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# United State - Iran Relations 1941-2020

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## Abstract

U.S-Iran relations rooted back to the second half of the 1950s decade of the twentieth century. The relation witnessed close cooperation with Shah of Iran and was very solid during the decades follow. USA provides Iran with all needed assistance either economic, military. By the 1979 Islamic relations the relations turned out 180 degrees. The relations witnessed some cooperation between the two countries and for a very short time according to the two countries interests. Iran Nuclear program plays a main role of increasing the tension between the two countries. Obama's administration exerts its best efforts to finalize Iran's nuclear program and it succeeded in signing the deal between (5+1) countries in 2015. Trump administration changed the whole situation through withdrawal from the agreement and the relations escalated again.

**Keywords:** Shah, Iran, USA, Relations, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

# Relaciones Estados Unidos - Irán 1941-2020

## Resumen

Las relaciones entre Estados Unidos e Irán se remontan a la segunda mitad de la década de 1950 del siglo XX. La relación fue testigo de una estrecha cooperación con Shah de Irán y fue muy sólida durante las décadas siguientes. Estados Unidos proporciona a Irán toda la asistencia necesaria, ya sea económica, militar. En las relaciones

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islámicas de 1979, las relaciones resultaron 180 grados. Las relaciones presenciaron cierta cooperación entre los dos países y durante un tiempo muy corto de acuerdo con los intereses de los dos países. El programa nuclear de Irán juega un papel principal en el aumento de la tensión entre los dos países. La administración de Obama realiza sus mejores esfuerzos para finalizar el programa nuclear de Irán y logró cantar el acuerdo entre (5 + 1) países en 2015. La administración de Trump cambió toda la situación al retirarse del acuerdo y las relaciones se intensificaron nuevamente.

**Palabras clave:** Shah, Irán, EE. UU., Relaciones, Plan de Acción Integral Conjunto.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Shah of Iran was an important ally of the United States. The Shah ruled from 1941 until 1979. When he falls in February due to the Islamic Revolution. During the decades that followed the USA intervention in Iran, the diplomatic and economic relations between the two countries witnessed great success and understanding. US Presidents Eisenhower, Nixon and Carter visited Iran. The United States Secretary of State has also paid many visits to Tehran throughout those three decades.

Iran was one of American strategic pillars in the Middle East. It has the fifth largest military power in the world and continued to be at the core of USA main foreign policy issues. Issues have been developed day after day and the two countries relations have become closer and closer. United States provided Iran with economic and military assistance, and issues remained as it is until the Islamic

Revolution, where the relations were reversed Relations between United States and Iran remain volatile regarding many issues since the hostage's crisis of the US Embassy in Tehran, when 52 American hostages were held for 444 days between November 4, 1979 and January 20, 1981

The study problem is summarized in identifying the developments of US-Iranian relationship since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, which overthrew the Shah government, the strong ally of United States of America. Before the revolution, the American friendship with Shah helped the United States access to cheap Iranian oil. The United States supported Shah's government despite government unpopularity. After 1979 revolution, the two-state relationship became hostile. The United States focused on accusations and criticism of Iran until it called the Islamic Republic as part of evil axis. The Islamic Republic's response was equal, calling the United States the Great Evil. The study problem is to investigate the US-Iran relations since 1979.

Relations between the United States and Iran are an important factor in peace determination in the Middle East. The security environment in the Middle East is considered unstable, so any crisis or problem could have a serious impact region peace and stability. In an attempt to identify the reasons behind US-Iranian relations deterioration, this study tries to answer the following questions:

- Is Iran considered as threat on US control in the Middle East?
- What are the external and internal factors that caused this large shift in US policy towards Iran?

- What is the impact of Iranian nuclear program on US-Iranian relations?

This research aims to clarify the pillars of US-Iranian relations as well as the causes of US-Iranian relations crisis in which crisis of Iranian nuclear program and supporting terrorism issue, and to determine the future of relations based on.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The study used the historical methodology, which helps the social researcher, when he is studying social structures changes and the evolution of social systems in identification, analysis and interpretation of phenomenon in the light of time and place in which it occurred, and the extent of its association with other phenomena and their impact on current phenomenon under study. The US-Iranian relations are rooted to the mid-eighteenth century, when the United States provided educational and health assistance to Iran In addition to signing the first cooperation and friendship agreement between the two countries. In 1856, Iran Shah delegated Nasiruddin as first ambassador to United States.

