

XXI. YÜZYILDA ABD-İRAN İLİŞKİLERİ: OBAMA YÖNETİMİNİN İRAN'A YÖNELİK POLİTİKASI

Özet

Bu makalede, ABD-İran ilişkilerinin gelişmesinin temel özellikleri, zorlukları ve umutları ile ABD'nin Obama yönetimi altında İran'a karşı tutumu, iş birliği stratejisi ve bu dönemde iki ülke arasındaki ilişkiler ele alınmaktadır.

ABD'nin İran nükleer programı konusundaki tutumu ve İran'ın mevcut koşullarda ABD'ye yaklaşımı özellikle vurgulanmaktadır. Stratejik ortak ülkelerin de dâhil olduğu bu konuda, iki ülke arasındaki ortak çıkarların aranması ve mevcut çatışmaların çözümü için planlar tartışılmaktadır.

Zaman zaman ABD'nin zorlu politikalarının İran üzerindeki etkisi ve iki ülke ilişkilerine karşı yaptırımların uygulanması analiz ediliyor. Obama yönetimi altında, özellikle ilk yıllarda yumuşak politikaların uygulanması ve daha sonra yaptırımların uygulanması, bu dönemde ABD-İran ilişkilerinin biçiminin değiştirilmesine yol açmıştır. Bu soruların sonuçlarının ve çatışmanın çözüm yollarının analizi makalede özel bir yer tutmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: ABD, İran, ilişkiler, nükleer program, yoğunluk, Obama yönetimi.

US-IRAN RELATIONS IN THE XXI CENTURY: OBAMA ADMINISTRATION'S POLICY TOWARDS IRAN

Abstract

This article discusses the main features, concerns, and prospects for the development of US-Iranian relations, as well as the attitude of the United States towards Iran during the Obama administration,

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and the strategy of cooperation and relations between the two countries during this period.

The US position on Iran's nuclear program and Iran's approach to the United States in the current situation is particularly emphasized. In this issue, which is also attended by strategic partner countries, plans are being discussed to find common interests between the two countries, as well as to resolve existing conflicts.

From time to time, the impact of the tough US policy on Iran and the imposition of sanctions on the two countries' relations are analyzed. The implementation of a soft policy during the Obama administration, especially in the first years, and then the introduction of sanctions, led to a change in the format of US-Iranian relations during this period. A special place in the article is occupied by the analysis of the results of these issues and ways to resolve the conflict.

Key Words: USA, Iran, relations, nuclear program, intensity, Obama administration

Giriş

US-Iranian relations have faced many challenges over the past four decades. In fact, the two countries that were good allies during the Pahlavi era became intensity after the Khomeini Revolution. The factor that strains the relations between the two countries even more is the moves in their foreign policy to increase hostility towards Iran. For this reason, the future of Iran-US relations and what it might expect in the coming days remain uncertain. Taking into account Alexander Went's perspective and the "triple culture of anarchy", several hypotheses can be presented with a descriptive-analytic approach to these scenarios of obscurity. One hypothesis is that the friendly relationship between the two countries will improve, given some strategic and regional requirements. Another hypothesis predicts that Tehran will increasingly compete with Washington in the international arena as part of great power games. The third hypothesis, which is based on an ideological conflict between Iran and the USA, sees the increasing hostility between the two countries as the most likely scenario. The findings of the descriptive-analytical study indicate that the future of US-Iranian relations can be a mixture of rivalry and hostility. The rivalry between the two countries can be observed in many areas. Iran's continued rivalry with the USA in the region may intensify, ultimately aiming to limit American influence to the lowest possible level. In fact, Iran has defined the U.S. presence in the region not as a basic building block of the regional security system, but rather

as a security problem. Due to its neighborhood with Iraq and Afghanistan, and its close relations with Syria and Lebanon, it is considered an influential actor in the equations of the Middle East and Gulf Basin. Therefore, Washington cannot fully achieve its own regional goals by ignoring Iran's influence in the region. At the same time, the two countries continue to compete in other parts of the world. Iran opposes the US gaining influence in Afghanistan and Pakistan (Douglas, 2009: 145).

However, as a regional power, Iran's competitiveness with the USA needs to be analyzed in a broader context. On the one hand, Iran, Russia, China and some regional and interregional actors and groups; On the other hand, the USA, its allies and the opposition groups with which it cooperates in the region play an active role in this competition. The developments in Syria in the last few years have been the best manifestation of this thesis.

