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**THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR DEAL
IN THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S FOREIGN POLICY**



Geopolitical Report

The Iranian Nuclear Deal in the Trump Administration's Foreign Policy

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Executive Summary

The Iranian nuclear issue has been at the core of the International political agenda for decades. The Lausanne agreement tried to put an end to the matter by stipulating a common ground between Iranian and Western interests.

The possibility of Iran acquiring the bomb has already been acknowledged, given Iranian interests in the Middle East and its rivalry with Saudi Arabia.

With a possible dismantling of the treaties, a nuclear arms race is foreseeable given the interests at stake. Saudi Arabia could be the first one to seek for unconventional capabilities.

“Tearing up” the Nuclear Deal would jeopardize the peace processes in the region and put in danger not only the Western World but also the already precarious situation in the area.

The third volume of *Geopolitical Report* written by Francesco Pisanò and published by ASRIE Association in partnership with Notizie Geopolitiche aims at analysing the geopolitical consequences of the revision of the Lausanne agreement and the nuclear race in the Middle East if this agreement signed by US State Secretary John Kerry will be dismantled. In addition, this report focuses the attention on the Iranian principal enemies and their ability to get the atomic bomb, an opportunity which will threaten the Middle Eastern region with direct consequences to Europe and the West.

The Report “The Iranian Nuclear Deal in the Trump Administration’s Foreign Policy” is one of the papers published by ASRIE Associazione with the purpose of promote the current political, economic, security, socio-cultural problems and events which could affect the world of International Relations and the cooperation between the countries. The author wrote this report collecting and analysing open sources.

Author

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Introduction

Since the earliest stages of its presidential campaign, President-elect Donald J. Trump has strongly criticized the Lausanne agreements, which put an end of a decade-long political diatribe between the United States and Iran over the nuclear issue. Calling them the most incompetently negotiated, the 45° occupant of the White House has several times already promised their dismantling; a future scenario which has already been welcomed by states, such as Israel, which saw the talks as a possible geopolitical rapprochement between Washington and Teheran. The question inevitably arises as to whether the collapse of the Iran Nuclear Deal can represent the right step to undertake in order to assure a smooth and future peace process in the Middle East.

The geopolitical role of Iran in the Middle East and its influence over fundamental governmental and non-state actors, such as Syria and Hezbollah, can no longer be ignored; the Ayatollah's government's help is crucial in order to achieve a durable stabilization of the area.

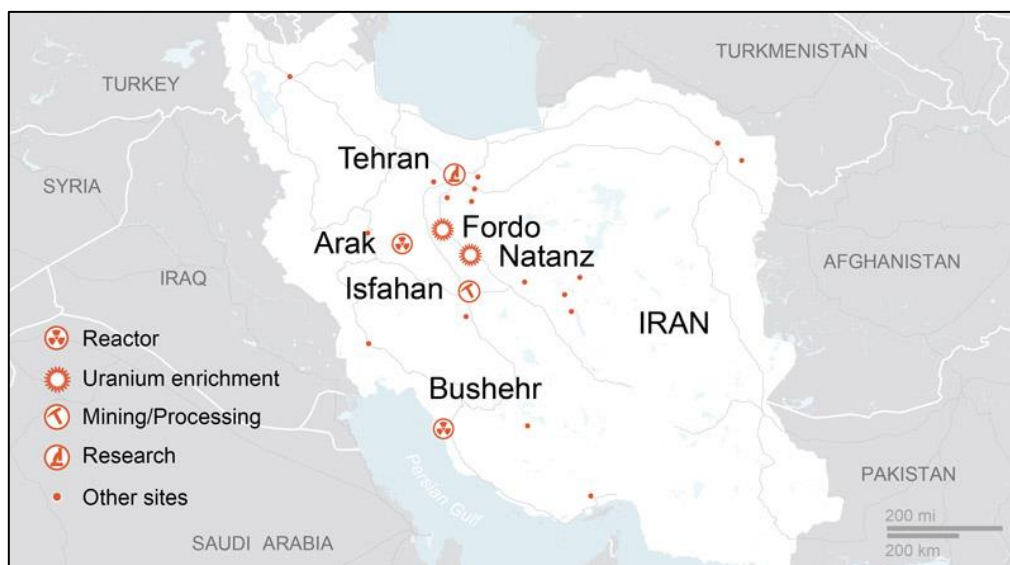


Figure 1 Iran's nuclear sites (Source: Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