In 1883, Samuel Benjamin was delegated to Iran as the first US diplomatic envoy. The relations between Iran and United States strengthened over time. In the early 1940s, the United Kingdom and Soviet Union invaded Iran and Iran allowed US military forces to enter its territory. The United States demanded, through a memorandum,

that Britain and Russia have to withdraw their forces in implementation of Butt-Sadam agreement. After World War II, United States recognized Iran importance (Mazhar, 1988).

In 1949, an agreement on mutual defense cooperation was signed between the two countries. The United States depended on Iran in the Persian Gulf region after it helped in suppressing the Dhofar Revolution in Oman. The United States gave Iran a role in supporting Israel during the Shah's period in 1948 by allowing Iranian Jews to immigrate to Palestine. (Olayan, 2017). In 1951 Mohammad Mossadq, was elected as Prime Minister. Two years later the Shah dismissed Mossadeq. Such action caused large demonstrations and protests. As a result, and because of internal pressure, Mossadeq was reinstated and the Shah fled the country. In 1952, Prime Minister Mossadeq nationalized Iranian oil. As a result, London imposed sever sanctions on Iran., but Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq refused to change his decision (Zahrani, 2002).

USA under Eisenhower administration joined Britani to restore the Shah to power through supporting General Zahedi in a CIA-operation that was called "Operation Ajax" on August 19, 1953. (Nasir, 2008). The Shah was anti-Communist, therefore the United States considered Shah government as a bulwark against Soviet influence expansion in the Persian Gulf and a counterweight for Arab regimes and movements who are pro-Soviet Union (Kenneth, a 2019).

In 1955, an agreement was concluded between the Shah and US President Eisenhower. This agreement included 23 articles in order to enhance cooperation between the two countries (Baghat, 1987). In

1972, President Nixon and his national security adviser Henry Kissinger arrived in Tehran to strengthening Iranian-American relations by signing a memorandum of understanding. One of the most salient features of US-Iranian relations from 1962 to 1978 was Iran's role as the region's policeman, with US support. The United States supported the method of developing Iranian military power. America supplied Shah with weapons and trained SAFEC (Iranian secret police) (Baghat, 1987).

In this regard it is very important to give a brief on Iran internal situation that led to the revolution. In the early 1960's and after Iraqi revolution in 1958. The Shah started with large reformation program that was called the White Revolution, as an attempt to Westernize Iran. For this purpose, Shah invested in infrastructure, hospitals, roads, American weapons, and opened massive new shopping malls. During that period, Imam Ruhollah Khomeini emerged as a powerful religious man who opposed Shah attempt to Westernize Iran. Khomeini became more popular, so the Shah called for his exile in 1964 (Zahrani, 2002). Khomeini in his turn fled to Najaf, in Iraq. Khomeini was expelled to France by Iraqi government in 1978 after the March 6, 1975, Algiers Accord between the Shah and Iraq. Khomeini in France continued his activities for revolution to establish Islamic government in Iran.

The 1970s witnessed an increase the opposition and conditions worsened in Iran which forced on 16 January 1979 Shah to departure, who was supported by USA. Two weeks later, the Islamic religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini returned from his exile in France. And inaugurated as the head of the state. The relations between Iran and



USA deteriorated, after the United States agreed to receive Shah Pahlavi for treatment. It should be noted that Iran did not initiate relations broke with Washington due to the selection by the revolutionary leadership of liberal Iranian pro-Western leaders. Carter Administration exerted efforts to build relationship with Iranian new regime, but all efforts failed after November th.4, 1979, when Iranian students takeover U.S. Embassy in Tehran. The United States broke relations with Iran on April 7, 1980, two weeks before U.S. military attempt failure to rescue the hostages. The 66 U.S. diplomats were held as hostage's for 444 days, and they were released pursuant to the January 20, 1981 "Algiers Accords." The diplomats release was completed minutes after President Reagan's inauguration on January 20, 1981. (Qaseem, 2015).

