

"Iran's Nuclear Program: History, Political Dynamics, and International Implications"

Neriman Naz Taşkıran Intern of TASAM

ÖZET

İran'ın nükleer programının dış dinamiklere ve aktörlere olan etkisi belirli başlıklarla analiz edilmeye çalışılmıştır. Şah döneminin modernizm anlayışından İslam devriminin muhafazakar ve izole etkisi incelenmiştir. Tarihsel arka planın yanı sıra UAEK(Uluslararası Atom Enerji Kurumu), , KOEP (Kapsamlı Ortak Eylem Planı) ve Amerika Birleşik Devletlerinin liderlerine göre değişen tutumu da aktörler içerisinde alınmıştır. Nükleer Programın dünü, bugünü ve etkileri koşullar göz önünde bulundurularak anlatılmaya çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İRAN, Nükleer Program, ABD, KOEP, Güvenlik , Çıkar İlişkileri

ABSTRACT

The impact of Iran's nuclear program on external dynamics and actors has been tried to be analyzed under certain headings. The conservative and isolated effect of the Islamic revolution from the understanding of modernism of the Shah period was examined. In addition to the historical background, the changing attitudes of the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency), JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) and the leaders of the United States of America were also included among the actors. The past, present and effects of the Nuclear Program have been tried to be explained by taking the recent conditions into consideration.

Keywords: IRAN, Nuclear Program, the US, JCPOA, Security, Interest

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1. Introduction

The Nuclear Program in Iran and the impacts on the international sphere are such a complex and long standing issue. This relationship affects the balance of power in the region and raises some security concerns on the international globe.

The initiative actor was the US by Eisenhower with the Atoms for Peace project in the 1950's. The close relationship between the US and the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was the bedrock of nuclear power. The program, which initially progressed with goals such as energy production and research for peaceful purposes, has led to concerns in the international community over time. ¹ Iranians always claimed that the nuclear program was for peaceful purposes and civilian use.

The Obama administration signed a nuclear agreement called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with the P5 + 1 countries (USA, Russia, China, France, UK and Germany) in order to restrict Iran's nuclear program. ² This agreement aimed at the limitations of Iran's nuclear activities and the removal of some sanctions. However, the Trump administration withdrew from this agreement in 2018 and reimposed sanctions on Iran. Two of the president's stances and ideology shaped Iran's nuclear program.

Iran aims to act main regional power in the Middle East. With this aim, developing military capabilities and continuing its nuclear program are the priorities of Iran. . Iran sees its nuclear program as a symbol of technological progress and national pride. ³ However, this situation leads to tensions with other actors in the region especially Israel and Saudi Arabia who are the closest to the US. ⁴

Resolution of the conflict depends on diplomacy, sanctions and regional security dynamics. Future developments will deeply affect the stance and position of Iran's nuclear program and the balance of power that is created in the security in the region.

2. Historical Context

The US and Iran have not always had a wicked relationship. Once upon a time the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, was the closest ally of the United States. The Western phenomenon and modernist ideology of Shah was parallel with the interest of the US. Pahlavi introduced newness according to plans of modernization in Iran with interaction and cooperation with some

¹Iran-Iraq War and the Nuclear Deal, Tabatabai-Samuel, p. 159.

²Iran: Politics, Gulf Security, and U.S. Policy, Katzman, p. 22.

³Nuclear Proliferation: The Islamic Republic of Iran, Bagdat, p. 309.

⁴Nuclear Proliferation in the Middle East: Iran and Israel, Gawdat Bahgat, p 25.

Western states and companies.⁵ The most influential initiative was the Nuclear Program of Iran with the assistance of the West. This initiative was the bedrock of the Nuclear Program which created concern about national security to the international globe. With the assistance of the West, the Atomic Center of Tehran University and a reactor established in Iran in 1960.⁶ The Shah's nuclear program initially began with US support under the "Atoms for Peace" program.⁷ Within this framework of this program, a research reactor and hot cell laboratories for radioactive materials were purchased in Tehran. Especially, France and Germany signed agreements which were initiated by the US, to provide Iran with enriched uranium, nuclear reactors and research centers.⁸