The Iranian issue: an overview

The Iranian issue has been present on the International agenda for decades. Being the nuclear a “doable technology”, which therefore can be used both for civilian and military purposes, it might be difficult to establish how and under which conditions it might be used by states and governments. The process to achieve nuclear-powered power for pacific or army purposes is the same, what it changes is the time and the effort which must be put on it. It might be problematic for states and international organizations to control the development and progression of the nuclear plan and the consequences of a Western-hostile country acquiring unconventional armaments might be devastating. This is why, in many cases, the International Community has tolerated friendly governments’ nuclear schemes, such as France or the United Kingdom, or even the attempt of the Italian government to become a permanent member of the “nuclear club”, and has condemned and, in some occasions even fought, opposition leaders; if it is, in fact, unrealistic to predict a nuclear escalation between Paris and London, given the current political scenario, the Iranian political aims are often questionable and unclear.

The Teheran’s nuclear plan is, contrary to what often believed, an old issue. Starting in the early 50s under the Shah’s regime, it was supported and financially endorsed by the Eisenhower administration¹. In those years, in fact, the Pahlavi regime was seen as a precious ally, a crucial Western asset, in a very complicated area; fundamental to limit the spread of the Communist ideology, always in the eyes of the Kennan’s foreign policy of Containment². It was, therefore, in the interest of the Western power to build a durable and stable alliance with the Iranian dictator, providing its government with important financial investment and overlooking its disastrous internal politics, which so poorly took advantage of the important oil revenues and posed the Iranian society under a climate of terror. The collapse of the Western-friendly regime, following the

¹ Kibaroglu. M (2007), Iran’s Nuclear Ambition from a Historical prospective and the attitude of the West, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 20, N.2

² For further information see Author Unknown (2011), A Conversation with Kennan’s biographer, *The Economist* [retrieved at <http://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2011/11/quick-study-george-kennan%E2%80%99s-cold-war-policy-containment> on the 24th of April]

1979 Islamic Revolution, changed completely the political landscape of the region, turning Teheran against following and becoming its strongest nemesis in the region.

Notwithstanding this, even though the Iranian attitude towards the West changed radically since 1979, it might be wrong to assume the devoted nuclear interest of the new extremist regime. As often acknowledged by many experts in the field, Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the 1979 riots, was strongly against the atomic device, seeing it as adverse to the Quran³.

As a matter of fact, the Iranian government has always claimed the pacific need for the nuclear power; many have, however, doubted that, considering the current geopolitical interests of Teheran in the Middle East and the relevant oil resources at its disposal. As it has already been highlighted, in an anarchical system, where no higher authority exists⁴, trust is a fundamental political pillar.

The obsession, therefore, of the Iranian government for the acquisition of the nuclear capability cannot simply be minimized by a “hard power” necessity, but it resembles more the Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. The model is fundamental to understand the different steps and purposes why nations seek the nuclear weaponry: survival deterrence, prestige, security/hegemony, and superpower status⁵. Generally speaking, the Iranian aims are not different from those of any other nuclear states⁶.

³ Porter. G (2014), When the Ayatollah said No to the Nukes, *Foreign Policy*

⁴ The “realist” concept of the International system argues the importance of States as main actors in the global arena. The absence of a higher authority characterises the anarchical system, obliging countries to ensure their basic needs and security. Among the literature that can be found here about the topic, see Kenneth. W (2008), *Realism and International Politics*, Routledge

⁵ Strain. R. F (1996), *Discerning Iran’s Nuclear Strategy: An examination of motivations, strategic cultures and rationality*, Air War College

⁶ Dorraj. M (2006), Behind Iran’s nuclear pursuit, *Pace Review: A Journal of Social Science*