US reactions ranged from broking diplomatic relations to suspending all forms of military support, to the new system (Robert, 1982). USA also adopted other steps to punish Iran in form of freezing all Iranian financial assets in US banks, preventing revenues transfer from Iranians living in America to Iran, cease all import and export relations between the two countries, and prohibiting all forms of mutual visits between two countries delegations. Iran has an interest section in Washington, under the auspices of Pakistan Embassy with Iranian Americans staff. The Iranian Embassy was closed in April 1980 when the diplomatic relations between the two countries were broken. Iran's mission to the United Nations in New York runs most of Iran's diplomacy inside the United States. The U.S. interests section in

Tehran, is under Embassy of Switzerland auspices and without any American personnel (Kenneth a ,2019).

In 1984, Reagan administration defined Iran as a state of terrorism sponsor in response to Iran's support for Marines bombing in Beirut in October 1983., Reagan administration supported Iraq in 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War. On November 4, 1986, the Iranian announcement of a visit to Tehran by an envoy to US President Ronald Reagan. Regan administration contradicted its efforts towards Iraq by providing weapons to Iran (“TOW”) antitank weapons and I-Hawk air defense batteries) in exchange for Iran’s help in releasing U.S. hostages held in Lebanon. After the Iran Contra scandal, the Reagan administration used a stricter policy towards Iran, which was issued a ban on the import of Iranian oil. (Kenneth, 2012).

During 1987-1988, U.S. naval forces fought with Iranian naval elements that are protecting oil shipments transiting the Persian Gulf from Iranian mines and other attacks. On April 18, 1988, Iran lost one-quarter of its larger naval ships in a fought with the U.S. Navy, including a frigate sunk. However, On July 3, 1988, U.S. forces in the Gulf shot down Iran Air Flight 655 over the Gulf, killing all 290 on board, contributing to Iran’s decision to accept a cease-fire with Iraq in August 1988 (Elaine, 1991). In 1989, Bush administration stated that US-Iranian relations could improve if Iran helps in freeing US hostages held by Hezbollah in Lebanon. Iran provided assistance that led to release all remaining American hostages there by the end of December 1991. But US ignored all of these efforts. In 1993, Clinton administration articulated a strategy of “dual containment” of Iran and

Iraq. Clinton administration pursued a tougher policy toward Iran. Clinton administration and Congress banned US trade and investment with Iran and imposed sanctions on foreign investment in the Iranian energy sector. In response to Iran's support for terrorist groups seeking to undermine the Israeli-Palestinian peace process (Kenneth,b 2019).

1997 witnessed developments inside Iran when Mohammad Khatami, who called for dialogue between Iran and the United States. This call coincided with voices rise in American society demanding a reconsideration of the US policy towards Iran. Then there was pressure from US economic companies to ease the embargo on Iran. (Atrisi, 2003). The two countries relations improved and Khatami visited United States in 1998, but relations returned to tension after Khobar bombing in Saudi Arabia. The United States believed that Iranian-backed Hezbollah was behind the attack (Salvin, 2009). Clinton tried to improve relations with Iran and sent a letter to Khatami to help with investigation related to Khobar bombing, but Khatami did not respond to the letter and adversely affected the diplomatic progress of Clinton administration (Salvin, 2009).

In 2001, Bush was elected and after that September 11 attacks happened, the Iranian president denounced the attacks and thousands of Iranians took to streets to support United States (Axworthy, 2013). In January 2002, President Bush identified Iran as part of an "axis of evil" including Iraq and North Korea. In 2003, US administration assisted earthquake victims in Bam, Iran, through some US military supplies to Iran. As Iran's nuclear program progressed, the

administration worked with several European countries to persuade Iran to agree to curb its nuclear program. (Helene and David, 2007)

President Obama asserted that there was an opportunity to persuade Iran to limit its nuclear program through diplomacy and to potentially rebuild a U.S.-Iran relationship after decades of mutual animosity. The approach emerged in President Obama's first message to the Iranian people on the occasion of Nowruz (Persian New Year, March 21, 2009), in which he stated that the United States "is now committed to diplomacy that addresses the full range of issues before us, and to pursuing constructive ties among the United States, Iran, and the international community." He referred to Iran as "The Islamic Republic of Iran," appearing to reject a policy of regime change. The Administration reportedly also loosened restrictions on U.S. diplomats' meeting with their Iranian counterparts at international meetings. In a speech to the "Muslim World" in Cairo on June 4, 2009, President Obama acknowledged that the United States had played a role in the overthrow of Mossadeq and said that Iran had a right to peaceful nuclear.

