

BABES-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY  
FACULTY OF EUROPEAN STUDIES

# DOCTORAL THESIS

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CLUJ-NAPOCA

2021

**THE GREAT POWERS' NUCLEAR DIPLOMACY TOWARD  
IRAN  
2003-2015  
From the “Grand Bargain” to the JCPOA**

**Summary**

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## ABSTRACT

This research aims to introduce exhaustive analysis of the diplomatic process between the Great Powers (the United States, Great Britain, France, China, the Russian Federation and Germany – referred to as the P5 + 1 group) and the Islamic Republic of Iran, process that led to the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), on July 14, 2015, an agreement that limits Iran's nuclear activity, by imposing the strictest international control regime carried out by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The actors involved in JCPOA welcomed this historic treaty, which was meant control Iran's nuclear operations and to make sure that it would be solely for civilian purpose, and it was also the corner stone for a fundamental change regarding this issue. The Great Powers have unanimously agreed when signing the JCPOA “that full implementation of this Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action will positively contribute to regional and international peace and security”. The research is structured in five sections and includes a set of annexes, an index of terms and some tables and figures representative of the negotiation process. The analyzed period extends between 2003 and 2015 – time limits that represent the first nuclear diplomatic initiative, respectively the year of signing the JCPOA.

**Keywords:** Great Powers, Iran, Nuclear Diplomacy, JCPOA, Grand Bargain, Nuclear Non-Proliferation, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), NPT, International Relations.

## SECTION I

The historic “agreement known as the *Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action* (JCPOA)”<sup>1</sup> signed in 2015 between P5+1 (United States, France, United Kingdom, China, Russia plus Germany) and Islamic Republic was meant to stop the Iranian path toward the nuclear bomb. At the time of the writing this research the US has withdrew unilaterally from the nuclear accord, during Donald Trump administration, in May, 2018, and Iran gradually began to violate the provisions of the JCPOA, increasing the stockpile of its fissile materials and enriching uranium up to 60%. The current US administration, led by new President Joe Biden, is working hard to return to compliance and to revive the Iranian nuclear deal. The nuclear deal with Iran is not just a tool meant to curb the Islamic Republic's path toward the nuclear capability, but also might become a **corner stone** for a global prospect of international non-proliferation and can complete the puzzle of nuclear debates, as long as it is “the strongest non-proliferation agreement ever negotiated”<sup>2</sup>. The decade spent at the

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<sup>1</sup> \*\*\* (2015), “The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) at a Glance”, *Arms Control Association*. <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/JCPOA-at-a-glance>. [May 9, 2018].

<sup>2</sup> The White House (2015), “Remarks of the President on the Iran Nuclear Deal”, August 5. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/08/05/remarks-President-iran-nuclear-deal>. [October 5,

negotiations table it is a proof of resilience and will, as well as the best example of diplomatic good practice and multilateralism.

This research is an exhaustive examination of the negotiations regarding Iranian controversial nuclear activities and it seeks to provide a detailed knowledge of this protracted process. A significant breakthrough was achieved in Geneva in November 2013, after several years of inconclusive rounds of negotiations – in Vienna, Geneva, Istanbul, Baghdad, Moscow and Almaty – between Islamic Republic of Iran and the P5+1 countries. One of the most important questions related to these negotiations relates to the link among Iran’s nuclear activities and its foreign policy, respectively its national security. Since the signing of the JCPOA, Iran’s policy makers have increasingly given the public impression that nuclear deal is a segment of a wider foreign policy rethinking, aimed at ending Iran’s international isolationism. UNSC sanctions have had a profound negative consequence on Iran’s infrastructure and domestic economy, especially during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s presidency, when the former Iranian president took a hostile stance on the West. His posture not only that endangered the regional and international stability, but also created a negative perception within the Iranian society hence in 2013, a conservative candidate with a more pragmatic approach has won the presidential race. Hassan Rouhani’s victory represented a cornerstone that shifted Tehran’s nuclear diplomacy in favor of a new flexible and pragmatic approach that was comparatively more amenable to strike a deal at the negotiations table. The early signs of such a development emerged during the 2013 Presidential debate, between Saeed Jalili, Hassan Rouhani and Ali Akbar Velayati. Both, Rouhani and Velayati, accused the former for failing to cause a breakthrough in the ongoing (at that time) nuclear negotiations, from his position of Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator. Promising to bring “good nuclear news”<sup>3</sup> during his first one hundred days of his presidency, the than-candidate Rouhani openly critiqued the Mahmoud Ahmadinejad-led nuclear policy, as being basically and economic disaster caused by the comprehensive international sanctions. Rouhani appointed Javad Zarif as Foreign Minister and transferred toward him the “nuclear file from the Supreme National Security Council”<sup>4</sup>.

The **purpose of this research** is to present and create a perspective on how the Iranian nuclear program emerged as an international issue, what actions has been taken to solved it and on nuclear agreement advantages. This thesis is designed to review the antecedents, to analyze the JCPOA and to assess the international community’s position and the Great Powers’ diplomatic

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2017]; M. Fitzpatrick (2017), “Assessing the JCPOA”, *Adelphi Series*, Vol. 57, Issue: 466-467, pp. 19-60. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19445571.2017.1555914>. [October 12, 2017].

<sup>3</sup> N. Entessar, K. L. Afrasiabi (2018), *Iran Nuclear Accord and the Remaking of the Middle East*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> A. E. Torbat (2020), *Politics of Oil and Nuclear Technology in Iran*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 21.

efforts and to analyze the outcomes. The applied methodology is mostly analytical, but the empirical research and few interviews with scholars and diplomats, who either studied the field of nuclear negotiations or were directly involved in the process, are meant to complete and enhance the quality of this research. However, when analyzing a particular phenomenon, or more, with an event whose consequences and outcomes are still unfolding and subject of debates, one is facing the lack of necessary resources to find adequate answers for all the questions. About Iran's nuclear deal plenty of articles have been created, numerous academic papers, as well as few dozens of books. The shortcomings of this writing are due to the semi-public access to the behind door of nuclear negotiations. It certainly cannot be claimed privileged knowledge to such confidential information; therefore the picture that emerged with regard to the negotiations process between Iran and the Great Powers is an incomplete one, with some pieces of puzzle still missing from the public eye. Still, in spite of such scarcity of information, dictated by the tightly guarded process, it is possible to rely on the vast pool of available ones, open sources intelligence, and also on the openness of some people to discuss such a sensitive matter. All of those resources will be put together in order to create a narrative that objectively aims to present the nuclear diplomacy of the Great Powers toward Iran.

The **research interest** is not coincidental. Islamic Republic of Iran and its nuclear ambitions kept the front page of the Great Powers' agenda during the last couple of decades. The nuclear issue portrayed Iran into a state with hegemonic intentions, perceived in apocalyptic terms, placing Tehran on the so call "axis of evil."<sup>5</sup> The institutional dualism, mix of religion and politics together with the Shiite revolutionary ideology, created the perspective of an aggressive state that can be contained only through hard power means, like military intervention in spite of the fact that Tehran's action during almost the last four decades indicates a rational actor, looking for defensive ways to preserve its national interests. Iran's nuclear quest was the last resort of a regime that led the country through an eight years war with the neighboring Iraq, and then appealed to any means to put Iran on the international stage. Hence, JCPOA is a consequence of a constructivist change within the Iranian government that overcame the reputation of a rogue state in the international system and demonstrated that it can be treated as a rational actor. The will and interest to study in depth the whole process behind the signing of the JCPOA grew rapidly and soon became a doctoral project. Nuclear negotiations and nuclear agreement's main features are embedded in this research, with an

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<sup>5</sup> G. Bush (2005), "2005 State of the Union Address", *The Washington Post*, February 2. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/transcripts/bushtext>. [September 19, 2019].



enhanced interest toward the behavior and motifs that prompted the P5+1 group not to abandon this complicated project.

