



Navigating Engagement with Iran: Exploring US Strategies and Options: A Futuristic Scenario and Review

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Abstract— Although Iran is not at the level of power of China or Russia, it is considered a complex actor for the United States. The logic of the US policy towards Iran includes things such as gradually weakening Iran, preventing the increase of national financial resources, prohibiting foreign investment, postponing national development, intensifying inefficiencies, etc. Nevertheless, there are many challenges regarding the implementation of US policies to confront Iran. In this study, some of the most important of them include challenges related to Iran's nuclear programs, challenges related to the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East and issues related to Iran with the involvement of Russia and China, as well as challenges related to proxy war of Hamas-Israel and Iran's role in it will be examined.



Keywords— Iran, Proxy war, U.S foreign policy, domestic politics, regional politics

I. THE CHALLENGES OF THE UNITED STATES REGARDING IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAMS

Several obstacles have been created in the path of nuclear negotiations and agreement, which have complicated Washington's calculations regarding the negotiation. The protests in Iran, the war in Ukraine, the doubts and inaction of the European Union and the uncertainty of the United States about the future of Iran-Russia relations were also other reasons that have made the United States hesitant about the benefits of the agreement (Guldemann, 2023).

One of the important challenges that have arisen regarding the nuclear negotiations with Iran is that a deep rift and division has been created between European countries and the United States during the Trump administration. The unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA was strongly condemned by the country's allies, the European countries, and this caused differences between the foreign policy of the European countries and the United States regarding interaction with Iran (Batmanghelidj & Rouhi, 2023).

Another important challenge for the US government regarding Iran's nuclear programs and nuclear negotiations with this country is that the scope of mistrust between Washington and Tehran has greatly increased. By unilaterally withdrawing from the JCPOA, the United States increased distrust towards the Iranian government. Also, the suspicious actions of Iran and the increase in the amount of uranium enrichment by Iran have also caused an increase in distrust in the United States government. In addition, the existence of some internal political considerations of both countries means that tangible steps in the field of pushing back Iran's nuclear program are extremely challenging. According to the progress of this program, many officials and analysts believe that the 2015 nuclear agreement cannot be revived.

The United States is also seeking Iran's commitment to improve its cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency, but progress has been spotty.

Among other challenges related to Iran's nuclear programs, we can refer to the numerous reports of the International Atomic Energy Agency. In some of them, the agency has

claimed that no progress has been made in resolving "remaining safeguards issues" related to the agency's long-term investigation into Iran's nuclear activities. In this regard, Iran's obstruction of the International Atomic Energy Agency's inspectors' access to some of Iran's nuclear facilities can be raised as a very important concern and challenge for the United States government.

The challenges of the United States regarding Israel-Hamas proxy wars and Iran's role in them

Considering the geostrategic and geoeconomic importance of the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, the United States has made serious efforts to be present and secure its interests in this region. The occurrence of revolutions and popular movements in the Arab world forced American leaders to adopt different approaches to these changes. One of the policies adopted by the United States is resorting to proxy wars (which is an important factor in redefining the regional order), which is aimed at weakening Iran (Wertman & Kaunert, 2023).

In this regard, due to the high political, economic and human costs for both sides, the United States and Iran are trying to attack the other side without entering into a full-scale war by supporting third parties and governments. The war between Israel and Hamas, which are supported by the United States and Iran respectively, is actually a proxy war between Iran and the United States (Kabat, 2022).

For years, Iran has funded and trained various proxy groups throughout the region, including Hamas, and has used its connections with these groups to counter Israel and the United States and exert influence throughout the Middle East. However, it denies its direct involvement in the activities of these groups. Iran's failure to withdraw its support to Hamas and the widening scope of this support, especially in recent years, has become one of the most important challenges for the United States to confront Iran.

Another challenge of this proxy war for the United States is the prolongation of this war. In fact, despite spending a lot of money, this war has not been able to fully secure the interests of the United States. The erosion of the Hamas-Israel proxy war and Israel's inability to make progress in the field in Gaza despite heavy bombing and attacks in this area, along with the field movements of Hamas forces against Israel and American bases in the region, are other factors of concern and challenges for the powers that support Israel, especially the United States. Especially since the United States has faced unprecedented protests by its people against Israel.

The continuation of the Hamas-Israel proxy war, in addition to being considered a humanitarian, moral and strategic disaster, not only harms the long-term security of Israel and has unimaginable human costs for the Palestinians, but also

the central interests of the United States in the Middle East, in Ukraine threatens the Indo-Pacific order in Washington's competition with China. Therefore, this issue can also be considered as one of the challenges of this proxy war for the United States.