Obama administration has stressed that there is an opportunity to persuade Iran to limit its nuclear program through diplomacy and to rebuild US-Iranian relations. This approach emerged in President Obama's first message to the Iranian people on the occasion of Nowruz (Persian New Year, March 21, 2009). Obama stated that the United States "is now committed to diplomacy that addresses the full range of issues before us, and to pursuing constructive ties among the United States, Iran, and the international community." He referred to

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In early 2013, the administration began direct talks with Iranian officials in Oman to discuss Iran's readiness to conclude a comprehensive nuclear agreement. In June 2013, Rouhani's election contributed to US shift to emphasis on diplomacy. On September 24, 2013, President Obama confirmed, exchanging messages with Rouhani stating that United States was prepared to resolve nuclear issue peacefully and that United States is not seeking to change the Iranian system. Obama and Rouhani made a phone call between them. Such call was the first direct presidential contact between United States and Iran since 1979. After the completion of JCPOA in 2015, the two countries made meetings in all nuclear talks and elsewhere, covering bilateral issues. President Obama expressed his hope that JCPOA is the starting point of new era in US-Iranian relations, and in the same time Obama affirmed that JCPOA will benefit US national security. President Obama met Zarif the Foreign Minister at September 2015 in General Assembly session. ( CRS, 2019)

On November 8, 2016, Trump came to power .On October 13, 2017, Trump announced that he would not ratify the nuclear deal. On May 8, 2018, Trump announced that the United States would withdraw from the agreement and re-impose all U.S. sanctions by November 4, 2018. ( White House, 2018)

Trump shifted US policy against Iran significantly .Since then, Trump administration took additional steps for the purpose of providing maximum pressure "on Iran's economy and regime. On May 21, 2018, Pompeo announced the return to US strategy to pressure Iran through imposing sanctions with specific requirements that Iran must meet in revised nuclear deal and normalize relations with United States. ( Secretary of state, 2018).

He also expressed US "solidarity" with Iranian people. On July 23, 2018, Rouhani and other Iranian leaders threatened to stop oil flow through Persian Gulf in case Iranian oil exports were blocked due to sanctions against Iran. On August 16, 2018, Minister Pombo announced Iran Working Group establishment in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which responsible of coordinating the Department relating to Iran activities. .

Trump administration escalated the relations by taking several steps that can be summarized as follows:

- During Trump visit to Middle East region on May 20-24, 2017, President Trump informed Saudi Arabia leaders that “Until the Iranian regime is willing to be a partner for peace, all nations of conscience must work together to isolate Iran....”

- On October 13, 2017, President Trump, stated that he would not certify Iranian JCPOA compliance (under the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act, INARA, P.L. 114-17), and the United States would only stay in the accord if Congress and U.S. allies (1) address the expiration of JCPOA nuclear restrictions, (2) curb Iran’s ballistic missile program, and (3) counter Iran’s regional activities.

- On January 12, 2018, Trump announced that he would not continue in JCPOA-.

- On May 8, 2018, after France and Germany leaders visits to the United States for the purposes of convincing United States to remain in JCPOA, Trump announced that United States would withdraw from the JCPOA and re-impose all U.S. secondary sanctions by November 4, 2018.<sup>21</sup> Since that time Trump Administration took additional steps for the purpose of applying “maximum pressure” on Iran’s economy and regime.

- On May 21, 2018, in his first speech as Secretary of State, Michael Pompeo announced a return to a U.S. strategy of pressuring Iran through sanctions. He articulated 12 requirements that Iran must meet in a revised JCPOA. .

- On July 23, 2018, in response to Rouhani threats and other Iranian leaders to cut off the flow of oil through the Persian Gulf if Iran’s oil exports are prevented by sanctions, President Trump posted the following on Twitter: “To Iranian President Rouhani: never, ever threaten the united states again or you will suffer consequences the likes of which few throughout history have ever suffered before. We are no longer a country that will stand for your demented words of violence & death. Be cautious!”

- On August 16, 2018, Secretary Pompeo announced establishment of “Iran Action Group” at the State Department for the purpose of coordinating department’s Iran activities in this concern.

- On October 3, 2018, the Administration terminated the 1955 U.S.-Iran “Treaty of Amity, Economic Relations, and Consular Rights. The treaty termination did not affect interest’s sections status .

