visits Hiroshima”, *Atomic Heritage Foundation*, May 27. <https://www.atomicheritage.org/article/president-obama-visits-hiroshima>. [June 9, 2021].

<sup>13</sup> The White House (2016), *Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Abe of Japan at Hiroshima Peace Memorial*, May 27. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/05/27/remarks-President-obama-and-prime-minister-abe-japan-hiroshima-peace>. [October 19, 2017].

<sup>14</sup> \*\*\* (2015), “The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) at a Glance”, *Arms Control Association*. <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/JCPOA-at-a-glance>. [May 9, 2018].



non-proliferation agreement ever negotiated.”<sup>15</sup> The decade spent at the negotiations table is a proof of resilience and will, as well as the best example of diplomatic good practice and multilateralism.

## 2. Research Interest

In the autumn of 2013, according to intelligence, the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) seemed to be very close of reaching breakout capacity, hence to becoming a nuclear-armed state. The “Arak research reactor was approaching completion”<sup>16</sup> and could have produce soon “enough weapons-grade plutonium for about couple of bombs per year”.<sup>17</sup> Even though the Islamic Republic’s nuclear activity submitted to standard Atomic Energy Agency’s safeguards,<sup>18</sup> Tehran declined at the time “to accept the standard IAEA provisions requiring the declaration of new facilities before they become operational.”<sup>19</sup> In 2013, the Western Great Powers had been negotiating with Iran for more than a decade, using along

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<sup>15</sup> The White House (2015), “Remarks of the President on the Iran Nuclear Deal”, August 5. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/08/05/remarks-president-iran-nuclear-deal>. [October 5, 2017]; M. Fitzpatrick (2017), “Assessing the JCPOA”, *Adelphi Series*, Vol. 57, Issue: 466-467, pp. 19-60. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19445571.2017.1555914>. [October 12, 2017].

<sup>16</sup> M. Fitzpatrick (2017), “Assessing the JCPOA”, *Adelphi Series*, Vol. 57, Issue: 466-467, p. 20. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19445571.2017.1555914>. [October 12, 2017]

<sup>17</sup> W. Raas, A. Long (2007), “Osirak Redux?: Assessing Israeli Capabilities to Destroy Iranian Nuclear Facilities”, *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 4, pp. 15-16. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4137564>. [November 17, 2018].

<sup>18</sup> M. Fitzpatrick (2017), “Assessing the JCPOA”, *Adelphi Series*, Vol. 57, Issue: 466-467, pp. 19-60. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19445571.2017.1555914>. [October 12, 2017]; IAEA (2003), “Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Resolution adopted by the Board on 12 September 2003”, GOV/2003/69, p. 2. <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/gov2003-69.pdf>. [December 5, 2019].

<sup>19</sup> M. Fitzpatrick (2017), “Assessing the JCPOA”, *Adelphi Series*, Vol. 57, Issue: 466-467, pp. 19-60. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19445571.2017.1555914>. [October 12, 2017].

the way the regime of economic sanctions, back channel diplomacy and even keeping the military option available, as in the United States' case. However, the so-called *right of enrichment*<sup>20</sup> provided by the NPT – to which Iran is a signatory – was a rigid sticking point based on Article IV from NPT:

“Nothing in this Treaty shall be interpreted as affecting the inalienable right of all the Parties to the Treaty to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination and in conformity with Articles I and II of this Treaty.”<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, because the Islamic Republic did not report its nuclear activities to IAEA, this led to a general Western anxiety. In consequence, between 2005 and 2010, the United Nations adopted an increasing number of resolutions, sanctioning Iran for not complying with its obligations stipulated in NPT. The maximalist stance adopted by Tehran led to another stalemate during the nuclear negotiations process between the Great Powers (the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, China and Germany, denominated in the international literature in this field, hence also for this research, as the P5+1) and Iran.

However, the Iranian dynamics changed<sup>22</sup> in 2013, after Hassan Rouhani was elected as President of the Islamic Republic<sup>23</sup>, a moderate politician who had “campaign[ed] on a pledge to improve”<sup>24</sup> the country’s “stagnant economy by getting the sanctions lifted.”<sup>25</sup> Yet, prior to Rouhani’s election, the incumbent president “Ahmadinejad had authorized secret bilateral talks in Oman with emissaries from US President Barack

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<sup>20</sup> IAEA, (1970), “Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)”, March 5. <https://www.iaea.org/publications/documents/treaties/npt>. [March 19, 2016].