The **research topic** is definitely **timely**, given the fluid nature of the actual International Relations development and the changes into Western administrations. The JCPOA has been an issue at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and continues to be so nowadays. Moreover, the 2016 shift of administration at the White House brought the US withdrawal from Iranian nuclear agreement, gesture that caused a real international dispute. President Donald Trump's decision triggered anxiety and even some concerns not only on the part of Iran, but also European Union (EU), China, and even Japan. Once President Trump has decided to withdraw US from JCPOA on May 8, 2018<sup>6</sup>, the other signatories of the deal met with Iranian officials pledging to work together in implementing agreement's provisions<sup>7</sup> and President Hassan Rouhani had expressed his government will to keep JCPOA in place. However, the US administration, without citing "any evidence of Iranian noncompliance"<sup>8</sup> further announced the sanctions suspended in 2015 and 2016 it will be reinstated.<sup>9</sup> Given all these circumstances, the JCPOA topic looks like it will fill up the international agenda for the coming years. Though E3 / EU share mutual concerns with US regarding Iranian nuclear activities, their approach was consistently different of Trump administration, advocating for multilateralism and diplomacy. But they take a strikingly different approach from the Trump administration to dealing with Iran. The consequences of US withdrawal and aggressive rhetoric toward Iran have the potential to shatter the international non-proliferation architecture and to induce further stability in the Middle East. Also, it can cut off future diplomatic path with Iranian government for other regional issues, such as Syria, Afghanistan or Yemen. The debate over the JCPOA tends to grow as the new waves of the US sanctions enter into force. From all the ongoing international issues, the Iranian file seems to keep its top position within the Great Powers agenda. Whether or not is considered to be saved, the JCPOA became a reason for debate not only between the EU and the US, but also has attracted other actors, regionals or not, into this debate. Those advocating against the JCPOA might argue that this would be conceding too much to a regime that fails to fulfill its obligations, yet, it is a small price to pay for a chance which might lead to a deterioration of relations beyond the point of no return. The main objective of JCPOA was

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<sup>6</sup> K. Katzman, P. K. Kerr, V. Heitshusen (2018), "U.S. Decision to Cease Implementing the Iran Nuclear Agreement", *Congressional Research Service*, May 9, p. 1. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/R44942.pdf>. [May 10, 2018].

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> \*\*\* (2015), "The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) at a Glance", *Arms Control Association*. <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/JCPOA-at-a-glance>. [May 9, 2018].

<sup>9</sup> K. Katzman, P. K. Kerr, V. Heitshusen (2018), "U.S. Decision to Cease Implementing the Iran Nuclear Agreement", *Congressional Research Service*, May 9, p. 6. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/R44942.pdf>. [May 10, 2018].

“limited to only nuclear issues”<sup>10</sup> and starting from this other topics was to be addressed in the foreseeable future. If nuclear agreement becomes ineffective, the Europeans – and as well the US – would be left with no options other than confrontation.

Regarding the **research hypothesis**, it is based on the following premise: if it had not been a common ground of interest for the actors involved, the agreement would not have been signed, and without understanding the specific mechanisms of negotiations, for both, Tehran and Western governments, then neither the long-term strategies of Iran and P5+1 states can not be anticipated.

Any hypothesis can be confirmed or invalidated, so to clarify the **validity** of this approach I have resorted to:

- A comparison of offensive and defensive realism for a better understanding of Iran’s quest toward acquiring nuclear capabilities;
- Critical discourse analyzes in order to demonstrate whether it influenced the foreign policy decisions of all parties involved in the process of nuclear negotiations. The CDA relies mostly on Teun van Dijk (1995) model because “critical discourse analysts take an explicit position and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately challenge social inequality”<sup>11</sup>. Moreover, Van Dijk argues that his model “is able to explain how ideologies monitor practices of social actors in the society”<sup>12</sup>;
- The analysis of the relationship between religion and politics, as Shi’a has taken on Iranian political leadership. Analysis of the relationship between religion and politics because after the 1979 Revolution the two overlap in the realm of Iranian government. Such an analysis is necessary because it provides a frame of the difference between Tehran and Western chancelleries, an aspect that has also influenced the process of nuclear negotiations;
- Putnam’s “two-tier”<sup>13</sup> model in the negotiations because it was useful in proving “that digitalization has complicated the two-level game by democratising access to foreign policy decisions and increasing interactions between the national and international levels of diplomacy”.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> European Parliament (2018), “Debates”, June 12. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-8-2018-06-12-ITM-010\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-8-2018-06-12-ITM-010_EN.html). [June 12, 2018].

<sup>11</sup> T. van Dijk (2015), “Critical Discourse Analysis”, January 16, p. 466. <http://www.discourses.org/OldArticles/Critical%20Discourse%20Analysis.pdf>. [June 2918].

<sup>12</sup> T. van Dijk (1995), “Discourse analysis as ideology analysis”, in C. Schäffner & A. Wenden (Eds.), *Language and pace*, Aldershot: Dartmouth, pp. 17-33.

<sup>13</sup> R. D. Putnam (2016), *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*, New York: Simon & Schuster, p. 158.

<sup>14</sup> C. Bjola, I. Manor (2018), “Revisiting Putnam’s two-level game theory in the digital age: domestic digital diplomacy and the Iran nuclear deal”, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 31, Issue 1, p. 1. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09557571.2018.1476836?journalCode=ccam20>. [October 14, 2018].

To identify particular aspects of the relationship between the Great Western Powers and the Islamic Republic and to shed some light on the emerging effects of conflict resolution in the international nuclear diplomatic arena, this research aims to:

- Analysis of the features of the nuclear negotiations process;
- Presenting and analyzing the provisions of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action;
- Analysis of geopolitical interests of actors involved;
- Presentation of the current situation of relations between Western governments and Islamic Republic of Iran after US withdrawal from JCPOA;
- Findings regarding the future of JCPOA;
- Recommendations on addressing a new type of diplomatic relationship between Iran's nuclear potential (in the absence of agreement) and Western governments.

Against this background, this thesis is looking to answer to the following **research questions**:

- Is it possible the cooperation between competitive states that exert their influence in an anarchic system and which were the major challenges for the Great Powers to achieve the proposed goal – curbing Iran’s nuclear activity?
- How were events, actors, and policies regarding the Iranian nuclear program and nuclear negotiations between the Great Powers and Iran portrayed in editorials and how those opinions influenced the negotiations process?
- Which were the individual interests of each actor involved in the JCPOA negotiations?
- Which were the major challenges for the Great Powers to achieve the proposed goal – stopping Iran’s nuclear activity – and which were the turning points that led to an agreement?
- Which might be the inflection point that could lead to the to the resumption of the Iranian nuclear program and how the Great Powers will respond to this scenario? How this resumption would impact the already fragile stability in the Middle East?
- Does the zone of possible saving the agreement exists in the context of US withdrawal from the agreement and which is the possibility for the E3 / EU along with Russian Federation and China to secure the nuclear deal considering the risk of creating a conflict of interest with Washington?

This section in also introducing a subchapter dedicated to literature review and a complex chapter that presents the methodology and theories of international relations used to conduct this research.

