

20

Presentation date: January, 2023

Date of acceptance: March, 2023

Publication date: May, 2023

CHANGES

IN WASHINGTON'S POLICY REGARDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF NUCLEAR ENERGY IN IRAN UNDER THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION

CAMBIOS EN LA POLÍTICA DE WASHINGTON BAJO LA ADMINISTRACIÓN DE OBAMA CON RESPECTO AL DESARROLLO DE LA ENERGÍA NUCLEAR EN IRÁN

Gulzar Ibrahimova Isakhan gizi¹

E-mail: ibrahimova-gulzar@rambler.ru

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8760-408X>

Nargiz Carciyeva Elchin gizi¹

E-mail: nrgizcarchiyeva@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-3385-2810>

¹Baku Eurasian University. Azerbaiyán.

Suggested citation (APA, seventh ed.)

Ibrahimova, G., & Carciyeva, N. (2023). Changes in Washington's policy regarding the development of nuclear energy in Iran under the Obama administration. *Universidad y Sociedad*, 15(3), 217-222.

ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to analyze the changes in Washington's policy under the Obama administration regarding the development of nuclear energy in Iran. Since the regional and world political and economic order is dynamic and going through a period of transition, there is a prospect that the peripheral factor or structural levels within intra-state and inter-state relations will be absorbed or skewed at the expense of other factors, and therefore, without considering other levels, the Iran-US interaction. USA will greatly affect the events in your activity. In this sense, the analysis of the US foreign policy doctrine at the beginning of the 21st century, including the changes in Washington's Tehran policy regarding the development of Iran's Nuclear Energy during the Barack Obama era, allows an assessment to be made. geopolitics of the policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran with respect to the nuclear program and to determine the dynamics of development. Then, analyzing the policy of the Obama administration in the direction of solving the problem arising from Iran's nuclear activities, Hillary Clinton's thesis: "with smart power, diplomacy will be the vanguard in foreign policy" seems to be justified.

Keywords: USA-Iran relations, Iranian nuclear program, nuclear weapons non-proliferation

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar los cambios en la política de Washington bajo la administración Obama en relación con el desarrollo de la energía nuclear en Irán. Dado que el orden político y económico regional y mundial es dinámico y atraviesa un período de transición, existe la posibilidad de que el factor periférico o los niveles estructurales dentro de las relaciones intra-estatales e interestatales sean absorbidos o sesgados a expensas de otros factores, y por lo tanto, sin considerar otros niveles, la interacción Irán-Estados Unidos. USA afectará en gran medida los eventos en su actividad. En este sentido, el análisis de la doctrina de la política exterior estadounidense a principios del siglo XXI, incluyendo los cambios en la política de Teherán de Washington respecto al desarrollo de la Energía Nuclear de Irán durante la era de Barack Obama, permite hacer una valoración. geopolítica de la política de la República Islámica de Irán con respecto al programa nuclear y determinar la dinámica del desarrollo. Entonces, analizando la política de la administración Obama en la dirección de solucionar el problema derivado de las actividades nucleares de Irán, parece justificada la tesis de Hillary Clinton: "con poder inteligente, la diplomacia será la vanguardia en política exterior".

Palabras clave: Relaciones EE.UU.-Irán, programa nuclear iraní, no proliferación de armas nucleares

INTRODUCTION

In the century in which we live, Iran's nuclear program remains one of the most pressing problems of modern international politics. Due to systemic changes affecting the foreign policies of states, modern US-Iran relations have become a product of the international political structure, as well as the product of the domestic politics of both regions. The disruption of the regional balance of power in the Middle East created a situation in which the strategic interests of Iran and the United States were similar to each other on the main stage and strengthened the threat factor conceptualized by the Islamic Republic. The regional conditions that laid the foundations for reciprocal strategic intransigence in the internal political scene of both countries were maintained for a long time. In this way, Iran-US relations does not stay within its borders, as one side is the only global superpower with global reach, and the other is the main regional power in the most influential region of the world, creating a systemic effect.