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> M. Colleau (2016), “Iran’s Janus-Faced US Policy: The Rouhani Administration Between Continuity and Change, Opportunity and Constraint” in S. Akbarzadeh, D. Conduit (eds), *Iran in the World*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 43-45. [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-1-137-58577-6\\_3](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-1-137-58577-6_3). [September 15, 2019].

<sup>23</sup> L. Zaccara (2020), *Foreign Policy of Iran under President Hassan Rouhani’s First Term (2013-2017)*, Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

Obama”<sup>26</sup> being endorsed in this endeavor by Islamic Republic’s Supreme Leader, Sayyid Ali Khamenei.<sup>27</sup> During his first year in office Rouhani opened up the diplomatic path and the Great Powers and Iran reached an interim deal, signed in Geneva on November 24, 2013.<sup>28</sup> A Joint Plan of Action was implemented in January 2014 and provided “for an enhanced verification.”<sup>29</sup> Moreover, JPOA raised the prospects for comprehensive agreement that could provide a solution to the Iranian nuclear crisis and toward the normalization of Iranian relation with Western states. Few months later, on April 2, 2015, “limits on Iran’s nuclear program had largely been agreed, when negotiators meeting in Lausanne, announced that they had reached a framework for a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action”<sup>30</sup> and consequently “all UN sanctions resolutions would be terminated.”<sup>31</sup>

The diplomatic efforts of China, France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United States, and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy,<sup>32</sup> on one hand,

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<sup>26</sup> B. Kaussler, A. B. Newkirk, (2012), “Diplomacy in Bad Faith: American–Iranian Relations Today”, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 23, Issue 2, pp. 351–353. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09592296.2012.679493>. [May 7, 2019].

<sup>27</sup> M. Fitzpatrick (2017), “Assessing the JCPOA”, *Adelphi Series*, Vol. 57, Issue 466-467, pp. 21-23.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19445571.2017.1555914>. [October 12, 2017]; M. Colleau (2016), “Iran’s Janus-Faced US Policy: The Rouhani Administration Between Continuity and Change, Opportunity and Constraint” in S. Akbarzadeh, D. Conduit (eds), *Iran in the World*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 43-45. [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-1-137-58577-6\\_3](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-1-137-58577-6_3). [September 15, 2019].

<sup>28</sup> M. Fitzpatrick (2017), “Assessing the JCPOA”, *Adelphi Series*, Vol. 57, Issue 466-467, p. 21.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19445571.2017.1555914>. [October 12, 2017].

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> M. Fitzpatrick (2017), “Assessing the JCPOA”, *Adelphi Series*, Vol. 57, Issue 466-467, pp. 21-22.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19445571.2017.1555914>. [October 12, 2017].

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>32</sup> M. Fitzpatrick (2017), “Assessing the JCPOA”, *Adelphi Series*, Vol. 57, Issue 466-467, pp. 21-23.

and the Islamic Republic of Iran, on the other, to attain a comprehensive and long-term solution to the Iranian nuclear issue, led to the signing of JCPOA (UN resolution 2231/2015)<sup>33</sup> on July 14, 2015. The actors involved in JCPOA welcomed this historic treaty, which was meant control of Iran's nuclear operations and making sure that it would be solely for civilian purpose, and it was also the corner stone of a fundamental change regarding this issue. The Great Powers unanimously agreed when signing the JCPOA "that full implementation of this Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action will positively contribute to regional and international peace and security."<sup>34</sup>

The *Implementation Day* of JCPOA was reached on January 16, 2016, when the UNSC received the report from the IAEA confirming, "that Iran has taken the key steps to restrict its nuclear program and has put in place increased monitoring."<sup>35</sup> *Termination Day* would take place ten years after *Adoption Day*.<sup>36</sup> On February 16, 2026, all the provisions of Resolution 2231/2015 were to be lifted<sup>37</sup> and the UNSC was going to conclude its consideration regarding the Iran's nuclear file.<sup>38</sup>

Unquestionably, JCPOA is not perfect, but such a thing would be impossible. All the actors involved compromised at one moment or another, and their governments shifted their stances along the way. However, given the issues at stake, such as regional and international security, nonproliferation, preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear capability, avoiding another regional war or foreign military intervention on the Iranian soil, it is remarkable that all the shortcomings were

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<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19445571.2017.1555914>. [October 12, 2017];

<sup>33</sup> United Nations Security Council [UNSC] (2015), "Resolution 2231 (2015) on Iran Nuclear Issue Background."

<https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/2231/background>. [October 12, 2017].

<sup>34</sup> \*\*\* (2015), "The Final Deal: Zarif, Mogherini Statement", *The Iran Primer*, July 14. <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2015/jul/14/final-deal-zarif-mogherini-statement>. [October 19, 2015].