II. THE CHALLENGES OF THE UNITED STATES REGARDING THE GEOPOLITICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE MIDDLE EAST WITH THE INVOLVEMENT OF RUSSIA, CHINA AND IRAN

The United States is one of the actors that is trying to develop its comprehensive control in the geopolitical region of the Middle East. In this regard, the triangle of Iran, Russia, and China, with the aim of securing regional goals and interests, have used their capabilities in creating an anti-hegemon strategic alliance in order to prevent the realization of the goals and unilateralist policies of the United States. In this regard, these three countries, while opposing the imposition of American global hegemony, are taking steps to contain the United States and in this way form the desired regional arrangements and order with the aim of guaranteeing and securing their regional goals and policies (Aras & Kardaş, 2021).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, China has become the biggest political and geostrategic problem of the United States. On the one hand, this country is the main trading partner of the United States, and on the other hand, it is the only world power that is considered the ideological enemy of the United States, whose nuclear capability is not under the direct control of the United States (Stanzel, 2022). These features have turned China into a cause of fear and concern and the biggest security problem of the United States. Now, the interference of Russia and China in the affairs of the Middle East and issues related to Iran has made the United States' confrontation with the issues of this region, especially the issues related to Iran, more complicated.

The two countries China and Russia have to cooperate and get closer to each other in order to prevent American influence in the Middle East region. The holding of joint exercises between China and Russia and members of Shanghai since 2005 on an almost wide level with advanced equipment along with the activation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS are examples of anti-hegemonic efforts and policies of these countries against the United States. The emergence and creation of an alliance between Iran, China and Russia can challenge the supremacy of the United States (Shehu, 2021). The goal of Russia and China is to have non-destructive and destructive anti-space weapons for use during a possible war in the

future. Therefore, if there is going to be a war in the future with the participation of Russia or China with the United States, both countries welcome the attack on the satellites of the United States and its allies if necessary to destroy any privilege related to military, civilian or commercial systems. Military reforms in both countries in the last few years indicate an increase in the focus on creating operational forces with the aim of attacking space and information systems along with military operations in other areas. With the emergence of China as the world's largest economy, the revival of Russia as a military power, and the fearless resistance of countries such as Iran to the economic aggression of the United States, the ability of the United States and its allies to dominate the Middle East region is rapidly decreasing.

By using an aggressive and unilateralist foreign policy, it has challenged many structures and even international agreements. Increasing trade tariffs and economic war against China and Russia, charging double defense costs from regional allies in the Middle East and unilaterally withdrawing from international agreements such as nuclear and missile disarmament agreements with Russia and withdrawing from the nuclear agreement with Iran are the cases that can be analyzed in order to curb Iran's economic-military power in the Middle East.

The set of threatening actions of the United States has made the strategy of confronting and opposing American unilateralism in the Middle East become a common point of Beijing-Moscow-Tehran policy towards Washington. China and Russia are challenging the hegemonic power of America. The holding of joint military and security maneuvers of the two countries at the regional level and the establishment of international organizations to contain and balance the power of the United States and NATO can be seen in this direction (El-Rafie, 2023). Also, the three countries of Iran, Russia and China have started to organize a joint naval exercise by creating a new front against the United States. This exercise shows that these three countries are shaping regional equations and order in the Middle East, and the influence of America in this region is decreasing. Iran has established its position as an independent power in the region and has increased its diplomatic bargaining power and acting ability at the regional and international levels. Iran was also able to attract the support of Russia and China and show its role as one of the key players in the region.

In the end, it should be said, the actions and resistance of Iran, Russia and China and other countries dissatisfied with the current situation to neutralize the hegemonic plans of America and the West also show that Washington can no longer rely on its power as in the past. The mentioned cases

are the important challenges of the United States in the field of geopolitical perspective of the Middle East as well as the confrontation with Iran.

III. THE POTENTIAL OPTIONS OF THE UNITED STATES IN INTERACTION AND CONFRONTATION WITH IRAN

In general, the potential options of the United States in confronting Iran can be classified in the form of four scenarios, which include the following:

1) Intensification of economic sanctions against Iran

After the victory of the Islamic revolution in Iran, Iran has always been sanctioned by the United States, and the most severe economic sanctions can be considered related to Trump's presidency (Bajoghli et al., 2024). The results of using this strategy have shown that the pressures caused by these sanctions have only made the Iranian people poorer and have not been able to make a noticeable change in Iran's macro policies. Therefore, it cannot be considered as an efficient and successful strategy and used as an ideal option in the future.