The Shah was also determined to develop national nuclear technology which led to creation of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) in 1974. Iran purchased yellowcake from South Africa and financed an enrichment facility. The Shah signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968, the agreement ratified in 1970 to accelerate Iran's national nuclear program.⁹ The Shah demanded the free zone of nuclear weapons in the Middle East (MENWFZ) which would be sustained until the overthrow of Pahlavi.¹⁰ During the Shah time, Iran and Israel had the closest relationship except the US in the case of security issues. Political, economical and mutual interest relationships existed among the allies.¹¹

The Islamic Revolution which was led by Ayatollah Khomeini was the turning point of Iran in an ideological way in 1979. Ayatollah Khomeini stopped the nuclear program, believing that nuclear weapons were against the basic principles of Islam.¹² Almost every Western state suspended the relations with Iran then and cut the assistance on the nuclear program. The 1980's Iran, restarted the program which was stopped by the Islamic sensitivity of Khomeini. The loneliness of Iran created the search for uranium accelerated and exiled Iranian nuclear scientists have been encouraged to return to the country. The West turned their faces to Iran in any case. Iran mostly looked for assistance from Russia and China. However, under the US pressure, China has stopped nuclear aid to Iran.¹³

The period of 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war was another conclusion of the regime change. It happened after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Saddam Hussein aimed to weaken the regime,

⁵ Nuclear Proliferation: The Islamic Republic of Iran, Bagdat, p. 308.

⁶ Nuclear Proliferation: The Islamic Republic of Iran, Bagdat, p. 308.

⁷ Gawdat Bahgat, p 31.

⁸ Gawdat Bahgat, p 31.

⁹ Nuclear Proliferation: The Islamic Republic of Iran, Bagdat, p. 309.

¹⁰ Nuclear Proliferation: The Islamic Republic of Iran, Bagdat, p. 309.

¹¹ Nader Entessar, "Israel and Iran's National Security," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 27 (2004): 1-19.

¹² Nuclear Proliferation: The Islamic Republic of Iran, Bagdat, p. 309.

¹³ Nuclear Proliferation: The Islamic Republic of Iran, Bagdat, p. 310.

secure his power and capture the oil in the south east of Iran. ¹⁴ The war ended with great losses for both sides and resulted as revision of the revolution in Iran. They believed that the international community had abandoned Iran during the war and international law was just a piece of paper which served the allies. The first distrust of Iran occurred in the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council. ¹⁵

The chemical weapons that Iraq used in the war influenced Iran's decisions to continue the national nuclear program. ¹⁶ The huge losses convert Iran into nuclear power. Iran, which was isolated by the international sphere during and after the war, understood the importance of developing nuclear weapons to imply deterrence policy. They believed that the international community treated them unfairly during the war and international institutions were unreliable and played a significant role in the trust among them. ¹⁷ The fall of Iraq and the US presence in the region had increased concerns of Iran in isolation and also it increased the benefits of the nuclear option. Iran sees itself under constant threat from external forces and needs military self-confidence. Additionally, some Iranian officials have stated that withdrawing from the NPT could be an option.

3. The Role of the IAEA

The IAEA monitors the nuclear facilities of its member countries and tries to prevent the use of nuclear materials for military purposes. It works under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which was created to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons while encouraging the spread of nuclear energy for civilian purposes. The IAEA signs safeguards agreements with countries that are party to the NPT, these agreements made for a transparent process between sides. Plus, Additional Protocol developed by the increasing IAEA's targeting ability to secret nuclear activities such as the Iranian case. ¹⁸ The relationship started with the Iranian resistance group. They revealed two secret facilities which were in Natanz and Arak. The enrichment of uranium and production of plutonium were the main actions in facilities. ¹⁹ Iran initially constructed cooperation beyond regular safeguards, and later Iran denied access to some key facilities and did not fully cooperate with the IAEA's questions. ²⁰ IAEA accused Iran for violating the NPT safeguards because of the reluctant behavior of Iran. This accusation led to Iran in the desk of the UN Security Council.

¹⁴ Iran-Iraq War and the Nuclear Deal, Tabatabai-Samuel, p. 160.

¹⁵ Iran-Iraq War and the Nuclear Deal, Tabatabai-Samuel, p. 168.

¹⁶ Unequal Contest: Iranian Nuclear Proliferation Between Economic and Value Symmetry, Parsi-Yetiv, p 333.