At the same time, intensity between the two countries can likely continue for the foreseeable future. The US administration sees Iran as a threat to its ally Israel and its own interests. Washington's policy to overthrow the Iranian regime is the result of this threat perception. Increasing US sanctions on Iran on human rights, terrorism, and armaments can likely continue as well. However, the probability of a large-scale military attack/conflict is low. On the other hand, another scenario is aimed at an attempt to establish a system of friendship and collective security between the two countries; but this scenario seems almost impossible for now. Despite this, some speculation has been put forward regarding the possibility of a major agreement between Iran and the United States (Kenneth, 2008: 3-44).

From today's perspective, the probability of such a scenario occurring in the near future is low, but possible. In fact, the two countries have many common interests in regional cooperation. It seems possible that we will witness the expansion of bilateral cooperation in the near future. The ideological rivalries between the countries of the region and the conflict on the ground do not make it possible to establish a collective security system and broad political, economic and military cooperation between the two countries.

1. Perspective of Iran-US Relations

It is essential to consider the issues and developments from a scientific point of view and to think about the underlying causes in order to make a correct assessment. In Iran, history has left the future

behind. In other words, the obsession with the past in the general perception of Iran causes Iran not to see the risks and opportunities in front of it. But it is important to look at issues and processes from a strategic perspective. The strategic approach requires analyzing different aspects of an issue with a long-term attitude. Forty-four years have passed since the Islamic Revolution in Iran. However, at the end of this process, it was seen that there was no any development in the foreign policy of Iran towards the USA. However, another point that should not be forgotten is that the story of Iran and the USA is not a one-sided issue and it is not only the USA that decides and implements it. Iran is also not passive in this equation; this process takes place through action and reaction. The behavior of the Iran Islamic Republic is also very influential in the USA decisions. Another important point is that the conditions are not pre-modern, modern or post-modern, on the contrary, we are moving towards globalization. This means that the US and Iranians, who were already in the globalization phase, are now moving in the opposite direction of globalization. Donald Trump claimed to be against globalization, but such an attitude was not possible for the USA. According to Joseph Nye, an American political scientist and researcher, the attitudes of US presidents may be anti-globalization, but it is impossible to go against the progress of science, technology and history. The relations between Iran and the USA should be analyzed in this context and many concepts such as sovereignty should be reviewed. Sometimes even the United States fails to address the issue of national sovereignty as it claims. On the contrary, independence, sovereignty and many other concepts take a new form with the perspective brought by the changing future (US-Iran Relations, 2009: 29-45).

Another issue to consider is that both Iran and the United States are facing an identity crisis. After the Cold War, the identity crisis in American foreign policy became more noticeable. On the other hand, Iran faced this problem after the 1979 revolution. Since both sides are faced with this dilemma, first of all, the content of friendship and enmity relations between the two sides should be defined, only in this way mutual national interests can be defined. In other words, national interests cannot be easily defined unless the conditions are the same.

Until the JCPOA, there was also the difference of opinion among American political groups on Iran; the radical part that saw Iran as hostile was on the extremist wing, and those who focused less on hostility in their political stances were on the balanced wing. Obama didn't even get the signature of one of the extremists to ratify the JCPOA deal, so Trump continued to follow the Republican line. In contrast, even the Democrats who objected to this agreement at the time are now seriously converging on the JCPOA field due to the current stance of the extremist faction. This shows that America does not have a homogeneous society, and that not all segments of the society have the same opinion about Iran. Therefore, any change in Iran's behavior could make a difference in American society. Another important point is that the US has not been a strategic existential threat to Iran for the last 40 years. Saddam was a strategic existential threat because he wanted to destroy Iran and attack as best he could. But in the case of the USA, this is difficult to say. Because the United States has neither the intention nor the ability to realize this existential threat. Instead of; existential threats like the Soviet Union, Saddam and the Taliban have been eliminated from all over Iran. What matters are not the motivations of the threats, but that Iran has cleared the threats around it (Foreign Policy, 2009).

On the other hand, Iran's attitude is also of great importance. In order to take the right decision in the future, Iran's role needs to be well defined. But so far this role has not been well defined.

2. Obama's Middle East Policy

The United States has acted differently in some respects in foreign policy during different people's presidency. Therefore, the red lines of US presidents may differ. For example, the Obama era was the period that had the most opportunity to improve bilateral relations.