The 2015 Nuclear Deal

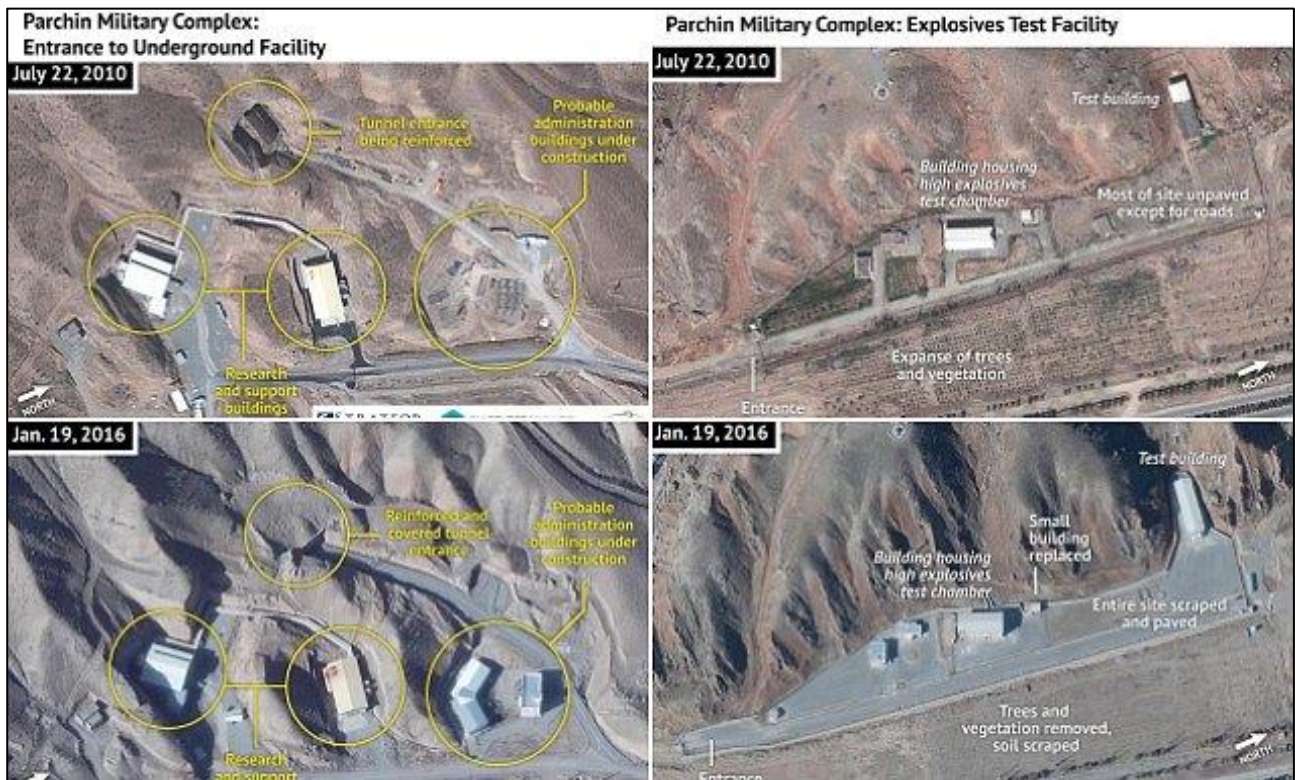


Figure 2 Parchin Military Complex (Source: Daily Mail)

The Lausanne agreement came after a period of high political tension between the Iranian and American governments. The negotiations, which were signed in Switzerland in April 2015, were conducted by the P5+1 group (the nuclear powers plus Germany) and Teheran and saw also the important participation of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini, which symbolized the role of the all Union in the deals. The main points define the number of the centrifuges and technological devices the Iranian government will be allowed to own and deploy. Moreover, the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) will be allowed to control, over a period of 25 years, the Iranian Nuclear facilities, including the secret Parchin base, where, according to the US Intelligence Community, Teheran conducted for years illegal nuclear plans. In exchange, the previous financial sanction imposed by the International

Community, will be lifted, in order to help the Iranian economy and establish an initial partnership among the parties⁷.

The importance of this agreement can only be understood in the light of the current geopolitical scenario that shapes today's Middle Eastern arena.

Even though the deal has given the Iranian leadership political legitimization, it is also true that it has solved the critical situation, which threatened to destabilize the region.

The Middle Eastern affairs have been, over the last few years, highly informed by the "Cold War" between the Sunni State of Saudi Arabia and the Ayatollah's regime. Putting forward two different religious affiliations and two different understandings of the International Relations, the two States found themselves, especially after the collapse of the Pahlavi Dynasty and the rise of the Shia extremism at the exact opposite of the geopolitical table. The Shia Iranian government has attempted to fuel the Shia minority's resentment against the Sunni government in the south of Saudi Arabia, while Riyadh actively sponsored through individual donations important Sunni extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda and, in its earliest stages, the Islamic State. In these regards, Riccardo Redaelli highlights the importance also of the economic aspects to understand the climate of "cold conflict"⁸.