¹⁷ Iran-Iraq War and the Nuclear Deal, Tabatabai-Samuel, p. 172.

¹⁸ Iran's Nuclear Program: Recent Developments, Squassoni, p 6.

¹⁹ Iran and the IAEA, Adler, p 1.

²⁰ Iran and the IAEA, Adler, p 2.

The UN Security Council had to impose four rounds of the sanctions in order to suspend the enrichment process.²¹ The cooperation and monitoring were the other requirements that Iran needed to comply. Despite these sanctions, Iran continued to enrich uranium and reduced its cooperation with the IAEA. In a 2010 report, the IAEA stated that Iran was obstructing the agency's work.²²

4. The JCPOA (2015)

The JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) was established for the constraints of the Iranian nuclear program, increasing transparency and preventing acquiring nuclear weapons. The deal also aims to control Iran's uranium enrichment activities, the number of centrifuges, enriched uranium stockpile and key nuclear facilities such as the Arak heavy water reactor.²³

The IAEA had a great role in the deal. Monitoring Iran, compliance with the measures are the responsibilities of the IAEA. The sanctions will be lifted or facilitated by the proportion of the comply with the measures.²⁴ The rate of enrichment of uranium must be at the level of the IAEA determined. Additional centrifuges were suspended. Heavy water reactor in Arak became inactive and redesign of the reactor was accepted. The enriched uranium stockpile was limited to 300 kg. The enrichment activities in Fordo were suspended. And finally Iran had to agree to the temporary implementation of the Additional Protocol, which increases the IAEA ability to monitor and gather information.²⁵

The JCPOA envisions the gradual lifting of economic sanctions on Iran. However, some sanctions, especially which related to the missile program and terrorism would remain. UNSC 2231 calls for the gradual lifting of nuclear-related economic sanctions on Iran, along with the implementation of the JCPOA. The lifting of sanctions aims to enable Iran to reintegrate into the international trade and financial system.²⁶ However, this decision does not cover sanctions on other issues, such as its ballistic missile program. The agreement has allowed Iran to access frozen oil revenues and rejoin international trade.²⁷ The agreement started to be implemented in 2016. According to the perspectives of Iran, the agreement aims for Iran to take rightful place in the international community and economically recover. The agreement was criticized by the non lifting of all the sanctions and the US implementations. The Resolution 2231 invalidates all the provisions before the resolution on Iran's nuclear program.²⁸

²¹ Iran and the IAEA, Adler, p 1.

²² Iran and the IAEA, Adler, p 6.

²³ Iran and the IAEA, Adler, p 7.

²⁴ Iran and the IAEA, Adler, p 7.

²⁵ Iran and the IAEA, Adler, p 7.

²⁶ Iran-Iraq War and the Nuclear Deal, Tabatabai-Samuel, p. 175

²⁷ Iran and the IAEA, Adler, p 6.

²⁸ Iran-Iraq War and the Nuclear Deal, Tabatabai-Samuel, p. 175

We should know that there is a mechanism in case of change of relations in the nuclear program and its called snapback mechanism. It provides that the P5+1 countries have the authority to automatically impose sanctions again if Iran violates its JCPOA obligations.²⁹ The resolution has strengthened its role in monitoring Iran's nuclear activities and verifying compliance with the JCPOA. Iran believes that international law and institutions serve the interests of superpowers. The Iran-Iraq war was one of the reasons for this belief.³⁰ The sustainability of and successful implementation of the JCPOA requires the West to make empathy in case of security concerns of Iran and threat perception externally.³¹

6. The US and Iran's Nuclear Program

The US Administration is divided into two parts according to the president's ideology and perspective. Firstly the Obama Administration stated that the possibility of the limitation of the Nuclear Program via diplomacy and a possible outcome of reconstruction of the US -Iran relationship.³² In 2009, President Obama wrote letters to Iran's supreme leader (Ayatollah Ali Khamenei) outlining a philosophy of establishing contact with Iran.³³ In his speech to the "Muslim World" in Cairo on 4 June 2009, he acknowledged the US role in the overthrow of Mossadegh and stated that Iran has the right to peaceful nuclear energy if it complies with its responsibilities under the NPT.³⁴ The Obama administration focused on finding a diplomatic solution to Iran's nuclear program, and these efforts led to the signing of the "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action" (JCPOA) nuclear agreement between Iran and six negotiating powers in July 2015.³⁵