The methodology used to conduct this research includes Oliver Richmond's models on **first-generation** conflict<sup>15</sup> and **second-generation** conflict resolution, James Rosenau's model analysis of foreign policy, discourse analysis, game theory, case study, semi-structured interviews and quantitative analysis of primary or secondary sources.

**Theoretical Framework** provides demonstrates the associations between (1) nuclear proliferation as dependent variable, (2) the nuclear negotiations process and state behaviors, as independent variables, and (3) the intermediate variables, such as security issues, bargain leverages, and protracted mistrust between actors. It then focuses on the casual connections between the dependent and independent variables, on the role of regional hegemonic ambitions, on significance of engagement, the presence of asymmetric threats, and on the final outcome of negotiations process – the nuclear deal between P5+1 and Iran.

The dominant theories of International Relations (IR) that focus on power and military capabilities, such as Realism and its variant Neorealism, are unable to explain alone Iran's propensity to acquire nuclear weapons simply by focusing on the frame of global system, which is anarchic, or led by security motivations. If anarchy caused proliferation, then all states in the international system would have proliferated. That is obviously not the case. Also, if simple security drives compelled states to acquire nuclear weapons then many states would have nuclear weapons because most states in the international system are insecure because of power disparity between states. That is not the case either<sup>16</sup>. Therefore, it is important to restructure the theoretical paradigms in order to gain a better knowledge and a better applicability for the topic in question. This research proposes an **eclectic theoretical approach** starting from the premise that a unilateral theoretical approach is not enough to explain the diplomatic process between the Great Powers and Iran.

SECTION I also includes some personal assessments related to the **limitations** inherent in any research, encountered during the entire process of collecting, selecting and analyzing the information that formed the basis of this paper. I have tried to collect as much data as possible in order to capture in the most efficient way the nuclear negotiations process, however, given the ultra sensitivity of the Iranian nuclear program, with regard to the Iranian stance this research is based mostly on hundreds of hours of watched documentaries, unclassified sources in English, Persian, Italian and French languages, speeches and interviews of the Iranian leadership. Of the former and current Iranian officials, only two have agreed to be nominated, the rest of them accepting informal discussions only on the condition that they not be identified. Therefore, their accounts were fact-

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<sup>15</sup> O. P. Richmond (2002), *Maintaining Order, Making Peace*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, p. vii.

<sup>16</sup> S. Khan (2010), *Iran and Nuclear Weapons. Protracted conflict and proliferation*, New York: Routledge, pp. 116-118.

checked both with other official whenever possible or from open sources, and where the information was not confirmed or found, I did not use it for the purpose of this research.

**OUTLINE OF THE THESIS.** This research is structured in **five main sections**, each of them containing several chapters and subchapters dedicated to particular issues and specific concepts. The thesis is designed to present a comprehensive approach to the entire diplomatic process between the Great Powers and the Islamic Republic, being from this point of view a unique research in the Romanian academic environment. The proposed frame time was chosen both for methodological reasons, to clearly define the limits of this research and to avoid the ambiguity caused by the subsequent events, but also to present the realities of the international system in which the diplomatic negotiations between US, France, UK, Germany, Russia, China and Islamic Republic of Iran have been carried.

**SECTION I: INTRODUCTION** encompasses the introductory notions, such as research interests, literature review, methodological landmarks and theoretical framework. “Nuclear Requiem” is the opening chapter of this section because it stands for all the purposes and intents in advocating for the JCPOA, or for any other non-proliferation treaty that might be agreed in the near future. The nuclear threat is still with us today and is more complex than it used to be during Cold War era and while in military terms nuclear weapons are unthinkable in terms of use, yet, in a world that allows them to exist, morally and politically, those weapons still make a difference. A lot of attention and space has been allocated to the theoretical part, mainly because the best explanations and analyzes can be built only starting from the theoretical assumptions of the classical scholars.

**SECTION II: IRAN’S NUCLEAR AMBITIONS** proposes a detailed analysis of the Iranian nuclear program as well as of the driving force behind it. An insight into Iran’s nuclear ambitions is not only useful but also necessary and timely, as it is the only way to find a solution to this sensitive international issue. While living in a world the best described by Samuel Huntington, whose the new type of rivalries resides in the ideological nature and the competition between the West and the Rest is quite often misinterpreted, a comprehensive analyze of the Iranian Foreign Policy and of the domestic factors that influence it, is compulsory for anyone aiming to understand the dynamics of nuclear negotiations process between P5+1 and Iran. The Persian nationalism and self-professed cultural superiority are influencing the country’s regional and international behavior. Successive US administrations either did not understand or ignored this specificity of the Islamic Republic thus the consequence was decades of enmity and bitter rivalry. When Barack Obama became US President in 2009, his first policy shift was to look thru a different perspective toward the long-time enemy. Section II introduces some concepts specific to

Shiite Islam, a realistic approach to Iran's dominant religious policy, a comprehensive analysis of Iran's nuclear program, through the lens of the eclectic theoretical approach, and a timeline of Iranian presidents from 2003 to 2015. As mentioned above, the choice is not accidental, as Mohammad Khatami's presidency marked the beginning of a slight Iranian détente toward the West and the Grand Bargain proposal was drafted by his administration, and during Hassan Rouhani's presidency (2013-2021), the JCPOA has been signed (2015). Mahmoud Ahmadinejad filled the gap between Khatami and Rouhani.

**SECTION III: JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF ACTION** is comprising an exhaustive analysis of the nuclear diplomacy process between Great Powers and Islamic Republic of Iran, following which the JCPOA was concluded in 2015. Section III encompasses also a discourse analyzes hence the nuclear negotiations process has received an immense attention from the press, both Western and Eastern, and quite often some editorials influenced some political decisions. The second chapter of this section presents the roadmap of nuclear negotiations starting from the constructive engagement dilemma and going thru the entire diplomatic process initiated in 2003, until the outcome of that endeavor, signing of the JCPOA, on July 14, 2015<sup>17</sup> and its endorsement thru "UN Security Council Resolution 2231, adopted on July 20, 2015"<sup>18</sup>. Section III is introducing all the agreements concluded during this period between P5+1 and Iran, as well as the shortcomings that often blocked the negotiation process and also the factors that determined the resumption of nuclear talks. At the end of the section, the benefits of JCPOA to regional and international security and stability are presented, without neglecting the criticisms of the nuclear agreement, either by factors in the Iranian political realm or by regional or Western political actors.

**SECTION IV: BENCHMARKS OF THE GREAT POWERS' NUCLEAR DIPLOMACY TOWARD IRAN** allocates a generous space to the bi- and multilateral diplomatic process between the USA, UK, France, Germany, Russia and China. The choice to present in two separate chapters the American and European relationship and strategies with Iran is argued by the fact that, although the transatlantic relationship has never been questioned, the approaches of the two Western entities toward Iran has had certain specificities. Russia's and China's diplomatic talks are incorporated into a single chapter for two reasons: on the one hand, the relationship between China and Iran is not very different from that of Russia with the Islamic Republic, and on the other, the Beijing government's approach it often overlapped with Moscow's position. Russia

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<sup>17</sup> \*\*\* (2015), "The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) at a Glance", *Arms Control Association*. <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/JCPOA-at-a-glance>. [May 9, 2018].

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

and China joined the P5+1 format in June 2006 and have always used their UNSC veto strategically when the United States had advanced proposals for an international sanctions regime. Moreover, from a Sino-Russian perspective, Iran's nuclear program is not an existential threat<sup>19</sup>, as it was perceived in the West. Additionally, while Beijing and Moscow are seeing "Iran as a convenient partner in stymying the Western order"<sup>20</sup>, Tehran "views the two powers as an instrumental bulwark against Western efforts to isolate it and its own struggle to challenge the world order"<sup>21</sup>.