2) Manipulating public opinion through media tools in order to isolate Iran in the world

Rejecting a government, isolating it, and refusing to engage with it, in order to punish or weaken said government, or to try to force it to change its policies, inevitably involves self-denial. Therefore, adopting a strategy based on rejecting and isolating Iran or punishing and economic sanctions cannot be an optimal and efficient strategy to confront Iran in order to change its nuclear policies and programs. Therefore, interaction and negotiation can be introduced as an efficient strategy. Previously, in 2015, the US government was able to persuade Iran to accept the nuclear agreement and sign the agreement by using this strategy. It is expected that the use of a strategy based on interaction and negotiation can help to secure other interests of the United States while solving the existing challenges regarding Iran's nuclear programs. Therefore, the strategy based on manipulating public opinion through media tools and isolating Iran cannot be a comprehensive solution to deal with Iran in the future.

3) The confrontation between the people and the government of Iran and the creation of social chaos

Any unrest, disturbance and social chaos that has occurred in Iran for various reasons has always been approved and supported by the United States (Karkazis & Koutsouradi, 2023). In fact, the United States welcomes the confrontation between the Iranian people and the government. But the common reality of all these unrest and social chaos is their temporary nature. The government of Iran quickly

controlled these unrest by using various tools and even used them for propaganda against the United States and Israel. Therefore, this strategy cannot be introduced as an efficient and desirable option to confront the Iranian government.

4) Pressure diplomacy and bringing to the negotiating table again for a new round of negotiations

The political-military challenge between Iran and the United States during the past three decades has potentially had the necessary capacity to intensify changes in the process and irreversible challenges in the structure of the international system (Bassiri Tabrizi & Kienzle, 2020). Perhaps for this reason, despite extensive psychological operations and a lot of propaganda in public opinion, each of the main actors of the international scene found their ultimate interests in the adjustment of hostilities. The uncontrolled transformation of this potential force into an actual force will result in irreparable costs for the United States and the international system. Because in terms of geopolitics, geostrategy and geo-economics, Iran has the possibility to initiate dangerous measures in the region and at the international level if it sees a serious threat against its vital interests and values. The trend of developments in this direction will not be favorable for the United States in any way. Therefore, designing and implementing a new win-win game is an efficient strategy that will be achieved through dialogue. This approach is considered to be a wiser choice considering all the conditions and atmosphere prevailing on world politics and also the internal characteristics of the two countries.

IV. STRATEGIES AND SOLUTIONS OF THE UNITED STATES TO CONFRONT IRAN

The issue of nuclear negotiations creates a kind of decisive deterrence in the direction of Iran's military and political ambitions. In fact, negotiations are the most reasonable approach to confront Iran. In order to negotiate and talk with the Iranian government, it is suggested to use an incentive bargaining strategy. Bargaining strategy is encouraging a bilateral process with decisive pressure, threats and warnings, and applying pressure in different directions to influence the other party to accept the will or last offer of that country. Persuasive bargaining does not include the threat of harming the other party in case of failure to surrender. In this type of bargaining, threats and concessions are placed against the other party at the same time. This strategy helps that country to use these options to its advantage.

Another suggested strategy and solutions for confronting Iran is to increase Iran's cost to defend its national interest priorities in the security-defense structure of the Middle East. In this regard, the United States can try to get closer to

Iran's security borders, especially in the Persian Gulf, by realizing more Hebrew-Arab-oriented convergence approaches. Also, intensifying espionage activities against Iran's security, military and scientific structures can also be a way to increase Iran's security and defense costs.

Placing Iran in a tight spot by limiting the scope of this country's influence in the region and controlling and restraining Iran's role as a critical regional power are other strategies that can help reduce the complications of the United States' confrontation with Iran.

Another suggested strategy for confronting Iran is to force this country to align its behavior with the policies of the United States. This work can be done in a soft way by attracting the opinion of Iranian politicians and showing the goodwill of the United States. Also, it is possible to use policies based on stopping and containing by creating a delay in the development of nuclear programs for this purpose. In line with this grand strategy, expanding the security and economic relations of the United States with the regional governments of Iran's rivals, especially Saudi Arabia, can also be a way forward.

By adopting its aggressive national security strategies against Iran, the United States can limit Iran's interests in the international system so that it can increase its interests and eventually become the top hegemon in the international system.

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