Since 1980, diplomatic relations between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran have been severed. However, this lack of formal diplomatic channels does not tell the whole story. For more than four decades, the two nations have seen each other as arch-enemies and have engaged in hostile economic and diplomatic activities and, occasionally, in direct and indirect military confrontations. Furthermore, in almost every regional conflict, Tehran and Washington have supported opposite sides and engaged in proxy wars. However, during the second term of the Obama administration, senior Iranian and American officials successfully signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in July 2015. This has been the closest the two countries came to de-escalating the tension between them (Bahgat, 2023). This was coherent with Obama's position, since three months after his inauguration, President Obama made a statement in Prague about his intention to achieve a nuclear-free world, which soon won him the Nobel Prize (The White House, 2009). In addition to the Prague speech, the White House leader later expressed his willingness to take concrete steps toward "global zero" in US policy, including further reductions in nuclear forces and a reduction in the role of nuclear weapons (The White House, 2013).

As it can be seen, Obama's position as president caused serious changes in the discourse level of the US policy regarding Iran. At his first press conference at the White House, he declared that they could negotiate directly with Iran. Iran also responded positively to this. Then, a number of diplomatic proposals were made to Iran regarding nuclear weapons in the hope that Iran stopped its ambitions (Jhanbegloo, 2009, p. 10).

As early as April 23rd, 2007, in his first major foreign policy speech of the campaign, Obama made a speech before the Chicago Council on Global Affairs at the Chicago Cooperation Council, stating that although the global image of the United States had been undermined by the war in Iraq and a "foreign policy based on a flawed ideology", America had maintained its position in the world and had to recover and resist. In his opinion, America couldn't meet the threats of this century alone, but the world couldn't respond to them without America: "We must not retreat from the world, nor try to force it to surrender - we must lead the world by deed and example." As a sharp critic of President Bush, Obama called for increasing foreign aid to developing countries, expanding and modernizing the military, and rebuilding fractured alliances (Zeleny, 2007).

Although he was able to achieve this to some extent in his speeches, his position domestically was criticized by those who thought America was weak. Obama believed that the best policy for Iran was a soft power strategy. In his Nowruz message in March 2009, Obama used the term "Islamic Republic of Iran" when referring to Iran, unlike George W. Bush, who used "the people of Iran" or the current administration only as "the regime". Calling the Iranian people a great nation, as well as the Persian civilization as a great civilization (AlArabiya.net, 2009) the president quoted the Persian poet Saadi, then said: "My administration is committed to engaging in diplomacy based on honesty and mutual respect, which cannot be achieved by terror or arms, but rather by It can be achieved through peaceful actions that demonstrate the true greatness of the Iranian people and civilization." By referring to Iran's great culture and civilization it showed respect. This was a far-reaching gesture. Respect had not been in the US's Iran policy tool-box for decades. President Obama was trying a new approach and that caused a stir in Iran, catching the hardliners off-guard (Akbarzadeh, 2009, p. 398).

In an interview with Al-Arabiya, President Obama stated that it was important to be ready to negotiate with Iran, to state very clearly where there are differences, but there are potential ways forward, and he called this a potential opportunity. He attributes Iran's achievement of a kind of "strategic balance" with the United States, optimization of its national security goals, active foreign policy in the Middle East and strong regional position with Afghanistan, Iraq, Hamas, and Hezbollah in Lebanon over the decade. It was apparently part of a new strategy aimed at sidelining more punitive sanctions against Iran (Jhanbegloo, 2009, pp. 20–23).

Considering the above, this paper analyzes the changes in Washington's policy under the Obama administration

regarding the development of nuclear energy in Iran. For this, the historical-logical method was applied in conjunction with the analysis of documents, which allowed us to detail the evolution of this phenomenon, which due to its implications has had an impact to this day.

DEVELOPMENT

In April 2009, the Obama administration announced that it would not set any preconditions for sitting at the nuclear negotiating table with Iran (unlike the George W. Bush administration, which set a pre-condition for denuclearization). Since Washington's insistence on the cessation of nuclear activities was the most important obstacle to diplomatic negotiations with Tehran, this step of the Obama administration was a step familiar to Iran's domestic politics. In support of this move, Obama, in a June 4th, 2009, speech on the Middle East in Cairo, quoted verses from the Koran and called for a "new beginning between the United States and Muslims," provided each country, including Iran, fulfills its obligations under international agreements (Ali, 2017). The Obama administration opted for diplomatic efforts rather than the imposition of additional sanctions and the option of military force. Obama imitated the "Hot Dog Diplomacy" strategy to bring Iran to the table and start the negotiation process, and it was successful. With these actions, he planned to increase Washington's trust in the eyes of Russia, China and France, also permanent members of the UN Security Council.