**SECTION V: CONCLUSIONS** is embedding the final assessment of the nuclear negotiations process, a brief section with policy recommendations and a section dedicated to personal findings. Moreover, it highlights that the "clash of civilizations"<sup>22</sup> has become a prevailing feature of the new diplomatic order and of the contemporary design of international relations and that Islamic Republic of Iran is posing as a regional power willing to challenge the new world order<sup>23</sup>. Also, the conclusions part will answer the last two unaddressed research questions – how collaboration among competitive states in an anarchic system<sup>24</sup> can be attained and which were the individual interests of each actor involved in the JCPOA negotiations process.

## SECTION II

This section introduces a presentation of Iran's foreign policy during the terms of three presidents, during which Iran's nuclear program has become a concern for the entire international system. For a better understanding of the whole chain of events, the international context of the moment is also presented, in a comparative analysis with the regional dynamics of the Middle East. This section embeds theoretical assessments of the Islamic Republic foreign policy behavior and a timeline of the Iranian nuclear program.

**Neorealism** logic applies to global powers but it makes equal sense in conflicts between

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<sup>19</sup> H. Mann Leverett, F. Leverett (2009), "Iran Is No Existential Threat", *Foreign Policy*, December 4. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/12/04/iran-is-no-existential-threat/>. [January 9, 2018].

<sup>20</sup> D. Esfandiary, A. Tabatabai, (2018), *Triple-Axis: Iran's Relations with Russia and China*, New York: I. B. Tauris, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> S. P. Huntington (1993), "The Clash of Civilization", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/1993-06-01/clash-civilizations>. [January 9, 2018].

<sup>23</sup> H. Kissinger (2014), *World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History*, New York: Penguin Books, p. 269.

<sup>24</sup> J. M. Grieco (1988), "Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism", *International Organization*, Vol. 42, No. 3, p. 485. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2706787>. [July 19, 2018].

“regional actors and global hegemons”<sup>25</sup> given the reality that no regional state can outdo a Great Power “without possessing nuclear weapons.”<sup>26</sup> Any small actor can use nuclear arsenal as a deterrence factor and once it reached the breakout capacity, it also can menace its neighbors in a pursuit for regional hegemony<sup>27</sup>. Analyzing the model of conflicts of the Cold War era, Waltz and other realism’s scholars concluded, “peace has become the privilege of states having nuclear weapons, while wars have been fought mainly by those who lack them”<sup>28</sup>. The eventualities of a conflict are lowering down when “deterrent and defensive capabilities” are increased: “in the presence of nuclear weapons, there is less possibility for wars to start. Since they do, the gradual proliferation is more to be welcomed”<sup>29</sup>.

The arguments brought forward by **constructivism** are of great importance in solving the dilemma related to the pseudo-uselessness of the sanctions imposed by the USA on Iran. In addition, the presentation of the nuclear program as a reason for national pride is part of the socio-constructivist paradigm that has the tools to explain societal behavior in such a case. As described above “Iran has constructed two roles for herself: one of the oppressed (Iran’s self-conception) – a nation that simply wants to achieve nuclear power peacefully...and the other of the instigator (the perspective of the West) – a nation that challenges Western political control and will not relent to its pressures”<sup>30</sup> therefore, the correlation between interest and identity is one of the factors that legitimizes in the eyes of the population the choices made by Iran’s ruling elite. Wendt, who considers that “identities and interests are constituted by collective meanings that are always in process”<sup>31</sup>, also reinforces this presumption.

**From 1992 to 2002** Iran advanced toward completion of a nuclear fuel cycle<sup>32</sup> and nuclear activity was secretly conducted against Iran’s NPT safeguards obligations<sup>33</sup>. Moreover, Iran has started to build another underground facility near Natanz and AEOI had also “started to secretly construct a heavy-water production plant and a 40 MW research reactor near Arak”<sup>34</sup>. During a

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<sup>25</sup> F. Rezaei (2017), *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> K. N. Waltz (1995), *Peace, Stability, and Nuclear Weapons*, Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> K. N. Waltz (1981), “The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Be Better”, *Adelphi Papers*, Vol. 21, No. 171, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> L. Dorman (2013), “Iranian Nuclear Program: A Constructivist Perspective”, *Enerpo Journal*, European University at St. Petersburg, Issue 3, Volume 1, May 31. <https://enerpojournal.com/2013/05/31/iranian-nuclear-program-a-constructivist-perspective/>. [November 27, 2017].

<sup>31</sup> A. Wendt (1992), “Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics”, *International Organization*, vol. 46, No. 2, p. 407. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2706858>. [May 19, 2018].

<sup>32</sup> D. Patrikarakos (2012), *Nuclear Iran. The Birth of an Atomic State*, New York: IB Tauris, p. 333-334.

<sup>33</sup> A. Vaez, K. Sadjadpour (2013), “Iran’s Nuclear Odyssey. Costs and Risks”, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, p. 5. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2013/04/02/iran-s-nuclear-odyssey-costs-and-risks-pub-51346>. [April 18, 2018].

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*



press conference<sup>35</sup> hold on August 14, **2002**, Alireza Jafarzadeh drew worldwide attention by revealing that the Islamic Republic of Iran was developing a secret nuclear site in Natanz, and a deuterium oxide facility in Arak. A new report by IAEA released on February **2010**, presented details about Iran's potential for producing a nuclear weapon, thus confirming the assumptions about a second uranium enrichment facility close to "the holy city of Qom"<sup>36</sup>. At that time it was believed that Iran's nuclear program had steadily progressed, despite the increased number of concerns over its intentions and sanctions over its lack of transparency. However, between 2010 and 2011 any discussion within the Tehran's officials about the nuclear program was dominated by the idea of a foreign interference. By 2013, Tehran was effectively isolated from the international market and financial infrastructure. That year, the Presidential candidates' campaigns focused almost exclusively on improving the economy. Hassan Rouhani won the election with a mandate to strike a nuclear deal, put the country's economy back on the path to recovery, and normalize its international relations. One hundred days into his presidency, he delivered the Joint Plan of Action (JPOA). All parties signed the final agreement, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, on July 14, 2015.

### SECTION III

This section presents an analysis of the discursive background, conducted on a number of Western and Iranian editorials, the roadmap of nuclear negotiations and the final steps that led to the signing of the JCPOA.

The critical discourse analyze originates from constructivist theory of international relations, being both constitutive and constituted by society. In other words, society constitutes discourse by shaping ideologies, identities, values and attitudes of discourse producers; discourse constitutes society<sup>37</sup> through disseminating and reproducing or resisting those ideologies, identities, values and other social structures, such as power relations, social policies and institutions. Focusing on the role of ideational factors in international relations<sup>38</sup>, constructivism is opposing the predominant IR's theories – neorealism and neoliberalism – which rely on rationalist factors, such as rational-choice decisions, struggle for power, anarchy, economic interests or

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<sup>35</sup> \*\*\* (2002), "Remarks by Alireza Jafarzadeh on New Information on Top Secret Projects of the Iranian Regime's Nuclear Program", *Iran Watch*, August 14. <https://www.iranwatch.org/library/ncr-new-information-top-secret-nuclear-projects-8-14-02>. [September 15, 2017].

<sup>36</sup> M. Gaietta (2015), *The Trajectory of Iran's Nuclear Program*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 141.

<sup>37</sup> R. Wodak, M. Meyer (2016), "Critical discourse: history, agenda, theory and methodology", in R. Wodak, M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, London: SAGE, pp. 1-23.