First of all, foreign policy of Obama regarding the Middle East was productive than the past. He was realistic president and his policy was differed from the Bush. The policy of Obama was focused on the dominance of the USA. Simultaneously Barack's foreign policy in the Middle East has shown more sustainability than real change in the past. Palestine-Israel conflict was also very important for Obama which he wanted to stabilize the conflict and provide the peace between two countries. Sometimes presidential policy faces with bureaucratic, domestic and institutional politics as in the other regions.

Obama paid attention especially to the relations with Muslim countries, but sometimes Middle East was in the outside of this agenda. Increase America's financial home and develops its economic potential was one of the main Obama's priorities. Obama believed that America's future was very linked to Far East and Asia. Some experts considered policy of Obama as a wrong, but Obama believed that reducing military intervention and ensure political diplomacy on the region in itself served to their national interests. During the economic crisis and war with Iraq deeply influenced the policy of US (Scott: 2009). Measuring America's steps exerted diplomatic pressure, forcing the allies to step back and assume more responsibility for their own security. He prioritized strategy and resists efforts to push it away. Obama tried to ensure all the issues linked to the Middle East on the platform of US national and security interests.

President administration sometimes charged the policy of Obama which he has not paid attention the vulnerable points especially on Iran. His emphasis on finding alliances and his conciliatory approach were clearly highlighted in his stance toward Iran, where Obama had helped the country while also intervening in the violence that erupted in Iran in June 2009, following the peaceful demonstrations in Tehran in response to the controversial election results. This is a perfect example of Obama's desire for the United States to make concessions to realize a more peaceful world.

In June 2010, the United Nations imposed several strong sanctions to Iran due to Iran's continued attempts on a nuclear power program. The response of the USA to the UN Susan Rice's acceptance on this issue, the sanctions also shows the conciliatory stance of the Obama administration. He noted that the resolution offers a clear path to the suspension of sanctions on Iran, as well as affirms willingness of America and other countries to continue to engage in diplomacy for this purpose. (United Nations Security Council 6335th Meeting, SC / 9948, 9 June 2010). It is interesting to emphasize that although the sanctions were very strong, there was a clear way out for Iran. During Obama's first term, these messages to the Iranian government did not seem to have much effect. A turning point was reached in 2013, when the administration began bilateral talks with the Iranian government. The result of these conversations was an interim nuclear agreement involving other actors such as Iran, Russia, France, the UK and China (Milena, 2016: 69-70). After the controversial 2009 Iranian

presidential election, the crackdown on the pro-democracy demonstrators against the Iranian Green Movement opposition, which is affiliated with the Iranian state, was condemned by Obama.

When Hassan Rouhani was elected as a president he thought that due to the intensity and problematic relationship between the two countries in the past, it is important to organize several meetings like this between the two presidents (Obama, 2007). Iranian analysts mentioned several times that the close relations between two presidents, it was the first closest relations since 1979.

3. Principles of Obama's Iran Policy

Problems between the USA and Iran under Barack Obama-He stated that nuclear issue on Iran is the main point linked to security issue of USA. The negotiations between Iran and the international coalition, tentatively scheduled for April 2012, focused on attempts by Iran to limit its enrichment activities. Importantly, however, it was not only the US security issue, but also there were several reasons about concern stems from several areas: Iran is producing and stockpiling amounts of enriched uranium, was in a high level that necessary on using in nuclear power reactors. Otherwise Iran repeatedly denied the free access to their nuclear tools and refused the questions about the evidence of weapons program. 1) Extending Hand - Despite deep-rooted talks about this issue, these negotiations were not considered as seriously. Barack Obama promised to build peace through negotiations between two countries. Also it was very important that Iran opened a hand to them. The main reasons of sanctions were to oblige Iran to get the consensus with US on this issue. Iran's unchangeable position impeded to provide peace solution. This remains the right attitude. US make some efforts to provide diplomacy on this issue and vice versa it was great chance to put the sin into the Iranian policy. Through the talks it was a great chance to reintegrate Iran to the mild international environment. However, Iran had to prove more than sincere; it must convince President Obama that he did not need stronger measures to prevent a nuclear Iran. 2) Agreeing on strength- However, an extended hand was not the only way to convey to Tehran the importance of mutual cooperation. In this case The USA and international allies imposed strict sanctions that targeted Iran's energy field. USA chose mainly two way which to prevent this dangerous intensity which consist of sanctions to other foreign companies that cooperated with Iran and also to benefit from military