In the events that followed Iran's disputed presidential election in June 2009, the administration chose to remain neutral. Some segments of Iran called on Washington to support the opposition, hoping that the post-election demonstrations, also known as the Green Movement, would result in regime change. The administration responded negatively to these calls, claiming that the regime never lost control when similar incidents occurred in the past and that its ability to influence internal processes in this country was very weak (Majid, 2010). In the meantime, Ahmadinejad, who saw that his legitimacy was being questioned in the country with the events that took place after the presidential elections, worried that the problems in foreign policy could lead him to this situation, decided to sit down at the meeting table with the West. Taking into account that the situation in domestic politics is more difficult, in this context, he met with the 5+1 countries and proposed negotiations on many topics. However, he left the issue of uranium enrichment out of the scope of the negotiations so as not to be seen as a concession by opponents. Despite this, the Obama administration, which did not want the change in its policy regarding Iran to remain only at the level of negotiations, responded positively to

the call, thinking that this meeting would also help progress (Burns et al., 2017, p. 44).

On September 25th, 2009, the United States, Britain, and France announced that Iran was building a new nuclear facility near the city of Qom and demanded that the facility be opened to UN inspection. Obama managed to get Iran to the negotiating table on its nuclear program after AEBA demanded more fuel for the Tehran Research Reactor. During talks in Geneva in early October, Tehran agreed to an Agreement that would allow Iran to send its low-enriched uranium to a third country [Russia and/or France] for processing and conversion into fuel (Cordesman, 2010). The deal provided Iran with a golden opportunity to demonstrate the legitimacy of its program, and Obama went to the UN Security Council to demand amendments to resolutions banning Iran from exporting nuclear energy. But three weeks later, Iran reneged on the terms of the deal and refused to transfer the required amount to the nuclear reactors in Russia. Although the Geneva talks had a positive effect in terms of building mutual trust, Ahmadinejad, who was under pressure from his opponents due to intense debates in Iranian politics after the elections held in June, showed a different position in the implementation of the agreement, offering various alternatives that would provide more security to Iran (Perthes, 2010, pp. 99–100). After the Geneva talks failed, on November 27th, 2009, the AEBA board meeting condemned Iran's concealment of the facility and its failure to report to the UN and called for the halt of its uranium enrichment program. Iran reacted strongly to this. On January 2nd, 2010, Ahmadinejad asked the US and the West for a month to respond to his proposal to accept a United Nations-brokered deal aimed at slowing Iran's nuclear program.

It was Washington's success that Russia and China, who supported Iran, condemned Iran on the international platform. This policy implemented by Obama in the first year of his presidency regarding the problem of Iran's nuclear activities had certain similarities with the policy implemented by George Bush in the second term of his presidency. In fact, both presidents pursued a policy that combined diplomacy with political pressure and sanctions. However, while George Bush gave more importance to political pressure and sanctions in his policy and often emphasized the option of resorting to military force, Obama gave more priority to diplomacy in the first years and tried not to bring up the options of using military force and regime change as much as possible.

The 2010 national security strategy of the United States, considered one of the main documents to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, stated that The United States would try to prevent Iran from developing nuclear

weapons. If Iran fulfilled its international obligations regarding its nuclear program, it would be able to continue on the path of greater political and economic integration with the international community. If they ignored their international obligations, US would use various means to increase their isolation and bring them into compliance with international non-proliferation norms. At the same time, US activity should be comprehensive and strategic. US would abandon threats by building on the people's desire for justice, education and opportunity, and by implementing a positive and sustainable policy of US partnership with the region. In other words, in 2010, as an important element of its efforts to overcome the challenges of nuclear power growth and move toward a nuclear-weapon-free world, the United States launched a broad international effort to rebuild and strengthen the global nuclear non-proliferation regime assumed the priority of leading the effort.