<sup>38</sup> K. Waltz (1979), *op. cit.*, p. 49-51.

influence, in order to explain the international issues<sup>39</sup>. Constructivists argue that nation-states' behavior and relations are determined by both, their *domestic ideational factors*<sup>40</sup>, such as national identity and culture, and by *systemic ideational factors*<sup>41</sup>, such as states' perceptions of each other as enemies or friends<sup>42</sup>. Moreover, each of these factors has a discursive character or, at least, a discursive dimension. According to constructivism's securitization theory<sup>43</sup>, the threats do not necessarily need to be there in the outside world – politicians or other elites can create them through their discourse. The critical discourse analyze allows one to put in balance the both views, the *Orientalist one* and the *Western perception* of the “Other”<sup>44</sup>. This chapter will examine linguistic and discursive strategies employed by media, politicians or businessmen and lobbyists in their attempt to construct their version of reality, while the process of legitimizing “Self”<sup>45</sup> and delegitimizing “Other”<sup>46</sup> has boosted the tensions.

The engagement with Iran over the nuclear issue has essentially been the Great Powers diplomacy, which aimed to check Iranian regional ambitions for hegemony and the nuclear capabilities rather than pursuing a security and political partnership based on trust. Borrowing Richmond's (2002) models on “**first-generation conflict management, second-generation conflict resolution**”<sup>47</sup>, and James Rosenau's (2012) “**model analysis of foreign policy**”<sup>48</sup>, the narrative of dealings between US, EU and Iran (and to a lesser extent Russia and China) establishes that diplomatic interactions were firmly rooted as well as operated within a state centric and self-interested Westphalian international system. However, the power-based diplomacy by all sides not only failed to break a stalemate but, in fact, created a protracted conflict between Europe, US, and Iran and it took about a decade to reach a consensus and finally a comprehensive agreement. After the EU's (including the United Kingdom at the time) perceived non-fulfillment of its engagement of Paris Agreement (2004)<sup>49</sup>, Iran resumed enrichment in 2005 and refused to test any subsequent diplomatic initiatives offered by the European parties, which was later also supported by the US. Contrariwise, feeling encircled by violent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan,

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> A. Wendt (1992), *op.cit.*, p. 391.

<sup>43</sup> O. Wæver (1995), “Securitization and desecuritization”, in R. D. Lipschutz (Ed.), *On Security*, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 46-86.

<sup>44</sup> J. Hartley (2002), *op. cit.*, p 170.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> O. Richmond (2002), *op. cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>48</sup> J. Rosenau (2006), *op. cit.*, p. 171.

<sup>49</sup> B. Kaussler (2014), *op. cit.*, p. 3.

and facing Israel's continuous threats of military attack, Tehran maintained power-based diplomacy aimed at balancing against the US<sup>50</sup> and its allies in the Persian Gulf.

The constructive engagement “is seen a foreign policy strategy intended to seek and maintain dialogue with anathematized or authoritarian regimes”<sup>51</sup>. E3's policy of constructive engagement created the diplomatic environment in which negotiations between the other three Great Powers (US, China and Russia) and Iran has been conducted. It took over a decade of nuclear negotiations in order to reach a final and comprehensive agreement, and in order to reach this outcome, a series of steps and multiple rows of meetings were committed (see Annex 3 for the “chronology of the main steps of the negotiation process”<sup>52</sup> between the Great Powers and Iran, for the time frame 2003-2015). *The first step* of the engagement was the attempt to reintegrate Iran into the international system, initiative known as the Comprehensive Dialogue (2000-2003).<sup>53</sup>

In order to achieve this goal, EU forwarded in 2000 a proposal for the Iranian government – “Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA)” – as a sign of goodwill yet, the document was conditioned by “progress in four areas: human rights, non-proliferation, terrorism and Middle East peace process.”<sup>54</sup> The European logic was to support president Rouhani's reformist strategy, encouraging so the moderate policies.<sup>55</sup> However, the human rights policy was a constant failure within the Iranian government, this aspect being most accurately exposed by Shirin Ebadi, the only Iranian woman to win a Nobel Prize so far: “the West cares more about its own security than human rights. I think they are wrong...Undemocratic countries are more dangerous than a nuclear bomb. It's undemocratic countries that jeopardize international peace.”<sup>56</sup> However, with mounting pressure from the George W. Bush administration, the human rights dialogue eventually decoupled from engagement and the E3 focused solely on nuclear diplomacy.

In this context, the statement that constructive engagement, informed by international security concerns (e.g. non-proliferation, violent conflicts, power balance challenges), as opposed to human rights dialogue, does not seek to find an in-depth solution in terms of social issues, is not entirely wrong. In the end, this type of engagement based on first-generation conflict management

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<sup>50</sup> Public Library of US Diplomacy (2009), Canonical ID: 09MUNICH22\_a, *Munich Security Conference – Focus on Iran* (10 February), Current Classification: Unclassified. [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09MUNICH22\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09MUNICH22_a.html). [November 2, 2018].

<sup>51</sup> B. Kaussler (2014), *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> P. Canova (2018), “The Iran Nuclear Deal: an in-depth analysis of the negotiation process”, *Università Ca' Foscari Venezia*, p. 68. <http://dspace.unive.it/handle/10579/13108>. [January 19, 2020]

<sup>53</sup> B. Kaussler (2014), *op. cit.*, p. 18.

B. Kaussler (2012), “From Engagement to Containment: EU–Iran Relations and the Nuclear Programme, 1992–2011”, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 14, Issue 1, p. 56. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19448953.2012.656935>. [May 17, 2018].

<sup>55</sup> Author interview with H. E. Ambassador Benno Lagner (Switzerland) during the course “Introduction to Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament”, organized in Vienna, October 19-30, 2020.

<sup>56</sup> S. Ebadi, A. Moaveni (2018), *Iranul meu. Gustul amar al revoluției* (tr. I. Filat), București: Corint, p. 252.

follows the realist paradigm rather than a constructivist resolution strategy, employing different types of coercion or even the use of force. Therefore, the conclusion is that states act as unitary rational actors and seek first and foremost to achieve a secure position in international level, thus fitting into the realistic paradigm described by Viotti and Kauppi, who explain “the state-as-actor is essentially rational (or purposive) actor and selects the alternative that maximizes utility or at least achieves an acceptable outcome.”<sup>57</sup>

*The second step of the engagement (2003-2015)* was to create a diplomatic architecture to prevent a military campaign against Iran and, finally, to reach a comprehensive final deal. Yet, the objective of the second-generation conflict resolution was for Iran to accept the security framework lay out by the E3 and the US government. Engagement ceased to be an exercise in problem solving and had morphed into coercive diplomacy by all parties involved. At this stage, the E3 / US and Iranian nuclear talks have been characterized by “realist perceptions of power and control.”<sup>58</sup> For Iran, the commitment served to test the US pressure and maintain good relations with Europe, while using the E3’s engagement to diplomacy<sup>59</sup> as a mean to “project power and link EU demands to a wide array of Iranian interests”<sup>60</sup>. On the contrary, the European diplomacy has tried to verify Iran’s nuclear activities and pursue with the engagement, together with the US, in a “carrots and sticks”<sup>61</sup> strategy. Both US administrations involved in the nuclear negotiation process – of George W. Bush and Barack Obama – have been guided by the Cold War mindset<sup>62</sup>, seeking tactical advantage over Iran and favoring sanctions and other forms of coercive diplomacy over constructive engagement. By the end of 2012, the US had imposed on Iran the most severe set of sanctions since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Diplomacy became an economic warfare in its pursuit to force Tehran to compromise and in an attempt of a regime change from inside. None of the three main actors involved in nuclear negotiations – E3, US and Iran – have employed a genuine constructive conflict management. On the contrary, it has altered into containment, mutual distrust and eventually in a power-based exercise in statecraft.