option. Simultaneously information or media campaign was also one of the ways of USA which was ready to implement. In the terms of Iranian policy they had also their offers regarding the talks. Pushing the limits-debating Northern Korea was one of them. One of the primary goals of the United States was to ensure that Iran not to get the advantages from the talks. This would require Iran to prevent the clock from running with impunity (Obama, 2007). After the Obama's inauguration in 2009, together with P5+1 Barack presented several proposals to Iran for the negotiations. But Iran did not react to it positively. After the October Iran showed its desire to the deal. It took much time to implement the negotiations. Western negotiators at the same time were very vulnerable not only to the deadline of discussions, but also the outcome will be for not meeting these deadlines. One of these deadline issues was the start of meeting by 1 July. During this period United States and other countries could continue to impose additional sanctions if negotiations continued. However, if no agreement was reached by 1 July, the allies were going to impose new sanctions. Some claimers of negotiation groups may consider accepting minor concessions on Iran might be considered as a diplomatic victory. Some powers were wotting about the shifting of international power balance (Doran, 2013: 14). The United States had plausible reasons for considering such an agreement. Finally, the participation of the USA in the potential April talks could be regarded as an indication of its willingness to reach a diplomatic solution. Obama made all his efforts to provide successful negotiation with Iran and also decided to put the pressure on Iran through the sanctions in order to implement and protect US security.

4. The Process of Approaching Between the Two Countries During the Obama Period

The current intensity between the US and Iran runs deep into historical woes. Many Americans do not know the ways of Mohammed Mossadegh's come to power in 1953. Iranian people often see this process as the beginning of bad relations between two countries. Many Americans accepts that the hostility began due to the Islamic Revolution and the capture of US hostages. It is not the surprise to analyze this event in this mind. The interests and opinion of two countries' had been differed from each other and it complicated the situation. In the Middle East America tried to benefit oil resources,

eradicate terror threats and prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Simultaneously Israel security issue was very important for USA. At the same time Iran had its own interests in the region that serve to hegemony in the region and protect their regime. Of course The USA and Israel was a threat to mentioned passions. Day –by day the situation was getting critical for two countries. Main policy of USA was focused to Isolate Iran and the first authority period of Barack it was very different to provide diplomatic relations. Besides of this fact, Ahmadinejad very controversially claimed to be president at his second authority term. Then the mind was changed and many people thought that there might be another president in Iran who softens the policy of Iran. Another fact was that US security and intelligence bodies believed that Iran can increase the level of uranium for a nuclear weapon if they chose to step up their enrichment activities (Obama, 2009: Continuation). Certainly all these intensities concerned both sides and it made them to think about the diplomatic cooperation and to break the ice. USA was very sensitive on Israel. USA presidents have faced a heated Congress against Iran in recent years regardless of whether they are locally controlled by Republicans or Democrats. If this tendension would be continued it could lead to more serious steps against Iran. So it needed careful steps by Republicans and Democrats of USA. Long broken relations between USA and Iran led to the disappearance of the US government and experts working with the US government.

5. The Model of Cooperation in Us-Iran Relations in the Obama Period (Nuclear Agreement)

Nuclear program of Iran concerned the US because it would cause external military pressure by Iran and could spread nuclear possessing process in the vulnerable Middle East region. Through Iranian government aims they could have handed over technology of nuclear to radical groups. Simultaneously Israeli authority considered nuclear weapon of Iran as a danger to sovereignty of Israel. Including some Iran authority's opinion, nuclear weapon of Iran could make them more powerful against external invasion. Especially nuclear program had become major national security issue for the United States since 2002. After the process when Iran accepted that they was building uranium facility in Nathanz and heavy water technology in Arak, the situation has been very intense. The certain threat increased

in 2010 when the Iran side began to enrich uranium and it gave them opportunity to make nuclear weapon. Many foreign pressures occurred regarding this issue and Obama said on January 12, 2016, that nuclear program of Iran should be main target of US foreign policy (Obama, 2009).

6. Iran's Nuclear Purposes and Activities

The US community especially dealing with intelligence issues disclosed that it isn't exact that Iran steadfastly will decide to produce nuclear weapons from the nuclear program. Iranian authority cited Khamenei's official statement in 2003 was a proof that nuclear weapons were not expedient for them. As Khamenei mentioned that nuclear weapon production and use was considered as a sin and all issues regarding the nuclear weapons were harmful, expensive and empty. Some experts and state representatives' attempts of Iran in order to produce nuclear weapon cause a dangerous threat in the region. Also it could trigger Israeli or Us military action. Iranian leaders refused all claims on nuclear weapons and mentioned several times which they has aimed the nuclear program of Iran for use of civilian, Electricity generation and medicine also are in this list. Iran side argued several times that uranium enrichment is not the opposite of the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and they have the right to enrich the uranium for the civil purposes. US officials also expressed their opinion on this issue that it is not a problem of using nuclear energy by Iran and it can be acceptable. The IAEA showed that it was investigating a nuclear explosive tool for Iran's nuclear program, which was detailed in report on December 2, 2015. Although JCPOA alighted that it was not observed of indicators regarding the preparation of nuclear weapon. US government sometimes charged JCPOA due their breakout for investigations and this period gave a big chance to Iran (Obama, 2015).