It was a return to the course set by the George W. Bush administration before September 11th, 2001, but postponed due to the onset of the "global war on terror." The political-military part of the "shift of the center of gravity" was formed in a new document -Strategic Defense Directives-, which occupies an unusual place among the main materials of US strategic planning. The Strategic Defense Directive is by default the "National Security Strategy" signed by the President, which defines the main directions of the Obama administration's national security policy, the "National Defense Strategy" approved by the Minister of Defense, the "National Military Strategy" signed by the Chairman of the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Defense and Energy. It was a collection of four documents that made up the jointly prepared Nuclear Policy Review. In the 2010 Nuclear Review, since the adversaries had already been identified, it was also reflected that the areas for the placement of weapons were closer to potential targets, that is, the transition of the concept from the global level to the regional level took place, and this was evaluated as "an important element of an effective regional security architecture".

At the end of 2011, despite Iran's threat to close the Strait of Hormuz in the face of heavy sanctions, and the United States announcing that it would respond to it, the possibility of a heated confrontation appeared, but both countries were not in favor of it. After the Hormuz crisis, the dialogue environment created by the negotiations between Iran and the 5+1 countries in Istanbul in April 2012 and in Baghdad in May 2012 greatly reduced the possibility of a heated confrontation. However, although both meetings had a positive effect on the development of dialogue between the parties, no concrete progress was achieved. The most important reason for the lack of tangible success was the

lack of mutual trust between the United States and Iran. Washington did not believe that Iran's nuclear activity was peaceful and considers it to be aimed at obtaining nuclear weapons. On the other hand, Tehran, which turned access to nuclear technology into a matter of national pride, regarded stepping back in the face of Western pressure as a defeat. In this context, providing Iran with a security guarantee that it will not face a military attack by the US or its allies in the region, and that its regime was not intended to be overthrown, could encourage the Tehran regime to take a more conciliatory position. However, as long as the Tehran regime continued its enmity with Israel and supported Hezbollah and Hamas, it was difficult for Washington to take steps in this direction.

The conflict between the two countries continued until the 2013 election of Iran's pragmatist President Hassan Rouhani, who moved quickly to forge lines of communication with the White House and between Kerry and Zarif. In March 2013, the US reportedly began a series of bilateral talks with Iranian officials in Oman on the possibility of reaching a major deal on Iran's nuclear development (Ali, 2017). It proved to be quite ineffective for the religiously conservative Iranian administration because conducting such a policy was considered a victory of the hardliners over the liberal reformers.

In August 2013, the liberal reformer and more open to negotiations, Hassan Rouhani, was elected as Iran's new president, and he looked for a peaceful solution to the nuclear issue a top foreign policy priority. In September 2013, for the first time since the Iranian revolution, Obama and Rouhani had a telephone conversation and serious negotiations were held with the West on Iran's nuclear program. Obama reconceptualized the military route of hard power toward soft power, a more coercive diplomacy based on "punishment" and "deterrence." As a result of these efforts, on November 24th, 2013, an interim agreement, known as the Joint Action Plan, emerged between the six countries which participated in the negotiations with Iran (Kaya & artepe, 2016, p. 5; Timofeev, 2018, pp. 3-15)

Considering the above, the Obama administration's policy power was coercive diplomacy with more sanctions than had existed in previous administrations. However, although the sanctions imposed by the United States and the international community on Iran paralyzed the Iranian economy to some extent, this did not cause the Iranian government to abandon its nuclear program. Even during Obama's presidency, Iran did not give up on becoming an imperative regional power in achieving its ultimate political goals and having a say in decision-making in the region. That is, the policy of "sustenance" under sanctions has never excluded Iran from the rest of the region in its

self-defense strategy, in penetrating the internal affairs of other countries, and Iran has insisted on not being left off the table broadly, empowering its decisions about the future of the region.

Thus, the transition to the new world order is shaping new geopolitical realities, and the struggle for corridors is central here. Obama's call for a "grand bargain" and Rouhani's response that it should be based on "dialogue between civilizations" with mutual respect do not predict that Iran will back down from its goal despite diplomatic pressure and economic sanctions. Today's modern international relations and the global world need peace more than anything else.