<sup>35</sup> \*\*\* (2015), "The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) at a Glance", *Arms Control Association*. <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/JCPOA-at-a-glance>. [May 9, 2018].

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

overcome and the nuclear agreement became reality. It is easy to make the assessment that there are some risks. The West does not trust the government in Tehran, and Iranians do not trust the West. Hence the entire negotiations process was conducted through a diplomacy of mistrust. However, JCPOA states that the “deal represents a major diplomatic achievement”<sup>39</sup> among states often characterized by rivalry, even enmity and it is one of the best examples of successful multilateral negotiations.

This research is an exhaustive examination of the negotiations regarding Iran’s controversial nuclear activities and it seeks to provide a detailed analysis of this protracted process. A significant breakthrough was achieved in Geneva in November 2013, after several years of inconclusive rounds of negotiations – in Vienna, Geneva, Istanbul, Baghdad, Moscow and Almaty – between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the P5+1 countries. One of the most important questions related to these negotiations relates to the link between Iran’s nuclear activities and its foreign policy, with respect to its national security. Since the signing of the JCPOA, Iran’s policy makers have increasingly given the public impression that the nuclear deal is a segment of a wider foreign policy rethink, aimed at ending Iran’s international isolationism. UNSC sanctions have had a profound negative consequence on Iran’s infrastructure and domestic economy, especially during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s presidency, when the former Iranian president took a hostile stance towards the West. His posture not only endangered regional and international stability, but also created a negative perception within the Iranian society hence in 2013, a conservative candidate with a more pragmatic approach won the presidential race. Hassan Rouhani’s victory represented a cornerstone that shifted Tehran’s nuclear diplomacy in favor of a new flexible and pragmatic approach that was comparatively more amenable to striking a deal at the negotiation table. The early signs of such a development emerged during the 2013 Presidential debate, between Saeed Jalili, Hassan Rouhani and Ali Akbar Velayati. Both, Rouhani and Velayati, accused the former for failing to bring about a breakthrough in the ongoing (at that time) nuclear negotiations, from his position of Iran’s chief nuclear

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<sup>39</sup> A. Bohlen (2015), “Iran: An Opening for Diplomacy?”, *Survival*, No. 57, Vol. 5, p. 2. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00396338.2015.1090127>. [February 10, 2017].

negotiator. Promising to bring “good nuclear news”<sup>40</sup> during his first one hundred days of his presidency, the then-candidate Rouhani openly critiqued the Mahmoud Ahmadinejad-led nuclear policy, as being basically an economic disaster caused by the comprehensive international sanctions. Rouhani appointed Javad Zarif as Foreign Minister and transferred the “nuclear file from the Supreme National Security Council” to him.<sup>41</sup>

Zarif had formerly been Iran’s envoy to the United Nations (UN) and had played an instrumental role in brokering the deal for the post-Taliban order in Afghanistan. The Western media coined his approach as Iran’s “new charm diplomacy”<sup>42</sup> and he managed, in only two rounds of nuclear negotiations in Geneva, to achieve a deal that had eluded his predecessors during the previous nine years. This was preceded by a high-profile visit of President Hassan Rouhani to attend the annual UN gathering in September 2013, which resulted in an unprecedented “telephone diplomacy”<sup>43</sup> between Iranian President and his US counterpart, President Barack Obama, thus breaking the taboo of direct communication between the two sides. Saddled with a new mission to end the “unnecessary nuclear crisis”<sup>44</sup> that had cast a negative spell on Iran’s economic growth, the Rouhani administration boasted of having complete control of nuclear policy and was prepared to take the heat of Iran’s hardliners who questioned the President’s resolve to defend Iran’s nuclear rights.

When dealing with the nuclear challenge posed by Iran more than a policy shift was necessary. A new approach was required. In Iran the frustration of the population caused by the economic situation and

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<sup>40</sup> N. Entessar, K. L. Afrasiabi (2018), *Iran Nuclear Accord and the Remaking of the Middle East*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> A. E. Torbat (2020), *Politics of Oil and Nuclear Technology in Iran*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 21.

<sup>42</sup> S. Maloney (2013), “It’s Official: Washington’s Favorite Iranian Takes On The Nuclear File”, Brookings: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2013/09/05/its-official-washingtons-favorite-iranian-takes-on-the-nuclear-file/>. [October 25, 2017].

<sup>43</sup> T. Parsi (2017), *Losing an Enemy. Obama, Iran, and the Triumph of Diplomacy*, New Heaven & London: Yale University Press, pp. 204-205.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*