Taking into consideration that Iran had heavy water facility in Arak and it is another way to obtain nuclear weapon. JCPOA mentioned that Iran inactivated cores of 36 reactors and agreed to limit heavy water stocks to certain levels. When Iran temporarily limit of heavy water, including the United States, it exported excess quantities to keep business below threshold levels.

7. The International Diplomatic Work on Iran's Nuclear Program

One of the best projects on international effort on negotiation with Iran side for limitations its nuclear program, when the United States defined that Iran's real steps on the implementation of building facilities to provide uranium. France, Germany and UK (EU3) joined a diplomatic mission to discuss limitations on program of Iran. Iran took obligation to suspend uranium enrichment activities in response to peaceful nuclear technology and to sign the Additional Protocol to the Non-nuclear Proliferation Treaty on October 21, 2003. Although the treaty was signed by Iran side but the authority of Iran did not officially ratify it. Later Iran and EU group achieved the Paris Agreement on 14 November, 2004. In this context, Iran avoided from uranium enrichment and another help outside United States. It was accepted limitedly by USA authority by rejecting the issue of Iran participation in the World Trade Organization. The Paris agreement had been in the law till to 2005 that Iran refused the proposals for a nuclear deal with observing the unsuitable benefits for them. In 2005 Iran continued his uranium works and the IAEA's 37 boards voted to send its issue to the Security Council on 4 February. The Security Council defined a date of 29 April 2006 to end up the uranium enrichment. In May 2016, the Bush administration joined the negotiations, especially Permanent Five Plus1 group. This group offered new sanctions if Iran changed its policy (Maloney, 2008). After few processes IAEA confirmed Iran's steps within the framework of the agreement that will ensure its nuclear program will be maintained and remain only in the peace principles. After this deal the situation was changed on the time to get nuclear facilities, today it would take more time. Several facts were: 1) Enriched uranium worth 25000 pounds has been shipped from the country. 2) Two-thirds of the dismantled and centrifuges removed. This means the policy of sanction by US would be resulted on lifting 40 Iran nuclear sanctions. But several US sanctions would remain in place (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/>).

Conclusion

It would not be a complete approach to evaluate Iran-US relations only around the nuclear crisis. In general, the United States wants to pursue a number of goals in the region with regard to Iran: • Achieving geopolitical advantage by weakening Iran's influence •

Seizing control of hydrocarbon sources • Weakening the regime in Iran If we look at it from a broader perspective, we can see that there are intermittent paradigmatic changes in the relations between the two countries. In 2002, Iran's research into uranium enrichment, which could be used to make nuclear weapons without the information of IAEA, and the discovery of uranium enrichment and the construction of a heavy water technology further complicated relations. Inabilities of USA to control the resistance in Iraq and to impede Iran's efforts to reshape the Middle East are among the factors that have strained relations between the two countries. From time to time, US-Iranian relations took various forms, especially during the Shah's reign, although the situation changed dramatically after the revolution.

Iran will not give up its nuclear program in the face of threats. He can bring it up only after gaining some security. But the key issue for Iran to understand is that acquiring a nuclear weapon may not work for it. A nuclear-armed Iran will neither feel safer nor free from international blockade. Because no country in the region wants Iran to possess a nuclear weapon. USA should understand that the escalation of the crisis does not have a positive impact on its regional and global interests. The limited operation against Iran will further increase Iran's desire to achieve mass destruction weapons. Till Iran continues to feel threatened, it will take initiatives to threaten the stability of the region. The military and political costs of a possible operation could be many times higher than US estimates. Only through cooperation and mutual trust can issues be resolved. In this regard, the threat of force and the use of force will not be effective in other processes, and the same mistake should not be repeated in the Iranian case. In this context, USA attempts to use Iran's ethnic and religious minorities to achieve its goals may be futile. During the Bush administration, relations between the two countries and the nuclear issue remained unresolved due to various sensitive issues, Iran's ideological stubbornness and insufficient consideration of elements of domestic policy.

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