CONCLUSIONS

Obama, who came to power with the promise of change in the Middle East policy of the United States, believed that Iran's policy was one of the most important factors, that negatively affected his country's interests in the region. Although the stabilization of Iraq, occupied by the United States since 2003, has lifted a significant burden on Washington, the strained relations with Iran made it necessary to carry out serious work on this issue, which was neglected for years because of Iraq. Although Iran has been a threat to America's interests in the region since 1979, the problem of Iran's nuclear activities that emerged in 2002 made the size of this threat even more serious. Since Tehran's foreign policy conflicted with many US interests and policies in the region, Iran's possession of nuclear weapons would make it difficult for Washington to defend its interests and achieve its policies.

Aware of the need to act as soon as possible to solve the problem related to Iran's nuclear activities, the Obama administration was also aware that policies based on sanctions and the threat of military force in this regard did not yield any results. That is why he was a supporter of conducting a policy that prioritized diplomacy and gave importance to working in cooperation with the UN, unlike the Bush administration. For this reason, Russia and China, which had given great support to Iran on the international platform, especially the UN Security Council, made great efforts to persuade Iran to impose sanctions against this country. The warmer approach of European countries to Washington's approach, Tehran's uncompromising attitude in the negotiations, AEBA's statements linking Iran's nuclear program with the production of nuclear weapons, and the Obama administration's refusal to threaten the use of military force would ensure international cooperation.

Thus, the administration, acting under the influence of many internal and external factors, criticized Bush's policy

in the first years and followed a policy that prioritized diplomacy. Approaching the position of the Bush administration, which they later criticized, they began to prefer political pressure and sanctions in this context because they could not achieve the expected result. Overall, the Obama administration's foreign policy toward Iran has placed democracy promotion in the background, giving priority to nuclear deterrence, security, and economic interests, and although it has successfully engaged Iran in negotiations to some extent, it has not been able to change the regime's perception.

REFERENCES

- Akbarzadeh, S. (2009). Obama and the US policy change on Iran. *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 21(3), 397–401. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14781150903169075>
- AlArabiya.net. (2009, January 27). *Obama tells Al Arabiya peace talks should resume*. Al Arabiya English. <https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009%2F01%2F27%2F65087.html>
- Ali, M. (2017). *Obama Administration's Foreign Policy Towards Iran*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313034191_Obama_Administration's_Foreign_Policy_Towards_Iran
- Bahgat, G. (2023). US-Iran Relations: Challenges and Opportunities. *The Muslim World*, n/a(n/a). <https://doi.org/10.1111/muwo.12459>
- Burns, W. J., Flournoy, M. A., Blanc, J., Ewers, E. C., Goldenberg, I., Levite, A. (Eli), Rosenberg, E., & Sadjadpour, K. (2017). *Contain, Enforce, and Engage: An Integrated U.S. Strategy to Address Iran's Nuclear and Regional Challenges*. <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/423040/contain-enforce-and-engage/1394101/>
- Cordesman, A. H. (2010). Options in Dealing with Iran's Nuclear Program. *Center for Strategic & International Studies*. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/options-dealing-irans-nuclear-program-0>
- Jhanbegloo, R. (2009). *The Obama administration and Iran: Towards a constructive dialogue*. Working Paper No. 43. https://www.cigionline.org/sites/default/files/wp_43-web_0.pdf
- Kaya, S., & Şartepe, Z. (2016). Contentious Politics in Iran: Factions, Foreign Policy and the Nuclear Deal*. *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, 14(3), Article 3. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/alternatives/issue/26672/280308>

- Majd, H. (2010, January 6). Think Again: Iran's Green Movement. *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/01/06/think-again-irans-green-movement/>
- Perthes, V. (2010). Ambition and Fear: Iran's Foreign Policy and Nuclear Programme. *Survival*, 52(3), 95–114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2010.494879>
- The White House. (2009, April 5). *Remarks by President Barack Obama In Prague As Delivered*. Whitehouse.Gov. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-barack-obama-prague-delivered>
- The White House. (2013, June 19). *Remarks by President Obama at the Brandenburg Gate—Berlin, Germany*. Whitehouse.Gov. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/19/remarks-president-obama-brandenburg-gate-berlin-germany>
- Timofeev, I. N. (2018). A Pyrrhic Victory: The History of the Sanctions War Against Iran. *Russia in Global Affairs*. <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/a-pyrrhic-victory-the-history-of-the-sanctions-war-against-iran/>
- Zeleny, J. (2007, April 23). Obama Outlines His Foreign Policy Views. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/23/us/politics/23cnd-obama.html>