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<sup>57</sup> P. R. Viotti & M. V. Kaupi (2012), *op. cit.*, pp. 39-41.

<sup>58</sup> B. Kaussler (2012), “From Engagement to Containment: EU–Iran Relations and the Nuclear Programme, 1992–2011”, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 14, Issue 1, p. 70. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19448953.2012.656935>. [May 17, 2018].

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*; B. Kaussler (2014), *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>60</sup> B. Kaussler (2012), “From Engagement to Containment: EU–Iran Relations and the Nuclear Programme, 1992–2011”, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 14, Issue 1, p. 70. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19448953.2012.656935>. [May 17, 2018].

<sup>61</sup> W. J. Burns (2019), *op. cit.*, p. 769.

<sup>62</sup> B. Kaussler (2014), *op. cit.*, p. 20.

It was the neoconservative movement that advocated for the war against Iraq<sup>63</sup> and brought upfront the paradigm “change from a position of strength”<sup>64</sup> and to the opposite pole of this coercive expression of the US foreign policy was the European stance, based on the “ability to persuade”<sup>65</sup> thru non-coercive measures. The same path was followed on the Iranian case, with US imposing coercive measures and EU advocating for diplomacy. As Kaussler put it, those advocating for “second-generation conflict resolution strategies would put the EU’s stated commitment to constructive engagement in its foreign affairs within the context of liberal institutionalism”<sup>66</sup>. Liberals “are primarily interested in explaining the conditions under which international cooperation or collaboration becomes possible”<sup>67</sup> while for structural realists “the international system is the starting point for analysis and factors at the unit or state-societal level of analysis are of secondary importance”<sup>68</sup>.

Starting from these theoretical assumptions, it can be stated that in the context of constructive engagement, liberalism explains “the short-term mechanism for cooperation and / or rapprochement and the long-term mechanism to control the target state’s behavior.”<sup>69</sup> Hence, the second-generation conflict resolution has to be embedded with Keohane and Axelrod’s approaches to cooperation which represent a successful attempt to create a bridge between realist and liberalist theories of international relations because their theories of international regimes “argue that states under controlled conditions may reciprocate the cooperative acts of their opponents in a similar pattern while international laws and norms shape states’ preferences for such cooperation”<sup>70</sup>. The shortcoming of both approaches is that they serve “the task of historical and cultural reproduction in times of crisis”<sup>71</sup> of the Great Powers, aiming to preserve and reinforce a system established on “certain, western-orientated, universal values”<sup>72</sup>.

Section III also embeds an analytical appraisal of the JCPOA and presents a set of constrains and critics directed against both, the Iranian foreign policy behavior and nuclear agreement. In all its intents and purposes, the deal has been successful, at least until May 8, 2018, when the former President, Donald J. Trump, decided to withdraw unilaterally US from the agreement. The JCPOA was a wise foreign policy move because it has been working and Iran has

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<sup>63</sup> J. Kerry (2018), *op. cit.*, p. 458; see also W. J. Burns (2019), *op. cit.*, p. 411.

<sup>64</sup> B. Kaussler (2014), *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>65</sup> M. ElBaradei (2011), *op. cit.*, p. 264.

<sup>66</sup> B. Kaussler (2014), *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>67</sup> P. R. Viotti and M. K. Kauppi (2012), *op. cit.*, p. 129.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> B. Kaussler (2014), *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> D. Jones (1999), *Cosmopolitan Mediation*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p.3.

<sup>72</sup> O. P. Richmond (2002), *op. cit.*, p. 139.

limited its nuclear program. An often overlooked but key component to advocating and understanding the success of the JCPOA is to take it at face value. As Robert Einhorn stated, “[the deal] is transactional not transformational... the accord addressed one specific problem, and in those narrow terms, it can be judged a relative success. The value of that relative success should not be underestimated...”<sup>73</sup>. The final document is a complex one, with 159 pages. It is a flawed document, but it fills in some gaps and put at rest some anxieties. It was precisely the rebuttal of a zero sum game and the acceptance of possible flaws that allowed the two sides to get to closure.

## SECTION IV

This section introduces a comprehensive overview of the relationship between the Great Powers and Iran between 2003 and 2015. Throughout this time segment, the evolution of nuclear negotiations is being pursued, initiated in 2003 by former Iranian President Mohammad Khatami and completed in 2015 by the signing of the JCPOA. The proposed time segment is not adventitious, because during this period the commitment between the USA and Iran began to take shape, even if for more than a decade the dialogue was not always a constructive one. The conduct of the nuclear negotiation process has often been influenced by external events that affected and changed both, the US and Iranian strategies. An important part of this research focuses on the relationship between Washington and Tehran, because as it is already proven that the US contribution was extremely important during the diplomatic process and also in maintaining and complying with the provisions of the JCPOA. Of course, the European contribution is of special significance and it will be appropriately addressed, because the European policy of constructive engagement often bridged the gaps between US and Iran.

*The US-Iran relation* goes back in the early 1950s, with a mid period characterized by friendship, which, however, have deteriorated profoundly after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Snyder analyzes the shift from friendship to hostility and is of the opinion that it is caused by the following factors: the US’s economic and ideological goals; mutual distrust; and internal politics in the revolutionary Islamic Republic.<sup>74</sup> The post-Cold War developments, and the outcomes of the 9/11 terrorist attacks from New York – except few episodes where the two states cooperated informally, such as Afghanistan or Iraq – led to the intensification of the US stance toward Iran during Presidents Bill Clinton (1993–2000) and George W. Bush (2001–2009) administrations,

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<sup>73</sup> R. Einhorn *et al.* (2016), “The Iran Deal, One Year Out: What Brookings Experts are Saying”, *Brookings*, The Brookings Institute, July 14. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/07/14/the-iran-deal-one-year-out-what-brookings-experts-are-saying/>. [March 25, 2021].

<sup>74</sup> R. S. Snyder (2014), “The U. S. and Third World Revolutionary States: Understanding the Breakdown in Relations”, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Jun.), p. 273. <https://sci-hub.se/https://www.jstor.org/stable/2600756?seq=1>. [December 16, 2017].

with the “ultimate goal of changing the Iranian regime. The Bush administration even considered military action to achieve this goal”<sup>75</sup>. Furthermore, the administration of President Obama (2009-2016) had a different approach to Iran, consistent with that presented in the election campaign. After a promising phase of commitment, received reluctantly by the ultra-conservative administration of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, followed a new tense period that, however, was redirected into dialogue during Hassan Rouhani terms in office.

*Europe’s relation with Iran* goes long back in time and after the dismantling of the USSR the Islamic Republic had been trying to improve its foreign relations. Initially, most of the European countries were “opened to better ties to Iran”<sup>76</sup>, however, due to a number of international issues, such as Salman Rushdie affair or US Embassy in Tehran hostage crisis, the pace of improvement has slowed down. The transformation of the European Community into the EU and its attempts to develop the CFSP have partially restricted the bilateral relations of states with the Islamic Republic, as individual foreign policies have been constrained by broader EU policies. In this context, not even countries such as Germany, France or United Kingdom (part of the EU at the time) have been able to easily develop ties with Iran<sup>77</sup>. Nevertheless the EU was the channel of communication between Iran and Great Powers, and since 2003 has facilitated a multilateral negotiation framework doubled by a policy of constructive engagement toward Iran. Moreover, after US unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA, the European negotiators assumed the role of mediator between the US administration and Iran.