- Trumps Administration organized a ministerial meeting in Warsaw, Poland, in February 13-14, 2019 to explain the extent that U.S. partners to follow U.S. policy toward Iran. The meeting focused on Middle East issues in general and facing Iran threat in particular (Kenneth, 2019)

- On April 8, 2019, Trump Administration named Iran’s Revolutionary Guard as terrorist organization, and blamed it for its involvement in various acts of backing terrorism and anti-U.S. actions. (Kenneth,e2019)

- On April 22, 2019, Trump Administration announced it will not provide exceptions for those countries who undertook to reduce their purchases of Iranian oil (Kenneth, e 2019)

- On May 3, 2019, U.S.-Iran tensions escalated according to intelligence reports that either Iran or its allies may prepare for attacking U.S. forces or citizens in the region. Based on United States deployed more forces to Gulf area for the purpose of preventing such action( Kenneth, et al , 2019)

- President Trump administration indicated that the United States does not seek war with Iran or to change Iran’s regime, and it welcomes talks to ease tensions and renegotiate a JCPOA.(Peter and Maggie, 2019)



### **3. RESULT**

Through its illegal transactions, Iran has been able to make progress in its nuclear program. In 2003, the IAEA issued a report confirming Iran's breach of the agreement on the suspension of enrichment activities, and in 2004 Iran had to stop its uranium enrichment program as a result of pressure from Britain, Germany and France. In 2005, Iran returned to uranium enrichment, reneged on its promise to allow the IAEA to carry out inspections, and as a result Iran was referred to the UN Security Council, and in 2006 UN Security Council called Iran to halt its uranium enrichment activities and sanctions were imposed after rejecting it. During 2007 to 2011, sanctions imposed by Security Council on Iran were expanded and shipments were allowed to be inspected and confiscated.

In 2013, Iran went to negotiations to lift sanctions, including five countries-- America, France, Britain, Russia, China and Germany (5+1) after Geneva Convention succeeded in achieving its objectives, Iran and the six countries conclude a new agreement that stipulated that Iran would reduce the work of the nuclear program in exchange for sanctions lifting, Iran allowed IAEA to conduct inspections at nuclear sites and allow it to conduct its research for 10 years. The agreement received most countries of the world approval and Israel opposed this agreement because it allows Iran to possess the nuclear bomb, which poses a threat to Zionist entity in the Middle East. (Tayeb, 2014)

U.S. President Donald Trump announced a complete withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal in May 2018 and imposed new sanctions on Iran. Trump take this step after Iran declared that it had exceeded the agreement's limit of uranium enrichment, The agreement provides for a specific amount of uranium enrichment in exchange for lifting sanctions on Iran and allowing it to export oil, but President Donald Trump's announcement to withdraw from the deal and impose new sanctions has greatly affected the Iranian economy. Where the exchange rate of local currency declined and foreign investors stayed away from completing projects in Iran, and affected the scarcity of some imported products

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Through the above, U.S. policy toward Iran seems to have varied over certain periods of time, this is evident in US policy toward Iran before and after Iranian Islamic Revolution. Before the Islamic Revolution, the relationship between the two countries was characterized by harmony and friendship, and witnessed the conclusion of cooperation agreements between the two countries. After the Islamic Revolution, this friendship turned into a conflict, and Iran became a threat to United States in the Middle East, especially after September 11, 2001 events as a result of doubts about Iran's involvement in this incident.

Since the success of the Islamic Revolution, the United States has sought to restore Iran's hegemony as it has been its ally and depends on it in the Middle East region to achieve its interests and objectives. The United States has taken many methods to this effect, the GCC countries have used against Iran, and have tried to carry out many military coups to change the political system inside Iran but failed to do so, and Trump said in a speech that he hopes for system change in Iran. Also he announced U.S. withdrawal from Iran nuclear program agreement and imposed new sanctions on Iran, the most important of which was Iranian Revolutionary Guard inclusion on terrorist organizations list and stated that he would leave the door open for Iran to enter into new negotiations on U.S. and Israeli terms.

Despite the exchange of accusations and threats, the two sides have stressed their unwillingness to engage in a conventional war, as evidenced by Trump's declaration of willingness to enter into negotiations and on the Iranian side, which has been demonstrated by its adherence to the agreement despite United States withdrawal.

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