The new administration of Donald Trump criticized the JCPOA and they stated that the deal had to withdraw. This behavior of Trump has increased distrust of the United States in Iran. The Trump administration has imposed new sanctions on Iran due to its other activities, such as its missile program.³⁶ The withdrawal of the US from the JCPOA raises many concerns about impact on Iran's nuclear program and its regional implications. President Donald Trump's critical stance towards the JCPOA during his presidency which includes 2016-2020, has created uncertainty about the future of the agreement.³⁷ He defined the agreement as a bad deal. Iran has stated that the agreement is based on an international consensus and cannot be abolished by a unilateral decision such as Trumps. Also the Iranian officials criticized the efforts of the US to

²⁹ Iran-Iraq War and the Nuclear Deal, Tabatabai-Samuel, p. 175

³⁰ Iran-Iraq War and the Nuclear Deal, Tabatabai-Samuel, p. 176

³¹ Iran-Iraq War and the Nuclear Deal, Tabatabai-Samuel, p. 184.

³² Iran: Politics, Gulf Security, and U.S. Policy, Katzman, p. 36.

³³ Iran: Politics, Gulf Security, and U.S. Policy, Katzman, p. 36.

³⁴ Iran: Politics, Gulf Security, and U.S. Policy, Katzman, p. 36.

³⁵ Iran: Politics, Gulf Security, and U.S. Policy, Katzman, p. 36.

³⁶ Iran-Iraq War and the Nuclear Deal, Tabatabai-Samuel, p. 177.

³⁷ Iran-Iraq War and the Nuclear Deal, Tabatabai-Samuel, p. 152.

harm the deal and non lifting of all sanctions. Trump's Iran policy, unlike the Obama administration, took an approach to cancel the agreement and escalated tensions with Iran. This situation increased Iran's insecurity in the international arena and made its economic recovery difficult.

7. Conclusion

Iran's nuclear program has been a source of great concern to the international community. While Iran claims that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes, some countries and international organizations such as the US, suspect that Iran is trying to develop nuclear weapons. Iran always claimed that the development of its nuclear program is not for the weapons or military needs. The behavior of the US changed with President Obama and his administration. The Obama administration signed a nuclear agreement called the JCPOA with the P5+1 countries in order to restrict Iran's nuclear program. This agreement envisaged keeping Iran's nuclear activities within limitations and in return for the removal of some sanctions. However, the Trump administration criticized this agreement and withdrew the United States from the agreement in 2018. The Trump Administration has imposed various economic sanctions against Iran. Although these sanctions were facilitated in some areas during the Obama administration. The sanctions strengthened again during the Trump administration. This situation negatively affected the Iranian economy and reduced Iran's support for the nuclear agreement.³⁸

It is stated that Iran is trying to increase its influence in the region in order to ensure its own security, and this situation causes tension with other actors in the region. The self help system is the policy imposed by the Western states on Iran.³⁹ After the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the US and Iran relations were tense until the Obama Administration. Obama chose diplomacy unlike Trump who choose sanctions and threats.

The closest ally of the US is Israel since the existence declaration. Obviously, the tense relationship of two opposition affected Israel behavior. The tension between Iran and Israel is one of the most important problems in the Middle East. Iran does not accept the existence of Israel, and according to the statements of Israeli officials, Iran is worried about being in a position to threaten Israel by obtaining nuclear weapons.⁴⁰

In conclusion, Iran's nuclear program and international relations are a complex and multidimensional issue. The policies of the international community, especially the USA, towards Iran are of great importance for stability and security in the region. Future developments

³⁸ Iran: Politics, Gulf Security, and U.S. Policy, Katzman, p. 33.

³⁹ Iran-Iraq War and the Nuclear Deal, Tabatabai-Samuel, p. 156.

⁴⁰ Iran's Nuclear Program and the Israeli-Iranian Rivalry in the Post Revolutionary Era, Rezaei-Cohen, p. 553.

will depend on many features, including Iran's nuclear program, the effects of sanctions, and the context of US-Iran relations.

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