It must be not forgotten that Iran, as Israel, suffers from what it is known in International Relations as "Syndrome of Encirclement". It ultimately means, a deep and rooted sense of insecurity, which is derives from the certainty that all the surrounding states are enemies and represent an essential threat to the security of the Establishment. The protection of the conquered Islamic Republic, which was achieved after the struggles

⁷ Author Unknown, Iran: ecco I punti principali dell'accordo, *Ansa.it* [retrieved at http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/mondo/2015/04/02/iran-ecco-i-punti-principali-dellaccordo-di-losanna_232fc9e4-c3aa-4650-af40-fc91d4fe8378.html] on the 24th April]

⁸ Redaelli. R (2016), Sunniti vs Sciiti o Arabia Saudita vs Iran? Due narrative a confronto, *ISPI Online* [retrieved at <http://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/sunniti-vs-sciiti-o-arabia-saudita-vs-iran-due-narrative-confronto-14503>] on the 24th of April]

of the late 1970s, is of utmost importance. It is, possibly, the most vital foreign and domestic aim of the Republic.

The consequences of a possible dismantling of the Treaty

Therefore, the dismantling of the Lausanne Agreements might be appealing for those who believe that compromise with those who kidnapped and killed Americans, fuelled terrorist organizations and cells around the world, threatened to “wipe out the State of Israel”, is not possible. Surely, it would be welcomed by Netanyahu and those who would love to see a greater involvement of the United States in the region. Nonetheless, it is dangerous because, a possible invalidation of the treaties would represent a possible further deterioration among the actors, which could result in a future nuclear escalation. That can be understood, given the high sense of vulnerability in Iran. Unconventional arms are seen as the lesser of the two evils, given the important deterrence power they carry. As long as the diplomatic situation between the leadership is stable, there would be no reason for Teheran to continue their nuclear plan, as the International Community represents, at this stage, no existential threat to the State. However, a change in the political landscape would reawaken a sense of exposure and insecurity, which could steer the Iranian leadership to seek the weapon⁹.

Although it could also be argued that the importance of the weapon as a matter of “national matter”, which would improve the Iranian domestic sentiment as Middle Eastern stronghold against the Western World¹⁰, the geopolitical factor and the Iranian desire to become the regional most important player must not be underestimated.

In the case of a deterioration of the nuclear issue, it might be foreseen a possible attempt of the Saudi Arabia Royal Family to also acquire the unconventional weapon, to protect the reign from the Iranian aggressive foreign policy and renewed expansionism. This could be achieved by initiating a nuclear scheme or purchasing the warheads from other

⁹ Amuzegar. J (2006), Nuclear Iran: Perils and Prospects, *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XIII, N. 2

¹⁰ See Porter. G (2014) *Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iranian Nuclear Scare*, Just World Books, Virginia

countries (e.g. Pakistan). This scenario is highly improbable, given the Western immediate reaction and the loss of diplomatic ties with Washington and Brussels. Nonetheless, as it has already been shown, survival is the greatest aim of the government, which, before caring about political status and international recognition, must take care of the safety of its own citizens. Therefore, a threatened Riyadh could attempt to obtain the nuclear bomb, if the values of the State are believed to be at stake¹¹.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that both Saudi Arabia and Iran have signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the 1970 agreement, which aims to prevent the spread of atomic weapons and promotes cooperation for peaceful nuclear power. Under this treaty both states are forced not to seek the nuclear capability. Breaking this Treaty would create a possible precedent, which could encourage others to follow suit, sanctioning the death of the peaceful nuclear coexistence.

Nonetheless, it is unlikely that the Trump Administration, which, as mentioned before, spent most of its campaign calling for a complete overhaul of the deal, will eventually do it. There are many reasons. The first is the consequences, also mentioned in this analysis, of such a decision; the rearming of the Iranians and a possible nuclear arm race in the region. Moreover, Iran is crucial in the current fight against terrorism, providing vital Intelligence and military support on the ground; closing diplomatic ties would be a massive backlash for the US effort to eradicate the Islamic State. Moreover, it seems clear that no one else actually intends to invalidate the Treaty; if the White House did that, it would possibly find itself in a sort of international isolation¹².

Conclusions

The Iranian Nuclear Deal, as any other international deal does contain weaknesses and there still is room for improvement. Nonetheless, the idea of “tearing it up” is not only dangerous for the security of the Western World, but can have huge repercussions on

¹¹ Kaye. D. D, Wehrey. F (2007), A Nuclear Iran: The Reactions of Neighbours, *Survival*, 49:2

¹² For further information see Andelman. A. D (2017), Why Trump won't tear up Iran nuclear Deal, *CNN* [retrieved at <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/03/03/opinions/trump-iran-deal-andelman/> om the 24th of April]

the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern areas. The instability of the region can be solved only through cooperation and compromises and the Lausanne deal can represent a first important step in that direction. The assertions and intentions, although not so clear anymore, of President-elect Donald Trump, risk to jeopardize a long-lasting attempt to put an end to a dangerous situation which has concerned now seven different Presidential administrations.



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