*The Sino-Iranian relations* after the Cold War were positively affected by several factors. Out of the systemic consequences following the USSR’s dissolution, the most important was the US’ emergence as the “sole superpower acted as an impulse to better Sino-Iranian relations.”<sup>78</sup> Even if China and Iran encountered sometimes-different interests, the two countries always looked for common interests that might serve their regional and international strategies.

Among the issues faced by China and Iran it was the former reluctance to get too close toward the latter, even if the Islamic Republic was worthwhile to be used as a strategically link to control the US’ ambitions in the region, Beijing was quite hesitant “to embrace Iran too tightly out for fear of precipitating an open break in ties between China and the US.”<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, Iran’s

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<sup>75</sup> S. Hunter (2010), *op. cit.* p. 33.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>78</sup> S. Hunter (2010), *op. cit.* p. 121.

<sup>79</sup> S. Harold, A. Nader (2012), *China and Iran. Economic, Political, and Military Relations*, Santa Monica: RAND, p. 9.

sizable “reserves of oil and natural gas”<sup>80</sup> could be useful for China, while for Iran this was a good opportunity to ease the pressures exerted on its economy by American sanctions. In addition, a Iran embroiled in a dispute with the US offers China “a unique opportunity to expand its influence in the Middle East and could pin down the US military in the Persian Gulf so that it is harder to pivot toward the Pacific”<sup>81</sup>.

*Russia’s relation with Iran* had a hesitating start because the latter did not hail the dismantling of the USSR, because that event left the Islamic Republic with three unstable neighbors – Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkmenistan. Moreover, the first two were engaged in an armed “conflict over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh. This conflict faced Iran with unpalatable policy choices and made it vulnerable to negative consequences, such as the inflow of Azerbaijani refugees”<sup>82</sup>. In this context and facing the cold relations with the Western Great Powers, the Islamic Republic did its best to improve the relations with Russia, “despite Moscow’s repeated lack of enthusiasm for such ties”<sup>83</sup>. Hence, the relations between Russia and Iran have known “drastic twists and turns in as short a period of time”<sup>84</sup>. Analyzing the Russian-Iranian relations between 1991 and 2011, Vladimir Sazhin (2003) “called this relationship a ‘watchful partnership’”<sup>85</sup>. He claimed “although positive dialogue between Iran and Russia was in Moscow’s interests, the Russian government carefully watched the development of relations in order to prevent them from exceeding a level that would endanger Moscow’s dialogue with other countries”<sup>86</sup>.

## SECTION V

This section is dedicated to a set of conclusions, embedding the personal findings and few assessments and predictions regarding the fate of the JCPOA and its role in future international negotiations regarding the non-proliferation matter.

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<sup>80</sup> A. Scobell, A. Nader (2016), “China in the Middle East. The Wary Dragon”, *RAND Corporation*, p. 11. [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1200/RR1229/RAND\\_RR1229.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1200/RR1229/RAND_RR1229.pdf). [February 19, 2021].

<sup>81</sup> J. W. Garver (2011), “Is China Playing a Dual Game in Iran?”, *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 34, Issue 1, p. 79. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2011.538296>. [October 30, 2020].

<sup>82</sup> S. T. Hunter (1990), *Iran and the World: Continuity in a Revolutionary Decade*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 83-93.

<sup>83</sup> S. Hunter (2010), *op. cit.* p. 105.

<sup>84</sup> V. Evseev (2010), “Rossiysko-Iranskoye Nastorozhennoye Partnerstvo” (“The Russian-Iranian Watchful Partnership”), *Vestnik Kavkaza*, July 5. <https://vestnikkavkaza.ru/analytics/%20politika/22111.html>. [October 27, 2020].

<sup>85</sup> N. Kozhanov, (2015), “Understanding The Revitalization Of Russian-Iranian Relations”, *Carnegie Moscow Center*, p. 7. [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP\\_Kozhanov\\_web\\_Eng.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_Kozhanov_web_Eng.pdf). [September 27, 2019].

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*



The idea of this research was born from the following premise: the conception of a unique work that would cover the entire period of nuclear negotiations, while depicting each individual actor and his models of negotiations with Iran. All of the above contribute to the uniqueness of this research, which differs from all the other works that address this topic by its form, content and purpose. Apart from the fact that this work is **unique**, it is also **timely**, as Iran's nuclear program has once again caught the attention of the international system.

The JCPOA set a precedent for the constructive engagement and for the first-generation conflict management and led to a consensus among states divided according to ideological orientation and whose geopolitical ambitions are totally different. Iranian nuclear deal is a unique example of effective multilateralism<sup>87</sup> and has the capacity to set up a precedent for any future nuclear negotiations and nonproliferation endeavors. Moreover, the JCPOA reiterated and restored to some degree the importance and authority of the international institutions and treaties, like UNSC, IAEA or NPT.

From a theoretical perspective, the JCPOA demonstrated that cooperation among competitive states in an anarchic system can be attained and thus borders delimiting the international relations theories become thinner, allowing the researcher to explore new avenues. Thereby, the purpose of presenting the diplomatic process, both in a bilaterally and in a multilateral format, was to demonstrate that cooperation between states with different ideologies, strategies and perspectives is possible, and that theories of international relations juxtapose when the ultimate goal is instrumental for all actors involved in that diplomatic process.

Beyond the obstacles encountered along the way and despite concerns and constraints, nuclear negotiations process has placed the international system on the path of multilateralism while addressing very sensitive concerns regarding the Iranian nuclear ambitions. Following the adoption of the JCPOA, Iran had the chance to begin reintegration into the global system and by limiting the stocks of nuclear materials the Middle East region became safer.

At the time of concluding this research, the nuclear negotiations in Vienna are ongoing. As the sixth round concluded, the diplomatic teams have returned to their countries to clear out the last political details necessary to revive the JCPOA.

After US unilateral withdrawal from JCPOA, European parties to the nuclear deal focused on three main areas. *Firstly*, the E3 / EU spared no efforts to save the agreement since it was regarded as the pearl of the crown of the EU's foreign policy achievements, while being a reflection of principles that shape European identity –international rule of law, multilateralism,

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<sup>87</sup> Autor's discussions with H. E. Cornel Feruta, Cluj-Napoca, April 28, 2017; Bucharest, March 5, 2020.

non-proliferation and the preeminence of diplomacy in finding peaceful solutions to international disputes. *In the second place*, the EU should be very involved in reviving the JCPOA because it has important economic and trade interest in Iran, taking into account that in the aftermath of the JCPOA EU has become one of Iran's main trading partners (after the US withdrawal, due to the secondary sanctions imposed by the Trump administration, two major European companies Airbus and Total, withdrew from the Iranian market). Furthermore, Iran has significant energy resources that would offset the European energy deficit. *Thirdly*, E3 / EU considers that the purpose of JCPOA – to curb Iran's path toward acquiring nuclear capability – has been achieved, therefore, maintaining the agreement strengthens regional and European security. From EU's perspective, a nuclear-armed Iran would further destabilize the Middle East, worsening the “existing refugee crisis and increasing the potential for an arms race between key regional actors and a Sunni – Shia strategic confrontation”<sup>88</sup>.

With the change of US administration, both President Joseph Biden and the Iranian government have declared their will to return at the JCPOA's provisions. However, both sides are urging the other to comply first: the US “wants Iran to return to all the limits on nuclear enrichment and stockpiles specified in the JCPOA”<sup>89</sup>, while Iran has demanded for US to remove all sanctions according to JCPOA provisions, including the sanctions instated by “Trump administration in violation of the agreement”<sup>90</sup>. Moreover, even if some officials expressed their concern regarding the election of Ebrahim Raisi as the new Iran's president, he has reaffirmed on several occasion that Iran wants the JCPOA to become operational again. Enrique Mora, EU's official who chaired the final meeting<sup>91</sup> between Russia, China, Germany, France, Britain and Iran, stated, “we are closer to a deal, but we are not still there.”<sup>92</sup> The EU is the best choice to coordinate the ongoing nuclear negotiations in Vienna, as the E3 / EU actually has opened in 2003 the path toward the diplomatic outcome reached in July 14, 2015.

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<sup>88</sup> M. Fitzpatrick (2017), “Assessing the JCPOA”, *Adelphi Series*, Vol. 57, Issue: 466-467, pp. 19-60. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19445571.2017.1555914>. [October 12, 2017]; A. Elbakyan (2018), “The Future of the JCPOA”, *Strategic Comments*, vol. 24, No. 4, May 15, p. 2.

<sup>89</sup> D. Smeltz, A. Farmanesh, B. Helm (2021), “Iranians and Americans Support A Mutual Return to JCPOA”, *The Chicago Council on Global Affairs*, March 30. <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/research/public-opinion-survey/iranians-and-americans-support-mutual-return-jcpoa>. [April 2, 2021]

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> D. Liechtenstein (2021), “Iran nuclear talks make ‘progress,’ will reconvene next week”, *Politico*, April 21. <https://www.politico.eu/article/iran-nuclear-talks-make-progress-will-reconvene-next-week/>. [April 21, 2021].

<sup>92</sup> M. Fitzpatrick (2017), “Assessing the JCPOA”, *Adelphi Series*, Vol. 57, Issue: 466-467, p. 60. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19445571.2017.1555914>. [October 12, 2017]; P. Jenne, K. Grieshaber (2021), “Diplomats: Progress made in Vienna at Iran nuclear talks”, *AP News*, June 20. <https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-joe-biden-vienna-middle-east-iran-b6506eb091550af63b2097c3900bb4bf>. [June 20, 2021].

The North Korean file it is a present example by which it is proved that abandonment of a “deal that limited its plutonium production has led to an insurmountable problem”<sup>93</sup>. The “Agreed Framework”<sup>94</sup> (1994) has had its flaws “and North Korea cheated,”<sup>95</sup> however the bargain meaningfully has affected its nuclear-weapons program. Therefore, if Great Powers are willing to avoid a new North Korean situation, the revival and the implementation of a criticized but effective agreement it would be far beneficial than to postpone hoping to get the best result and attain the worst.

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<sup>93</sup> M. Fitzpatrick (2017), “Assessing the JCPOA”, *Adelphi Series*, Vol. 57, Issue: 466-467, p. 60. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19445571.2017.1555914>. [October 12, 2017].

<sup>94</sup> IAEA (2009), “Fact Sheet on DPRK Nuclear Safeguards”. <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/dprk/fact-sheet-on-dprk-nuclear-safeguards>. [July 1, 2021].

<sup>95</sup> M. Fitzpatrick (2017), “Assessing the JCPOA”, *Adelphi Series*, Vol. 57, Issue: 466-467, p. 60. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19445571.2017.1555914>. [October 12, 2017].

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## Interviews

- COLIBASANU, A., *Geopolitical Futures*’ Senior Analyst, Associate Professor at SNSPA.
- FERUȚĂ, C., Former Acting Director General at IAEA.
- GÄRTNER, H., Professor at the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University.
- GOLMOHAMMADI, V., Assistant Professor at Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran.
- HUNTER, S. T., Research Professor at the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.
- LAGGNER, B., Swiss Diplomat (Ambassador), Chair of the “Nuclear Suppliers Group” from 2017 to 2018.
- MOUSAVIAN, S. H., Iranian Diplomat and Former Negotiator for the JCPOA.
- PARSI, T., Co-Founder And Executive Vice President of the Quincy Institute For Responsible Statecraft, Former Adviser On Behalf of NIAC to US President Barack Obama.
- RAUF, T., Founder and CEO of Global Product, former Director of SIPRI, Senior Advisor to the Chair of the Disarmament Committee at the 2015 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference.
- ROCKWOOD, L., Director of Open Nuclear Network, former Section Head for Non-Proliferation and Policy Making at the IAEA.
- SOKOV, N., Senior Fellow at James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies and Senior Fellow at the Vienna Center For Disarmament and Non-Proliferation.
- SOLTANIEH, A. A., Iran’s Ambassador to the IAEA, (1982-2987; 2006-2013).
- ZWEIRI, M., Associate Professor - Director of Gulf Studies Center Contemporary History and Politics at Qatar University.

## Conferences and Workshops

- HARVARD KENNEDY SCHOOL’S INSTITUTE OF POLITICS, “THE IRAN NUCLEAR NEGOTIATIONS: A DISCUSSION WITH WENDY SHERMAN”, Cambridge, Massachusetts, October 7, 2015.
- EURINT: “REFLECTING ON EUROPE’S (DIS)ORDER: SCENARIOS FOR THE EU’S FUTURE”, Iași, May 18-19, 2018.
- “INTERNATIONAL PEACE STUDIES CONFERENCE”, Diplomatische Akademie Wien and Academic Council on the United Nations System, Vienna, May 28-29, 2018.
- “IRAN IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM”, International Institute for Peace, Workshop, Vienna, June 12-14, 2018.
- “INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION IN THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY – III”, Yeditepe University Istanbul, October 10-11, 2018.
- GEOPOLITICS FOR BUSINESS – RISK ANALYSIS WORKSHOP, Bucharest, March 16, 2019.
- DIECE CONFERENCE – “MANAGING DIVERSITY IN THE PROCESS OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION”, Faculty of European Studies, University Babes-Bolyai, Cluj-Napoca, March 21-22, 2019.
- SEPAD CONFERENCE – “SECTARIANISM, PROXIES AND DE-SECTARIANISM ACROSS THE MIDDLE EAST”, Lancaster University, UK, March 28, 2019.
- PSA ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE: „(UN)SUSTAINABLE POLITICS IN A CHANGING WORLD”, Nottingham Trent University, April 15-17, 2019.
- COUNCIL FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES – “SOVEREIGNTIES IN CONTENTION: NATIONS, REGIONS AND CITIZENS IN EUROPE”, Madrid, June 20-22, 2019.
- INTERNATIONAL AGENCY ENERGY AGENCY – “INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ROLE OF NUCLEAR POWER”, IAEA, Vienna, October 7-11, 2019.

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VIENNA CENTER FOR DISARMAMENT AND NON-PROLIFERATION (VCDN) - short course on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, online course, October 15-29, 2020.

THE EUROPEAN UNION’S EXTERNAL RELATIONS AND GLOBAL ORDER (EUXGLOB): “THE NEW TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS AND THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE GLOBAL ORDER”, Online, Faculty of European Studies, University Babes-Bolyai, Cluj-Napoca, April 15, 2021.

“IRAN AFTER THE ROUHANI PRESIDENCY: DEBRIEFING THE JUNE 18<sup>th</sup> ELECTION”, NATIONAL IRANIAN AMERICAN COUNCIL, Online, June 21, 2021.

“IRAN, RUSSIA, AND CHINA IN THE POST US WITHDRAWAL AFGHAN LANDSCAPE”, Middle East Institute (Washington, DC), Online, June 25, 2021.

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